Lesson 11: Worship Made in Our Own Image

Teaching Outline — Sincerity cannot replace God-governed worship
Passage: Judges 17-18 (KJV) | **Suggested teaching time:** 45 minutes
Key verse: “Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.” (Judges 17:13)

Lesson objective

- Class will understand:
  - Religious sincerity cannot replace worship governed by God’s Word

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Timed introduction (0-5 minutes)

The final five chapters

- Not a neat continuation after Samson
- They expose the spiritual and moral collapse produced across the era
- Judges 17-18 begins with:
  - Money
  - An idol
  - A household shrine
  - A Levite for hire

Nearly everyone uses God-language

- Micah’s mother: “I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD” — for a graven and molten image (17:3)
- Micah: “Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest” (17:13)
- Their confidence isn’t worship according to God’s Word

The question this lesson presses

- Do we worship the true God as He has made Himself known?

- Or do we construct a religion that lets us keep control?
- Sincerity isn't unimportant, but can't make disobedience into obedience
- Religious [BLANK: sincerity] cannot make false worship true

Read Judges 17:1-13 and 18:1-31

- **Read aloud**

Context (5-9 minutes)

The programmatic opening

- "And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah" (17:1)
- "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (17:6)
- Doesn't mean Israel lacked an administrator and so needed permission to invent worship
- Identifies a covenant people refusing God's rule

God had already spoken about worship

- "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" (Exod 20:4)
- Priests appointed from Aaron's line; Levites for their particular service
- A Levite wasn't automatically authorized as a private priest at a household shrine
- The refrain reveals an absence of faithful submission to the Lord, not merely of political organization

God-language vs. God-governed worship

- Not atheists rejecting religion
  - People using the LORD's name while refusing His authority
- Devout vocabulary
  - The mother dedicates silver to the LORD
  - Micah wants the LORD to do him good
  - The spies ask counsel from God
  - The Levite speaks a blessing
- The practices aren't governed by what God has said

A shallow way to evaluate worship

- Did the service feel meaningful?
- Was the music moving?
- Were traditions familiar?
- Did people appear sincere?
- These tell us about human experience, not whether worship honors God
- God isn't honored merely because we attach His name to our preferences
- He tells us who He is, how to approach Him, what faithfulness looks like

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Exposition (9-29 minutes)

1. A blessing, a dedication, and an idol (17:1-6)

The silver

- Micah confesses taking eleven hundred shekels from his mother
- She blesses him when he returns it
- She dedicated it "unto the LORD" to make "a graven image and a molten image" (17:3)
- Jarring: she invokes the name of the God who prohibited images, then funds what He prohibited
- Micah's mother used silver for a [BLANK: graven image] even while naming the LORD

The shrine

- Only two hundred shekels go to the founder
- The narrative doesn't explain every physical detail — the verdict is already clear
- Micah has "an house of gods," makes "an ephod, and teraphim," consecrates one of his sons as priest (17:5)
- An ephod had legitimate associations; its presence doesn't purify the household cult
- Mixing familiar religious objects with forbidden worship doesn't make the mixture acceptable

Why the second commandment matters

- An image isn't simply an artistic object
- Here, something visible and manageable through which people try to approach or represent God
- Micah doesn't deny the LORD outright
    - He reduces the living God to a system that can be owned, housed, and used to secure blessing

- An idol feels useful because it doesn't speak back with authority
  - It can be carried, adjusted, made to serve the worshiper's aims

The true God isn't manageable

- Near by covenant grace, but never our possession
- Hears prayer; can't be manipulated by technique
- Welcomes faith; faith isn't a lever that forces His hand
- Gives commands because He is holy and knows what life with Him requires
- First question in worship
  - Not "What will work for us?"
  - "What has God made known?"

A convincing counterfeit

- Micah accumulates religious items: image, ephod, teraphim, eventually a Levite
- Each makes the shrine seem more credible
- Assembling religious components doesn't create legitimate worship
- A counterfeit looks more convincing as details are added
- These don't prove a practice faithful:
  - Historical language
  - Formal clothing
  - Contemporary style
  - Emotional intensity
  - Visible success
- The standard is the Word of God

The ephod's warning

- Biblical words and symbols can be taken out of their God-given setting
- We can quote Scripture selectively to bless a decision already made
- We can use "calling," "anointing," "freedom," "revival," "discernment" without submitting our meaning to Scripture
- Not whether we can attach a Bible word, but whether the Bible actually teaches it in context

The diagnosis (17:6)

- "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes."
- "Right" in one's own eyes isn't the measure of right before the Lord

- The problem is self-rule
- Each person did what was right in his [BLANK: own eyes]

2. A Levite for hire (17:7-13)

The arrangement

- A young Levite from Bethlehemjudah, traveling to find a place
- “Be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals” (17:10)
- The Levite accepts; Micah consecrates him
- “Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest” (17:13)
- Micah obtained a Levite as a priest for [BLANK: hire]

