

1. Prof. Yechezkel Kauffmann, Judges, pg. 268

The author tells his story in an ironic tone. Michah speaks like an [irrational] idolatrous fetishist, “You have taken the god I made.” The kohen is described as a frivolous careerist. The people of Dan are fistfighters, lawless and thieving.

Chapter 17

2. Abarbanel to Judges 17:1

And after listing those [events] it told of these things. Even though they preceded, they are last in the book because the matters of the Judges and their wars are listed together, and after their conclusion it listed the matters of Israel, which occurred in their day, which are not about enemies or judges...

3. Talmud, Sanhedrin 103b

Why did they not list Michah [among those who do not enter *olam haba*]? Because his bread was available for travellers... The ministering *malachim* wished to push him, but Gd told them, “Leave him be, for his bread is available for travellers.” And for this, the people of *Pilegesh b’Givah* were punished.

4. Let’s make an idol Judges 17:1-6 (JPS 1985 edition, lightly adapted)

There was a man in the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Michah. He said to his mother, “The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you, so that you uttered a curse which you repeated in my hearing—I have that silver; I took it.” “Blessed of the Lord be my son,” said his mother.

He returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother; but his mother said, “I hereby consecrate the silver to the Lord, transferring it to my son to make a sculptured image and a molten image. I now return it to you.”

So when he gave the silver back to his mother, his mother took two hundred shekels of silver and gave it to a smith. He made of it a sculptured image and a molten image, which were kept in the house of Michah.

Now the man Michah had a house of Gd/god; he had made an ephod and teraphim and he had inducted one of his sons to be his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did as he pleased.

5. Radak to Judges 17:4

Michah did not wish to make the effort to create an idol and molten form, and he returned it to his mother again.

6. Let’s buy a Levi Judges 17:7-13 (JPS 1985 edition, lightly adapted)

There was a young man from Bethlehem of Judah, from the clan of Judah; he was a Levi and had resided there as a sojourner. This man had left the town of Bethlehem of Judah to take up residence wherever he could find a place. On his way, he came to the house of Michah in the hill country of Ephraim.

“Where do you come from?” Michah asked him. He replied, “I am a Levi from Bethlehem of Judah, and I am traveling to take up residence wherever I can find a place.”

“Stay with me,” Michah said to him, “and be a father and a priest to me, and I will pay you ten shekels of silver a year, an allowance of clothing, and your food.” The Levi went. The Levi agreed to stay with the man, and the youth became like one of his own sons.

Michah inducted the Levi, and the young man became his priest and remained in Michah’s shrine. “Now I know,” Michah told himself, “that the Lord will prosper me, since the Levi has become my priest.”

Chapter 18

7. Radak to Yehoshua 19:47

And Leshem was from their portion, but it was not conquered with the land of the other tribes, and they conquered it later, in the time of the idol of Michah. Or Leshem was not from the land which was divided into seven parts...

## 8. Reconnaissance Judges 18:1-6 (JPS 1985 edition, lightly adapted)

In those days there was no king in Israel, and in those days the tribe of Dan was seeking a territory in which to settle; for to that day no territory had fallen to their lot among the tribes of Israel. The Danites sent out five of their number, from their clan seat at Zorah and Eshtaol—valiant men—to spy out the land and explore it. “Go,” they told them, “and explore the land.” When they had advanced into the hill country of Ephraim as far as the house of Michah, they stopped there for the night.

While in the vicinity of Michah’s house, they recognized the speech of the young Levi, so they went over and asked him, “Who brought you to these parts? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here?”

He replied, “Thus and thus Michah did for me—he hired me and I became his priest.”

They said to him, “Please, inquire of Gd/god; we would like to know if the mission on which we are going will be successful.”

“Go in peace,” the priest said to them, “the Lord views with favor the mission you are going on.”

## 9. Raid Judges 18:11-27 (JPS 1985 edition, lightly adapted)

They departed from there, from the clan seat of the Danites, from Zorah and Eshtaol, six hundred strong, girded with weapons of war. They went up and encamped at Kiryat Ye’arim in Judah. That is why that place is called “the Camp of Dan” to this day; it lies west of Kiryat Ye’arim. From there they passed on to the hill country of Ephraim and arrived at the house of Michah.

Here the five men who had gone to spy out the Layish region remarked to their kinsmen, “Do you know, there is an ephod in these houses, and teraphim, and a sculptured image and a molten image? Now you know what you have to do.”

So they turned off there and entered the home of the young Levi at Michah’s house and greeted him. The six hundred Danite men, girded with their weapons of war, stood at the entrance of the gate, while the five men who had gone to spy out the land went inside and took the sculptured image, the ephod, the teraphim, and the molten image.

