

JUDGES 17:7-13

TEN PIECES OF SILVER AND A SUIT

“Now there was a young man of Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. And the man departed from the town of Bethlehem in Judah to sojourn where he could find a place. And as he journeyed, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. And Micah said to him, ‘Where do you come from?’ And he said to him, ‘I am a Levite of Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to sojourn where I may find a place.’ And Micah said to him, ‘Stay with me, and be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes and your living.’ And the Levite went in. And the Levite was content to dwell with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons. And Micah ordained the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. Then Micah said, ‘Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest.’”¹

Warriors do not fight wars tomorrow, though they must prepare for tomorrow’s war. The battles a warrior fights are today. Those who now contend earnestly for the Faith lay a foundation for future generations through their struggles against wickedness; but today’s warrior cannot compel the faith of those who follow. Jesus instructs disciples who follow in His steps, “Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” [MATTHEW 6:34b]. Each generation must defend and advance the Faith in their own generation.

It is amazing how quickly the benefits of a godly heritage can be squandered. We naturally assume that the child of a godly religious leader will stand firm in the truth espoused by the father. However, history frequently disproves what we might otherwise imagine to be the case. It is rare that a child or a grandchild thrust into the religious limelight of a father or a grandfather will hold to the same standard that the father or grandfather held.

In the text before us today, we meet a Levite. This young man is invited to be a priest. “Be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes,” is the offer made to the young man. The offer and his decision is the basis for our study. **Religion is cheap!** I repeat—**religion is cheap.** Despite the fact that one may pay dearly in order to have it, religion has scant value—certainly nothing of eternal worth. Religion is what one does in a vain effort to compel God to accept him or to ignore his sinful behaviour. Throughout the Word, you will note that God calls us to relationship and not to religion. The message this day reviews the drift of one individual into religion and the impact his drift had on a nation. I pray that understanding what happened will serve to warn us from a similar drift.

BEGINNING AT THE END — “The people of Dan set up the carved idol for themselves. Jonathan (son of Gershom and grandson of Moses) and his descendants were priests for Dan’s tribe until the people living in that land were taken captive” [JUDGES 18:30, GOD’S WORD]. I have deliberately read this verse from a contemporary translation in order to make a point. The man we are about to meet was Moses’ grandson—yes, that Moses! Moses, the great emancipator of the Jewish people, Moses, who gave the world the Pentateuch, the Law and the customs that marked a nation as belonging to the LORD God was the grandfather of this man.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The English Standard Version that I use reads, “The people of Dan set up the carved image for themselves, and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land” [JUDGES 18:30]. “The son of Moses” was undoubtedly the original reading. Gershom is identified as the son of Moses in Exodus [see EXODUS 2:22; 18:3]. Jewish scholars could not bear to think that a grandson of Moses should act in such an ungodly fashion. Owing to their reverence for the text they did not venture to alter it outright, but they inserted a small *n* above the line between the consonants *m* and *š*, thus turning “Moses” into “Manasseh,” which they regularly read.

The fact that this Jonathan, the grandson of Moses, is said to have been of the family of Judah [JUDGES 17:7] may be explained by supposing that the Levites, having no territorial possessions of their own, were for some purposes merged into the tribes in which they sojourned. The descendants of this Levite, it is noted, ministered in unbroken succession at the sanctuary of Dan till the Exile.² Regardless of how this scribal distortion was introduced, the text is precise in identifying this young man as “a Levite” who had lived in Bethlehem in Judah [see JUDGES 17:9].

Following the original text, we discover that descendants of Moses formed themselves into a Mosaic line of priests for the Tribe of Dan. Rather than an Aaronic priesthood, the Danites created a Mosaic priesthood, a dynasty of priests descended from Moses. It is significant to note that the rabbis struggled to account for this. They knew that Jonathan was Moses’ grandson. However, they considered this to be a blot on the name of Moses. “How,” the rabbis wondered, could Moses have an ungodly son?”