Credentials can’t validate worship

- Money, sacred-looking objects, a shrine, a Levite
- Worship isn’t valid by appearance, expertise, or title
- A priest isn’t a lucky charm
- None can replace obedience to God’s revealed Word:
  - A minister
  - A building
  - Music
  - A religious family history
  - Emotional intensity

Transactional religion

- Micah wants a priest for access, legitimacy, and assurance — controlling uncertainty
- Credentials become evidence God must favor his household
- Micah supplies salary, clothing, food
- The Levite supplies spiritual endorsement
- God is expected to supply prosperity

Examine our own hearts

- No household shrines, but we can treat faithful practices as bargains
  - Attend worship so God will protect our plans
  - Give so He’ll make us successful

    - Serve so He'll spare us hardship
    - Seek a leader's approval as a substitute for God's will
- Prayer, giving, gathering, and pastoral care are good gifts
- They're distorted when used to place God in our debt

The Levite's failure

- Not a passive victim or a mere prop — he makes choices
- May have been insecure and in need
    - Need doesn't turn an unauthorized office into a faithful calling
- Accepts money and a role God didn't give
- The spiritual leaders in these stories are compromised
- Prepares for ch. 19, where another Levite is at the center of a darker narrative

3. Dan seeks a home and an answer it wants to hear (18:1-10)

The spies and the priest

- "In those days there was no king in Israel" (18:1)
- Dan hadn't secured its inheritance; sends five spies from Zorah and Eshtaol
- At Micah's house they recognize the Levite's voice
- "Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous" (18:5)
- "Go in peace: before the LORD is your way wherein ye go" (18:6)
- Not authenticated by a biblical command, prophet, or divinely given sign
- The Danite spies received a [BLANK: convenient] answer from an unauthorized priest
- Religious language can baptize a plan already decided

Counterfeit worship supplies counterfeit guidance

- Project in mind before consulting the Levite
- Nothing shows they submit their plan to divine instruction
- They found a religious voice confirming what they wanted

Still familiar

- Seeking counsel selectively until someone approves
- Asking "Will this succeed?" when the prior question is "Is this right?"
- Calling a plan prayerful when we used prayer to calm ourselves rather than listen

- Wise counselors point beyond personal approval to the Scriptures
  - “I cannot promise what God has not promised.”
  - “This course conflicts with what God has said.”

Laish: opportunity isn’t permission

- Peaceful, prosperous, isolated
- The report emphasizes opportunity, not covenant obedience
  - “a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth” (18:10)
- Not simply that Dan wants land — God assigned an inheritance
- The danger: self-directed conquest affirmed by a counterfeit priesthood
- A door may be open because no one is strong enough to close it
- Success may be possible because those affected are weak
- Ease, profit, or favorable circumstances aren’t divine endorsement
- Test opportunity by God’s character and commands
  - Does it treat neighbors with truth and love?

4. Theft with a blessing attached (18:11-26)

The theft

- Six hundred armed Danites travel north
- Take Micah’s carved image, ephod, teraphim, molten image — and the Levite
- “Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest” (18:19)
- “Is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?”
- The priest’s heart is glad; he goes

Bought twice

- Bought for a household, bought for a tribe
- Prefers larger influence to faithfulness
- Attracted to advancement rather than obedience
- A larger audience, better salary, or better title can’t make disobedience into ministry
- The Danites don’t repent of idolatry — they scale it up

A word to those who serve visibly

- Pastors, teachers, musicians, elders, every visible servant
- Ministry can become a way to obtain affirmation, stability, influence, identity
  - Understandable desires; dangerous masters
- A leader must ask not only “Can I do this?” or “Will people follow?”
  - “Has God called His church to this, and can I do it with a clean conscience under His Word?”
- Churches shouldn’t treat leaders as service providers blessing congregational preferences

“What aileth thee?” (18:23)

- Micah protests; the answer is intimidation
- They took his gods, his priest, his property
- The absurd helplessness of idols
- Micah’s gods could be [BLANK: carried] away by the Danites
- A god loaded onto baggage can’t save its maker
- Tragic and ironic: the gods he made have been taken
- The living God isn’t vulnerable to theft, relocation, or the rise and fall of institutions
- He made us; we don’t make Him
- Freeing: we needn’t keep God alive through anxious control — He upholds us

False worship isn’t a harmless private preference

- They silence Micah, threaten his household, attack a defenseless city, establish a shrine in the aftermath
- What a community believes about God shapes its treatment of people
- If God is a tool for our goals, people become tools
- If we create our own moral authority, the strong define what’s right
- Sound worship and neighbor-love belong together — the true God is holy, just, compassionate

5. A permanent shrine in a place of violence (18:27-31)

Laish burned; shrine set up

- Attack a quiet, secure people with no nearby deliverer
- Burn the city, rebuild it, name it Dan
- “And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.” (18:30)

