

Judges Chapter 17 Part 2

Last week, there was a question concerning the Levitical priesthood. All through the book of Judges, there has been no mention of an active priesthood. In many churches today in America, there is very little teaching from the Bible. People like their ears “tickled.”

2 Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,

2 Timothy 4:4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

We are there. Fewer and fewer people are attending Bible churches. Mainstream denominations are turning from the Word of God. Televangelists tickle people’s ears with what they want to hear. They give a feel good message apart from the gospel message. They talk about God and even mention Jesus Christ.

Here is Robby Dean’s introduction to this last section of Judges:

“In these last chapters there are crises involved in both sections. Chapters 17 & 18 are one event, 19-21 relate to another event. In both accounts the crisis is precipitated by the actions of a nameless Levite. The Levites were the priest nation. The reason the author picks these two episodes is because they are going to be representative of many other things that are going on in the nation. So he is indicating that the crisis that is occurring in Israel comes from the spiritual leadership. We see the same kind of thing happening in our nation today. If a pastor isn't feeding the sheep he

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doesn't love Christ: "If you love me, feed my sheep." Today we have lost sight of what the real issues are, which is the studying of the Word of God and applying the Word of God. So we see here that the narrator chooses these episodes in order to emphasize the fact that the basic problem is a spiritual one and related to spiritual leadership. Then he also makes the statement four times in these chapters that "in those days Israel had no king" -- 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25. Today we have lost sight of what the real issues are, which is the studying of the Word of God and applying the Word of God."

Before we get into this portion of the book of Judges, let us look specifically at the duties of the priesthood. I found the following paragraph from "The Theology of the Older Testament" by J. Barton Payne to be helpful. What all is a Levitical priest supposed to do?

"The primary functions of the priest were thus to officiate at the sanctuary (Deut. 18:5) and to pray on behalf of the people (Joel 2:17). Three other functions, however, also appear. 1) The priest was expected in personal living, to set an example of faithfulness to the testament (Deut. 33:9). The priestly consecration therefore included an anointing upon the candidate's ear, thumb, and toe (Ex. 29:20): rightly to hear the word, to carry it out, and to walk therein throughout life. His need for "wholeness" in devotion was further symbolized by the exclusion from the altar of those who suffered from physical impairments (Lev. 21:17). 2) The priest, and particularly the high priest, was also to "enquire" of God for divine oracles. This function is specifically associated with his wearing of the urim and the thumin, the precious stones of the priestly breastplate; for the man who wore these insignia officiated before the ark of the testament and thus came into the closest possible contact with Israel's testamental God (cf. Judg. 20:27). Because of the high priest's oracular status, this setting of stones came in turn to be described as "the breastplate of judgment" (Ex. 28:30). 3) The priest finally, was

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responsible to teach the law (Lev. 10:11; Mic. 3:11; Mal. 2:7). He might even be required to travel about in his performance of this ministry (II Chron 17:9). These latter two functions, of revelation and interpretation, made it natural for the priests to serve also as judges (Deut 17:9).”

It is important to note that part of the Levitical priesthood duties was teaching the people. There is no single extended passage to indicate that. References to this function are spread out throughout the Old Testament. Here is Gordon Wenham in his “The Book of Leviticus” commenting on Leviticus 10:11:

“*To instruct the Israelites (v. 11)*. The priests were not just men who offered sacrifices, but were also teachers to “instruct” (*lʰôrôt*) the people involved teaching the law (*tôrāh*), which included both teaching the revealed *rules* and making decisions about difficult cases not explicitly covered in the Sinai revelation (Deut 17:9ff).”

**Leviticus 10:8 The Lord then spoke to Aaron,
saying,**

Leviticus 10:9 “Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations—

Leviticus 10:10 and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean,

Leviticus 10:11 and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them through Moses.”

This passage carries weight because as Wenham says, “Only here in Leviticus does God speak to Aaron directly and by himself; elsewhere it is always with or through Moses. This shows the importance of what follows, and that Aaron despite his son’s misdeeds, was still high priest and able to mediate between God and man.”

Now let us be reminded from Moses’ speech in Deuteronomy 12 of a few instructions that the sons of Israel are supposed to obey but are not obeying in the book of Judges:

Deuteronomy 12:8 “You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes;

Moses and God foresaw that “doing whatever is right in your own eyes” would be a problem. As we saw last week, that is exactly what is happening in the book of Judges.

One of those things that seemed right in their eyes was to have personal worship sites. Under the Mosaic Law there was one worship site wherever the Tabernacle was.

Deuteronomy 12:9 for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you.

Deuteronomy 12:10 When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives

you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security,

Deuteronomy 12:11 then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the Lord.

In other words, no personal shrines like Micah has.