It is interesting to see how the rabbis struggled with what was written and the ideal they held. The Talmud is forthright in acknowledging that the *n* [Hebrew, *nun*] is raised above the line to show that it may be either inserted or omitted. Thus, Rabbi Bar Channa said, “The prophet studiously avoided calling Gershom the son of Moses because it would have been ignominious to Moses to have an ungodly son. But he calls him the son of Manasseh, raising the *nun*[.] however, above the line to show that it might be either inserted or omitted. And that he was the son of either Manasseh or Moses. Of Manasseh through initiating his impiety, or Moses by descent.”³

Other rabbis referred to when Pharaoh stopped providing Israel with straw for bricks. Pharaoh “decreed that any Jew who did not complete his quota must put his child into the building in place of the missing bricks. [W]hen Moses saw the terrible suffering that he had caused that he complained to God... ‘Why did you send me on this mission? You said that you would save the Jewish people, but so far you have only brought them death and mourning.’ God answered, ‘I know that none of those children is worthy of living. If they were to survive, they would only grow up to be thorns in the sides of the Jewish people. It may appear cruel to you, but in this way, my holy people are being purified...’ Still Moses would not accept God’s decree. He begged for mercy. God said, ‘I will permit you to save one of these children, so that afterward you will see what becomes of him.’ So, Moses ... took one child out of the wall and saved him. That child was Micah ... [who grew] up to corrupt the Jewish people... The first one he led astray was the grandson of the man who had saved him, Moses.”⁴

² H. C. O. Lanchester, **The Book of Judges** (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1915), 91–92

³ Baba Bathra, 109b, cited by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, **Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Books of Judges and Ruth, 1st ed.** (Ariel Ministries, San Antonio, TX 2006) 222

⁴ Op. cit., Rabbi Shmuel Yerushalmi, in **Torah Anthology: The Book of Judges**, 345-346, cited by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, **Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Books of Judges and Ruth, 1st ed.** (Ariel Ministries, San Antonio, TX 2006) 222-223

JUDGES 17:7-13
TEN PIECES OF SILVER AND A SUIT

Look at one final effort to explain how this could happen. “As we have already learned, the Levite’s grandfather was not Manasseh, but Moses. The letter *nun* is therefore written higher than the other letters of the name to indicate that it does not really belong there. The prophet Samuel, who wrote the Book of Judges, wrote it in that way because he hoped that Jonathan would one day repent. In that case, the *nun* would be taken out and he would again be known as a descendant of Moses. This is indeed what eventually happened. King David saw that Jonathan did not really believe in the idol, but only served it because he had no other source of sustenance. King David sent for him and asked him how he could hire himself out for such a sinful practice. He answered, ‘I am following the teaching of my grandfather, Moses, who used to say a person should rather serve idolatry than rely upon charity of the community.’ King David explained to him that that was not at all, what Moses meant. He only meant that one should not be too proud to do the work that is beneath him, as we have already learned. Then seeing that Jonathan was attracted to money, King David appointed him as officer of his treasury. His name was then changed to ‘Shebuel,’ which means, ‘He returned to God.’”⁵

All these are rather fanciful efforts to explain what is made plain in the Word of God. Each individual stands accountable before God for the decision he or she makes. No parent can make the choice for a child; no child can live off the accrued righteousness of a grandparent. “Every tub sits on its own bottom,” is one colloquial way of stating this truth. God, speaking through Ezekiel, addressed this issue. The passage is found in the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel’s prophecy. Though somewhat extended, it will prove beneficial for us to hear the Word of the Lord on this matter.

“If a man is righteous and does what is just and right—if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor’s wife or approach a woman in her time of menstrual impurity, does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any profit, withholds his hand from injustice, executes true justice between man and man, walks in my statutes, and keeps my rules by acting faithfully—he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord GOD.

“If he fathers a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, who does any of these things (though he himself did none of these things), who even eats upon the mountains, defiles his neighbor’s wife, oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore the pledge, lifts up his eyes to the idols, commits abomination, lends at interest, and takes profit; shall he then live? He shall not live. He has done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself.

“Now suppose this man fathers a son who sees all the sins that his father has done; he sees, and does not do likewise: he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor’s wife, does not oppress anyone, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, withholds his hand from iniquity, takes no interest or profit, obeys my rules, and walks in my statutes; he shall not die for his father’s iniquity; he shall surely live. As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity.

