

Easy to Fall

(March 17, 2023)

Ancient Israel did not have a corner on immorality and apostasy. It wasn't as though only Israel turned apostate, however, Israel, once created, was the central figure in God's Word and God did not hesitate to point out their victories as well as their tragic failures.

What happened within Israel was due to their rejection of God and His rule over their lives. As this continued, they would simply sink further and further away from God into the immoral abyss that captures *every* society that does the same thing.

This same truth exists for all nations and all people. Individually, people who reject God follow the trajectory outlined in **Romans 1** by Paul. It's not pretty and it ends in absolute tragedy. People make up nations and when the majority of people in any nation reject God and His moral code, insanity, stupidity and blatant immorality ensues and becomes the norm.

Many believe by changing politicians, the tone of a country will improve. It might, but in reality, it doesn't last because it doesn't work that way. The only thing that will ultimately improve a person or a society is a move back toward God. Instead, what are we seeing? We are seeing so many awkward and immoral things that go against common sense alone happening throughout global society. These things will eventually create the downfall of any society. There are numerous examples of this throughout Scripture.

For instance, the book of **Judges** is an extremely interesting book and at times, tragically sad after Joshua's death.

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

That text - from **Judges 17:6** - tells us there was no human king who governed the land of Israel. It also means that God Himself was no longer recognized as King over Israel. This was the case solely because the people of Israel had grown to ignore and forget God over time, choosing to live as they wished, mainly for Self. This was a cycle Israel repeated. That self-centered trait existed then and exists now in society where people will ignore God to suit themselves. They'll live how they want to live, even ignoring government laws, if they believe they can get away with it.

In the days of ancient Israel, there were plenty of people who lived with no concern for God's Laws and consequently, no concern for what was actually the right thing to do. But what is interesting is in **Judges 17** and **18**, is that we see the problem extended to people who were from the Levitical tribe, from which priests came and should've known better. Not all Levites were priests but all priests were from the tribe of Levy.

Interestingly enough, in **Judges 17**, we read about a guy named Micah. But before we get into it in detail, it's good to understand that unlike the previous chapters of **Judges**, this section (**Judges 17-21**), seems to have been included in **Judges** not to highlight any particular judges God used, but to shed light on the actual condition of Israel's apostasy from God and its results. It's important to understand that.

This is one reason why God's Word is what it is because God points out the flaws in people, not merely the victories. He wants us to understand the ramifications of when people chose to abandon God's Laws and effectively, they're relationship with Him. There's the danger for us as well, but there is always hope that God will not abandon us even when we dig in our heels in rebellion.

So Micah is having a conversation with his mother about some silver that he had stolen from her. Apparently, he enjoyed riches to the point that it pulled him away from God.

The writer told us nothing about Micah's background, except that he originally lived in the hill country of Ephraim with or near his mother (vv. 1-2). Micah's name means "Who is like Yahweh." As is true of so many details in this story, Micah's name is ironic. He was anything but "like Yahweh."^[1]

You get this sense that the writer of **Judges** mocked Micah every step of the way. Certainly, the fact that Micah's name actually meant "Who is like Yahweh" was a mockery in and of itself because he was nothing like Yahweh in life.

So right off the bat, Micah confesses to his mother that he stole her silver (vv **1-2**). What's her response? Well, apparently, she *blessed* Micah (v**2b**). Really? Yes, really. The 1100 pieces of silver was enough to give one person at that time a decent living for the rest of their life. Micah seems to have confessed his thievery in an attempt to avoid her curse.

The whole story gets stranger. Mom says she dedicated all the silver to the Lord, but then turns around and gives 200 pieces of the 1100 to the local silversmith to create an idol. Yep, an idol...for *worship*. Micah then brings it into his house. Some commentators note that in actuality, two images were made, not just one (a *carved* image and a *molded* image, v**3b**).

Let's also note that Micah had an ephod that he had made and placed it in the shrine in his home with the other idols (v**5**). He probably used the ephod for purposes of divination. So here is an Israelite who thought to himself that he could have carved images and poured images made into idols that he would worship and then also have an ephod made (that only the high priest was supposed to have and wear), and would use those items in his manner of "worship," but of course, he was not worshipping the God of Israel, but demons.