Let us return to the teaching ministry of the Levites. This needs to be emphasized. It is the clear message from God that keeps people focused on what is really important in life.

Moses' blessing on Levi included this about the Levites:

Deuteronomy 33:10 “They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, And Your law to Israel. They shall put incense before You, And whole burnt offerings on Your altar.

2 Chronicles 30:22 Then Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good insight in the things of the Lord. So they ate for the appointed seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the Lord God of their fathers.

2 Chronicles 35:3 He also said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the Lord, “Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel built; it will be a burden on your shoulders no longer. Now serve the Lord your God and His people Israel.

2 Chronicles 17:7 Then in the third year of his (Jehoshaphat) reign he sent his officials, Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah;

2 Chronicles 17:8 and with them the Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah and Tobadonijah, the Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, the priests.

2 Chronicles 17:9 They taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them; and they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Nehemiah 8:7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the

Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place.

Nehemiah 8:8 They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

Now, today we continue in Judges chapter 17 with a second narrative that dovetails into the first that we studied last week.

I didn't completely cover verse 5 last time. It dovetails with verse 7.

Judges 17:5 And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols and consecrated one of his sons, that he might become his priest.

The man Micah. The English consistently transliterates Micah's name as "Micah." However, the author is playing with his name as well as other words. He is introduced as "Michaiah" in the Hebrew of verse 1. The "iah" is a shortened form of Yahweh. So his given name was a "theophoric" name, meaning his name contained the name of God. In verse 4, the house is the house of "Michaiah." That is legally who the house belongs to. However, in the rest of this chapter, the author uses the abbreviated form, "Micah." He drops the "iah" or "Yahweh" or God portion of the name. The translators universally use "Micah" in all instances. But the author is telling us that Micah and his mother (and perhaps father who gave him his theophoric name) may profess to worship Yahweh, he really doesn't.

Shrine. This is literally, "house of gods." It is not the house of Yahweh. The word for gods is *elohim* which can be used for pagan gods as well as for the Trinity, God. So, is this the "house of gods," or is it "the House of

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God?” Since Micah and his mother make a point of making idols to Yaweh, they would say it is “The House of God,” but from the author’s perspective it is “a house of gods.” There are Christian “denominations” today that do this very thing. They say they are Christian and then avoid the gospel. Lists of “do and do” are the task of the day. Be good and God will bless you. Except being good is from the sin nature which is man’s righteousness. That is condemned in Isaiah 64:6.

This is a violation of Mosaic Law. There is one House of God. At the time of the Judges, that was the Tabernacle. It was not in someone’s house.

Ephod and idols. We talked about ephod last week. Idols is literally, “teraphim.” These are prohibited in the Mosaic Law. Here is an extended quote from “GotQuestions.com” that may be helpful.

“The word teraphim comes from the Hebrew word hatterapim that in the Bible usually refers to household idols or family gods. We first see this word in Genesis 31:19 when Rachel stole her father’s household idols as she fled with her husband and family back to Jacob’s homeland. Throughout the Bible, teraphim is used in conjunction with idolatry and pagan worship.”

“Judges 17 relates another example of the use of teraphim in the days when “there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes” (verse 6). A man named Micah took silver from his mother, had it made into an idol, hired a Levite to be his personal priest, and then declared that the Lord must be pleased with his self-defined religion (verse 13).”

“Even though teraphim were sometimes used by the Israelites to represent the Lord God, they were still idols. In the days before the temple was built and after the temple had been destroyed, Israel often

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resorted to bringing teraphim into their homes, while pretending that those idols represented God. In their self-deception, they wanted to cling to a form of godliness (2 Timothy 3:5) while defying the commandments of the Lord against making graven images (Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 5:8). We see a form of teraphim worship in modern culture when people revere objects, photos, or statues as though those things had supernatural powers within themselves. The revered or venerated object may be a crucifix or a painting of Jesus, but honoring physical representations of the Lord as though they were God Himself is idol worship (see 1 Kings 14:9 and Isaiah 37:19).”

Consecrated. This is not the Hebrew word that would normally be translated as “consecrated” or “separated to” or “to make holy.” No, this is actually two words that if translated literally would be, “he filled his hand.” He can’t really consecrate his son according to the Mosaic Law. He is way off base here. His son is not a Levite. He is not a Levite. He is not at the Tabernacle. He is not following the Mosaic Law. As some commentators suggest, he is starting his own religion in the name of Yahweh. This is really taking the name of God in vain.

Now, I am skipping over verse 6 since I covered that sufficiently last week. And, we will encounter this again in chapter 18.

Judges 17:7 Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there.