⁵ Op. cit., Rabbi Shmuel Yerushalmi, in **Torah Anthology: The Book of Judges**, 367-369, cited by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, **Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Books of Judges and Ruth**, 1st ed. (Ariel Ministries, San Antonio, TX 2006) 223-224

JUDGES 17:7-13
TEN PIECES OF SILVER AND A SUIT

“Yet you say, ‘Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?’ When the son has done what is just and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

“But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die” [EZEKIEL 18:5-24].

It is important to keep in mind that we are looking at the service of a grandson of Moses. This is a man who should have enjoyed stature in the eyes of his fellow worshippers. We would expect that an individual with a pedigree such as he possessed would lift up those among whom he served. Instead, we discover that he reduced the Faith to a job—a job that went for the cheap wage of ten pieces of silver and a suit of clothes.

MARKETING RELIGION — “Micah said to [the Levite], ‘Stay with me, and be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes and your living.’ And the Levite went in. And the Levite was content to dwell with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons. And Micah ordained the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. Then Micah said, ‘Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest’” [JUDGES 17:9-13].

The Levite wouldn’t qualify as an itinerating preacher; he was a preacher looking for a job. He was prepared to hire out if someone would have him. Being a Levite from the lineage of Kohath, we would expect him to live in one of the Levitical cities of Ephraim, Dan or western Manasseh [see JOSHUA 21:5, 20-26]. Instead, he is a wanderer—now living in Bethlehem, now prepared to move wherever a better opportunity arises. His service is for sale to the one making the highest bid. His loyalty is readily exchanged for what he can get for it.

Perhaps we have all known such preachers during the years of our pilgrimage. I recall a fellow minister during a pastoral meeting; he asked those present to help him find “a better job.” “It is hard here,” he complained, “I must find something better.” I suppose I’m not as sympathetic as some imagine I should be. “Did God lead you here?” I asked.

“Yes,” he offered somewhat hesitantly.

“And during the time you’ve been here, have you fulfilled all that God laid on your heart before you came?” I inquired.

“No,” he stated. Then, somewhat more defiantly he attempted an explanation, “The deacons and elders here are unspiritual and won’t listen to me. I have to find someplace easier.”

“It doesn’t sound as if your work is finished,” I said. “Perhaps you need to be firm in offering your vision so that the elders will work with you.”

He was adamant, “No, it is just too hard here. I need someplace easier.”

At this, I stated, “I have never heard of an easy place if you are performing God’s work. There will always be opposition to the advance of the Faith.”

JUDGES 17:7-13
TEN PIECES OF SILVER AND A SUIT

In Bethlehem the Levite encountered a man named Micah; and Micah saw an opportunity to gain a cheap blessing for his house. This Micah needed some blessing. His mother had accumulated eleven hundred pieces of silver, but her accumulated wealth was stolen from her. No doubt she had hoped to have a measure of security with this silver—and now, her treasure was gone, purloined, stolen. When this woman discovered that her moneys were missing, in her frustration and anguish she pronounced a curse on the one who had stolen the silver.

It so happens that her son was the thief! He had stolen the silver. When he heard his mother pronounce the curse, the son grew fearful and confessed that he had stolen the treasure. After all, where could he spend the money without her knowing that he had stolen her money? More than that, the imprecations she was calling down on the head of the thief could be a real downer if they came to pass. There was a genuine fear that God might take notice and judge him harshly.

We don't take God's Word seriously today. God warns,

“If one curses his father or his mother,
his lamp will be put out in utter darkness.”

[PROVERBS 20:20]

Again, the direction of life is revealed as those who curse parents begins a path that leads to destruction when Solomon writes:

“There are those who curse their fathers
and do not bless their mothers.
There are those who are clean in their own eyes
but are not washed of their filth.
There are those—how lofty are their eyes,
how high their eyelids lift!
There are those whose teeth are swords,
whose fangs are knives,
to devour the poor from off the earth,
the needy from among mankind.”