The priest was standing at the entrance of the gate, and the six hundred men girt with their weapons of war, while those men entered Michah’s house and took the sculptured image, the molten image, the ephod, and the household gods. The priest said to them, “What are you doing?”

But they said to him, “Be quiet; put your hand on your mouth! Come with us and be our father and priest. Would you rather be priest to one man’s household or be priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?”

The priest was delighted. He took the ephod, the household gods, and the sculptured image, and he joined the people.

They set out again, placing the children, the cattle, and their household goods in front.

They had already gone some distance from Michah’s house, when the men in the houses near Michah’s mustered and caught up with the Danites. They called out to the Danites, who turned around and said to Michah, “What’s the matter? Why have you mustered?”

He said, “You have taken my priest and the gods that I made, and walked off! What do I have left? How can you ask, ‘What’s the matter’?”

But the Danites replied, “Don’t do any shouting at us, or some desperate men might attack you, and you and your family would lose your lives.”

So Michah, realizing that they were stronger than he, turned back and went home; and the Danites went on their way, taking the things Michah had made and the priest he had acquired. They proceeded to Layish, a people tranquil and unsuspecting, and they put them to the sword and burned down the town.

## He Meant Well

10. Rabbi Yehudah haLevi, Kuzari 1:1

He experienced a repeated dream, as though a *malach* spoke with him, saying, “Your intent is desirable to the Creator, but your deeds are not desirable.” He tried hard, within the Khazar religion, serving in their sanctuary

and bringing offerings wholeheartedly. For all that he worked at those deeds, though, the *malach* came to him at night and said, "Your intent is desirable, but your deeds are not desirable." And this caused him to investigate beliefs and religions, and in the end he and many Khazars converted to Judaism.

#### 11. Ralbag to Judges 17:3, 17:5

These were forms with which people erred in those days, thinking they had the ability to tell the future by awakening the forces of intuition. It appears that this is why he made it at first, and not for idolatry. This is indicated by her statement, "I have dedicated the money to Gd"... And they called it "House of Gd" thinking that the Shechinah would be manifest there.

#### 12. Prof. Yechezkel Kauffmann, Judges, pg. 268

The religious faith displayed here includes an idolatrous slant... Michah and his mother revere Gd. They bless in the Name of Gd. The mother consecrates a large sum of money to Gd. Michah has a house of Gd. He gives one of his sons the role of priest, but he is happy when he succeeds in establishing in his house of Gd a kohen of the tribe of Levi, and he is confident that Gd will benefit him now. And not only this, but the faith displayed here is monotheistic. There is no mention of serving foreign gods. Baal and Astarte are not mentioned here...

#### 13. Ralbag to Judges 17:9

Michah's heart was drawn to make him a kohen in his home, to inquire of the future via the statue and terafim...

#### 14. Radak to Judges 17:13

It is a good sign for me, that a member of the tribe of kohanim has come to hand, to be a kohen for me.

#### 15. Malbim to Judges 17:10-11

"And the Levi went" – It told that he did not want to hire himself out for idolatry at first, and he left. And then, "And the Levi agreed" – he was persuaded. "To stay with the man" – not to be a 'father' and kohen, just to stay in the house for some time. "And the youth was as one of his children" – eating at his table. And then, because he stayed in the house of the wicked, he was drawn after him.

#### Moshe's Grandson?

#### 16. A name Judges 18:30 (JPS 1985 edition, lightly adapted)

The Danites set up the sculptured image for themselves; and Jonathan son of Gershom son of Menasheh, and his descendants, served as priests to the Danite tribe until the land went into exile.

#### 17. Talmud, Bava Batra 109b-110a

He replied to them, "This is my tradition from my grandfather: One should hire himself out to avodah zarah and not need others." He thought this meant actual avodah zarah [idolatry], but it is not so – it meant avodah [work] which is zarah [foreign] to him, as Rav told Rav Kahana, "Throw carcasses in the market and accept payment, and don't say, 'I am a great man, and this is degrading for me.'"

#### 18. Midrash, Mechilta d'R' Yishmael, Parshat Yitro (Amalek) 1

"Foreign [land]" – Rabbi Yehoshua said: It certainly was a foreign land to him. Rabbi Elazar haModai said: It was a land of a foreign god [*nechar Kah*]... When Moshe said to Yitro, "Give me your daughter Tziporah for a wife," Yitro replied, "Accept that which I will tell you, and I will give her to you for a wife." He said, "What is it?" He said, "Your first son shall be for idolatry, and afterward for Heaven." He accepted it. Yitro said, "Swear to me," and he swore to him, as it says, "*Vayoe/Moshe*," and *alah* is an oath... Therefore, the *malach* came to kill Moshe...