Young man. This is not the word for man plus a word for young. This is the single word for “young man” that we have already encountered twice in the Samson narrative: 1) When the Angel of the Lord referred to Samson in the prophecy given to his mother and 2) the young man that held blind Samson’s hand just before he died. From Gary Kukis:

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“We found this same noun used for the man who led the blind and seemingly helpless Samson around in the previous chapter, prior to his death. This is a young man out on his way to make his fortune. His family lived in Judah; he was not a Judæan. The Levites, as you will recall, were scattered throughout all of Israel; they did not have a place of their own. However, they did have particular cities that God had assigned to them, and, interestingly enough, Bethlehem was not among of them. What this means is that this young man had been doing a little traveling, and one of the places where he stopped and stayed for awhile was Bethlehem. In the Levitical cities, there would be an abundance of Levites; in the cities which were not so designated, there would be no Levites. Therefore, this young man reasoned that he would have better luck getting a job where there were no competing Levites.”

Additional comments by Robby Dean:

“He is a young man, the Hebrew word means an adolescent, referring to anyone who was a young child to about puberty or adolescence. It seems to be a bit of a contradiction when it says he was of the family of Judah and a Levite, two different tribes. So it is very possible that his mother was from one tribe and his father from another.”

“There are a couple of things we should note about this because it tells us something about his spiritual condition. First of all, he is young and the writer of Judges is emphasizing this because according to the Mosaic law a priest needed to be at least thirty years of age, according to Numbers 4:3, 30. Numbers 8:24-26 suggests possibly a lower age limit of 25 years, but the point of those passages is that for a man to function as a priest he had to be at least 25 years of age. So there is absolutely no concern whatsoever here for any of the requirements of the Mosaic law. They don't matter at all, he is considering himself a Levite even though he may be a half-Levite; he is going to do what he wants to do. The second thing

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we note is that he is from Bethlehem, a fact repeated three times in this passage. Whenever the Holy Spirit repeats something even a couple of times we ought to pay attention to it, so we ought to ask the question as to why the writer want us to pay attention to the fact that he is from Bethlehem. Well, there are some people who think that Judges was really written as a sort of propaganda piece during the monarchy to establish and defend the Davidic monarchy. But this is not pro-David. David is from Bethlehem; Bethlehem is going to be called the city of David. Here the writer is clearly objective and he is going to paint a very nasty picture of Bethlehem. Bethlehem is tainted by this because they produced this heretic. So this is nothing positive about Bethlehem, in fact it is an embarrassment to Bethlehem and to Judah, as well as to all Israel. Then we are told that he is from the tribe of Levi so he is at least half Levitical, and he is living in Bethlehem. If we look at various passages in the Mosaic law what we will discover, for example in Joshua 21:9-16, there is a list of cities given for the habitation of Levites. Remember that in the Old Testament every tribe was given an inheritance or a possession in the land, except the Levites. The Levites were in the land but they didn't possess it. Instead, God assigned 48 cities in Israel for the habitation of the Levites, so the Levites were spread throughout the land. So he is not living in a Levitical city, he is living wherever he wants to and is doing whatever he wants to. It just substantiates the idea that everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes, and this is showing that the religious leaders were doing what is right in their own eyes and have complete disregard for the Mosaic law. We see here that as he leaves he is going out and looking for the will of God for his life, like so many Christians. They don't have any doctrine and are just waiting for any kind of open door opportunity to come along, and with no doctrine it looks like an opportunity so this must be God's will. He is really just an opportunist.”

Judges 17:8 Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he might find a place; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah.

The man. Now, the text identifies the young Levite as a “man.” Since he was described as a “young man” previously, that might refer to his age. However, once he departs home, he is now a man who must support himself. He is operating as someone he is not.

Departed. This is the word for walk. It is translated as “departed” because it is followed by “from” and “to” indicating direction. He walked from Bethlehem to find someplace else to live. There were not many options as far as travel. A person either walked or if he had some money to spare, he might have had a donkey or horse. But this young man is obviously not rich. So he walked. Remember that this word also has the idea of ordering one’s life. He is going to find a place that is good in his own eyes, not where God sent him.

To stay. This is not the word for permanently abiding but for sojourning. Some would want to know what that word means, including me. Per Merriam Webster on-line, it is a “temporary stay.” In the Hebrew this word is slightly more nuanced. The TDOT suggests that the sojourner, the noun from this word, “lives among people who are not his blood relatives, and thus he lacks the protection and the privileges which usually come from blood relationship and place of birth. His status and privileges are dependent on the hospitality that has played an important role in the ancient Near East ever since ancient time.” The “ger” has a status between the citizen and the foreigner.

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Find a place. This is perhaps a good translation. It is a single word meaning “found.” It is a noun. The root is a crossroads where “found” connects with “meet” and motion. It can also mean to find favor. We see all of these here.