Oh, and lest we forget, Micah apparently "consecrated" his own sons to be his priests for his house. I have found it fascinating that over the years, many of the churches we attended and/or were members of either had the sons of the senior pastor (or his father), as staff members. In other words, many pastors' sons tend to follow their father into the pastorate. This is not to say that all of them were not called by God. It's almost as though many pastors think of the pastorate like the Levitical priesthood from the line of Aaron. If you were from Aaron's lineage, you could be a priest. If not, no go. Do these pastors see the pastorate the same way? Isn't it a special calling that God places on a man's life?

Then the story concerning Micah gets even more interesting because another character is introduced; a Levite, from the tribe of Levi. Notice what the text says about him (vv**7-8a**).

7 Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he was a Levite, and was staying there. 8 The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find a place.

So here's this Levite from Bethlehem who set out to "find a place." What does that mean to us? First of all, the Levites were instructed by God to live in one of 48 cities that God told Moses to set aside for them (**Numbers 35:1-8**), yet this particular Levite chose to leave, looking for greener pastures. This particular Levite was not called by God to set out for another location as Abraham had been. He simply set out to find what he could find. He was going on a "walkabout" and God doesn't appear to be in the picture at all.

The Levite eventually met Micah, who saw an opportunity to improve his own situation. Why have sons that he "consecrated" when he could actually have a man from the tribe of Levi whom he could have as his own "priest" even though he wasn't a priest?

10 Micah said to him, "Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten shekels of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance." So the Levite went in. 11 Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him. 12 So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah. 13 Then Micah said, "Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!"

So we learn in **Judges 17:10-13** that this is exactly what happens. Micah seems ecstatic that he now has his own "priest." Then check out Micah's attitude when he thinks, "Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!" Um...okay.

What does this remind you of? It reminds me of just how often people think God is there for them to **use**. People then as people today too often believe God is some type of talisman who will bring blessing regardless of how we live. So Micah now has a Levite and notice that he worked a deal with him to essentially give him room, board and a paycheck (don't forget he's got all that silver from Mom).

The Levite is no better than Micah because he clearly set out to find a cushy situation for himself. This reminds me of those faith-healers and fake ministers like them who seem to have gone into ministry solely to get rich, to make their lives more comfortable and to do so off the backs of average people. It's like welfare for con artists. They prefer to be taken care of and will give back to people what they want to hear. They do this to keep their vaunted position over them when in actuality, have zero concern for the people over which they "minister." They are the terrible shepherds the prophets spoke of who really have zero concern for the sheep (cf **Ezekiel 34:2-10**).

Now Micah was by no means innocent and clearly deceived because he rejected God's rule. He knew what he was getting and incorrectly believed that God would bless him because he now had a Levite in his house. He was clearly deceived into thinking this but why? It all started back in **Judges 17:3** when we learned Micah had a habit of worshiping idols and using divination to gain knowledge and "wisdom."

Too many Christians can't find their way around the Bible, but they all want God to "speak" to them and above all things, "bless" them.

Micah and the Levite show us that "religion" and even the concept of God can be thoroughly used for self-aggrandizement and enrichment. Christians need to be far removed from such living. We need to eliminate all "idols" and draw close to God. That is done through His Word, through prayer and submission to His will, wherever He leads us. We are to be a reflection of His love and light (truth) to a world that is dying.

Can you imagine standing before God after you die trying to come up with some excuse for never or hardly ever reading His Word, the very book He wrote to tell us about Him, His plans and how He works in our lives? I shudder when I think of the fact that I don't know His Word better than I do.

Living for God is the opposite of what occurred in **Judges 17-18**, which highlights people who lived for SELF. We need to be all-in on living for God and our lives need to be filled with compassion and love for the lost.

Next time we'll use **Judges 19-21** as our backdrop for understanding how to live in a depraved world.

[1] file:///C:/Users/fred_/Downloads/judges.pdf, pg 187 (03/15/2023)