Read the KJV accurately

- Judges 18:30 in the KJV names [BLANK: Manasseh] in Jonathan's genealogy — not Moses
- A longstanding textual and interpretive discussion exists
- Don't alter the KJV reading in a lesson built on that text
- Don't claim the verse identifies a particular historical captivity
  - "The captivity of the land" has no date or named empire here
- The text establishes the enduring character of Dan's illicit worship; no exact identification

Shiloh (18:31)

- "And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh."
- Devastating contrast: God's authorized house at Shiloh; Dan's unauthorized shrine
- No lack of access to God's revealed worship
  - They preferred what they could manage
- Not lack of spiritual options — refusal to submit to God's provision
- We imagine disobedience starts with deprivation
  - More resources, leaders, or a convenient path, and we'd be faithful
- The deeper problem: the heart rejects God's provision because self-made alternatives feel controllable

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Application (29-35 minutes)

1. **Test worship by Scripture, not by sincerity**
   - Something may sincerely be called Christian, spiritual, traditional, meaningful, blessed
   - Has God commanded, permitted, or forbidden it?
   - Worship must be tested by [BLANK: Scripture], not merely by religious feeling
2. **Beware of using religious things as tools for personal control**
   - Micah wanted assurance because he acquired a Levite
   - We do the same with prayer, attendance, giving, leadership, or a religious object
   - The Lord isn't managed by our rituals
3. **Leaders must not sell spiritual service for status, security, or a larger platform**
   - The Levite moved from one shrine to another without asking whether either honored God
   - Faithfulness may be less impressive than influence; it's what God requires

4. **Self-made worship eventually harms communities**
    - Dan’s idolatry is connected to theft, threats, and violence against Laish
    - False worship is never merely private taste
    - What we believe about God shapes how we treat people made in His image

Evaluating new ideas

- Begin with Scripture, not novelty or fear of being left behind
- Ask what the practice teaches about God, Christ, salvation, the church, and human need
- Does it help the congregation hear and obey God’s Word?
- Or does it center personality, preference, and experience?
- Discuss humbly with mature believers
- Faithfulness comes not by one charismatic voice, but a church continually reformed under God’s Word

Not every detail is settled by a proof text

- Churches must make wise practical decisions
    - Meeting times
    - Room arrangements
    - Translation practices
    - Many other circumstances
- The issue: do we claim authority for what God forbids, neglect what He commands, or make preferences the measure?
- Distinguish God’s binding commands from human wisdom; never confuse them

> **Teacher note — lead toward repentance, not superiority:** It's easy to think only about traditions or churches unlike our own.
>
> - Begin with the group's own motives
>   - Where do we expect God to endorse a plan because we've done religious things?
>   - Where do we prefer a manageable version of God to the God who corrects us?
> - The aim isn't to win a contest of worship styles
> - The aim is to bow before the God who has graciously spoken and receive His correction with gratitude
> - Make room for the believer who fears getting every detail wrong
>   - The answer isn't anxious self-invention or dependence on an expert's personality
>   - God has spoken clearly in Scripture, given Christ as sufficient mediator, and placed believers in accountable fellowship
>   - We learn, test, repent, and worship with confidence in His mercy, not in our ability to construct a flawless system

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Christ and the gospel (35-39 minutes)

A god he can lose vs. the God who made Himself known

- Micah's household: a god he can make, finance, install, and lose
- The gospel: the true God who has made Himself known
- "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6)
- We don't approach through an image we create or a priest we hire
- We come through Christ, our sufficient High Priest

God takes the initiative

- No better technique for approaching God
- He reveals Himself, sends His Son, gives a mediator we didn't invent or hire
- Christian worship rests on grace
- We don't gather to persuade God to become favorable
- In Christ, believers come because He opened the way
- Should produce reverence, gratitude, and obedience — not casual control
- The God who welcomes us still defines the terms of worship

Spirit and truth

- “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24)
- Not permission to invent worship as long as feelings are strong
- Made alive by God’s Spirit; shaped by the truth revealed in His Son and Word
- True worship is in spirit and [BLANK: truth]

The call

- Turn from idols, including respectable religious idols
- Trust Christ alone
- He isn’t a religious accessory that improves our plans
- He is Lord

Discussion (39-43 minutes)

Discussion questions

1. What makes Micah’s use of the LORD’s name so alarming?
2. Which details show that the Levite was not authorized to validate Micah’s shrine?
3. How can a church distinguish biblical worship from personal preference dressed in religious language?
4. Why is it dangerous to treat a pastor, ministry, or practice as a guarantee that God will “do me good”?
5. What does the KJV actually say in Judges 18:30, and what should we avoid claiming?
6. How does Christ free us from trying to manage God through religious performance?

Closing prayer (43-45 minutes)

> **Closing prayer:** “Holy God, forgive us for the ways we try to reshape Thee around our preferences. Keep our worship under the authority of Thy Word. Protect leaders from serving for money, influence, or approval. Turn our hearts from every idol and teach us to come to Thee through Jesus Christ, our true High Priest and Lord. Amen.”