Hill country of Ephraim. This was explained last week. In case you forgot, here is the explanation from Merrill Unger, “Literally the “mountain/hill of Ephraim.” Per Merrill Unger, “The rendering “hill country” is misleading. “With their usual exactness the Hebrews saw that these regions (i.e. the mountains of Judah, Ephraim, and Naphtali) formed part of one range, the whole of which they called not by a collective name, but singularly—the mountain” (Smith, *Hist., Geo.*, p.53).”

House of Micah. The text does not say how the Levite decided to go to Micah’s house. It is possible he sought out the richest man in that area.

Judges 17:9 Micah said to him, “Where do you come from?” And he said to him, “I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to stay wherever I may find a place.”

The text does not specify how the young man got to Micah’s house or how he introduced himself.

If Micah has any understanding of Levites, he would realize immediately the inconsistency. This man claims to be a Levite but he is from a non-Levite city. He can see he is young in age, even if he has taken on the status of a man. We already know from last week that Micah is not averse to taking advantage of people. He stole from his mother. Now he is going to manipulate this young man.

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Going to stay. The word for walk, again. This is paired with the infinitive for sojourn. His purpose is to “sojourn.” We will see, that indeed, this will be a temporary, transient stay.

I may find a place. This is the same word used previously.

Judges 17:10 Micah then said to him, “Dwell with me and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year, a suit of clothes, and your maintenance.” So the Levite went in.

Dwell with me. Micah changes the word from “sojourn” to “dwell.” Micah wants a permanent relationship.

And be to me. The word “and be” here has the same letters as the so called “tetragramaton,” “YHWH.” but they are rearranged as “WHYH.” It is what Micah is doing. He is taking worship of YHWH and setting up a corruption of it. If you change or add something to the gospel, it is no longer the gospel.

Father and a priest. Micah has thrown out the Mosaic Law all the while having the outward appearance of abiding by the Law. This is something like what the Pharisees did in Jesus’ time. Micah is reverting to the procedures of the patriarchs. The father was the priest. Apparently Micah’s father is out of the picture. Perhaps he is dead. So Micah wants to hire someone to be his father and the family priest, like the patriarchs. But the man is a youth, possibly younger than his sons. Upside down and backwards!

Went in. This is the word for walk again. It is used three times in this chapter. Just following this word in the Hebrew tells a story:

1. Verse 8: The man departed (walk) Bethlehem.

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2. Verse 9: The man says I am going.
3. Verse 10: The man went in. He arrived at his destination. It is the start of a very bad journey which on the outside seems like a wonderful idea.

In the first section of this chapter, Micah and his mother violate several of the Ten Commandments in all they do. Now, Micah and the Levite will break additional rules of the Mosaic Law that apply to the priesthood. Thieme said, I am paraphrasing here, that some of the worst people on earth are self-righteous religious people. And Micah is one of those.

Judges 17:11 The Levite agreed to live with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons.

Man..young man. Here the contrast between the two is emphasized. The Levite is “the young man.” As Robby Dean suggests, he is perhaps just a teenager. The text calls Micah “the man” here instead of calling him Micah. This shows that Micah realizes he is hiring a kid to be “his father and priest.”

Son. But, now he is going to treat him like a son. So it would seem that Micah is going to pay the Levite to be a “father and priest” all the while treating him as a son. So Micah is going to tell the priest what he wants him to do. As Robby Dean suggested, he is going to create a new religion which appears on the surface to be worshiping Yahweh, but all the while is a worship of Micah’s “piety.”

Judges 17:12 So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah.

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Consecrated. This repeats the “filled his hand” idiom” given previously. Here is some interesting background on the depravity of worship in the book of Judges from Trent Butler.

“So again the Judges story in a unique fashion mirrors the sins of Jeroboam. Yet it also mirrors a form of family/clan religion in which families apparently had “friendly competition” to gain the best implements for worship and” the most qualified worship leaders. Here the apparent clan leader is also the clan religious leader who selects and “consecrates” the worship leader/priest. Illegitimacy/legitimacy of the priesthood depended in their eyes on the perspective from which you viewed the religious history of Israel and its family components. One perspective appears to have been that Yahweh could be honored in family settings with locally consecrated religious leaders. Another restricted true religious ceremonies to the high places where Yahweh was worshiped through Canaanite practices. A different perspective limited worship to the central sanctuary (sanctuaries) Yahweh had chosen under priestly leadership from the family Yahweh had chosen. The clan of Micah surely originated this narrative in celebration of Micah’s wit and financial power in bringing a qualified priest and special worship utensils to their clan shrine. The narrator who joined the narratives of the individual local heroes into the book of Judges used the narrative to show that even in their religious practices the people of Israel ignored Yahweh’s teachings and worshiped however it seemed right in their own eyes.”

Judges 17:13 Then Micah said, “Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest.”

This is so wrong in so many ways. Basically, “I have a good luck charm so God will bless me.”