[PROVERBS 30:11-14]

Our day is described in no small measure by Paul's summation of godless society characterised as “disobedient to parents” [ROMANS 1:30; 2 TIMOTHY 3:2], Let me warn of the serious consequences when children are permitted to defy those whom God has given as parents.

When Micah confessed the theft to his mother, she impetuously said, “I dedicate the silver to the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a carved image and a metal image” [JUDGES 17:3]. Then, despite God's prohibition of making images, she took two hundred pieces of the silver, gave it to a silversmith who made an ephod and household gods. Compounding her sinful action, Micah then appointed one of his sons to be a priest! Note the FIFTH VERSE. “The man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods, and ordained one of his sons, who became his priest” [JUDGES 17:5].

VERSE SIX provides the pathetic summation of the spiritual condition of the land in that day. “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” [JUDGES 17:6].

JUDGES 17:7-13
TEN PIECES OF SILVER AND A SUIT

In such an environment, those whom God appointed to serve felt free to appoint themselves to whatever position they desired. Tragically, many in this day treat the role of an elder as a job rather than a calling. One of the saddest verses of the historical books speaks of Jeroboam's rush into sin. The verse reveals Jeroboam's determination to sell the priesthood—a practise that has continued throughout the history of the congregations of the Master. "[Jeroboam] continued to appoint common people as priests at the high places. Anyone who wanted the job he consecrated as a priest" [1 KINGS 13:33, NET BIBLE].

At a later date after the time of this summary statement, Abijah was forced into war with Jeroboam. Attempting to dissuade Jeroboam from war, Abijah climbed up Mount Zemaraim in the hill country of Ephraim. There, he called out to challenge Jeroboam and the army that was with him. Abijah's censure echoed the assessment provided earlier. "Listen to me, Jeroboam and all Israel! Don't you realize that the LORD God of Israel has given David and his dynasty lasting dominion over Israel by a formal agreement? Jeroboam son of Nebat, a servant of Solomon son of David, rose up and rebelled against his master. Lawless good-for-nothing men gathered around him and conspired against Rehoboam son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was an inexperienced young man and could not resist them. Now you are declaring that you will resist the LORD's rule through the Davidic dynasty. You have a huge army, and bring with you the gold calves that Jeroboam made for you as gods. But you banished the LORD's priests, Aaron's descendants, and the Levites, and appointed your own priests just as the surrounding nations do! Anyone who comes to consecrate himself with a young bull or seven rams becomes a priest of these fake gods" [2 CHRONICLES 13:4-9, NET BIBLE]!

Religion is cheap. Anyone willing to buy the office could be a priest; but that practise didn't begin with Jeroboam! In our text, we witness Micah hiring a Levite, a man who was not appointed by God to serve as a priest. I read, "Micah ordained the Levite, and the young man became *his* priest, and was in the house of Micah" [JUDGES 17:12]. Notice Micah's assessment, "Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, because I have a Levite as a priest" [JUDGES 17:13].

How very akin to much of the practise of contemporary churches. We need a pastor. Who can we hire? When we appeal to the denomination, credentials and connections take precedence over character and calling. This is because the ecclesiastical hierarchy is more concerned with control over the churches than with seeking God's glory. That is precisely what was happening in the household of Micah. No problem displacing his son! Now he had a Levite! However, Micah was wrong. What he expresses is superstition, not faith. The worship is contrary to what God expects, though it satisfies man.

COMING TO THE ATTENTION OF A NEW COMMITTEE — "In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the people of Dan was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in, for until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them. So the people of Dan sent five able men from the whole number of their tribe, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to explore it. And they said to them, 'Go and explore the land.' And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there. When they were by the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. And they turned aside and said to him, 'Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here?' And he said to them, 'This is how Micah dealt with me: he has hired me, and I have become his priest.' And they said to him, 'Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether the journey on which we are setting out will succeed.' And the priest said to them, 'Go in peace. The journey on which you go is under the eye of the LORD'" [JUDGES 18:1-6].

JUDGES 17:7-13
TEN PIECES OF SILVER AND A SUIT

Eventually, if the preacher has anything on the ball, he will come to the attention of a pulpit committee. Churches were expected to always be preparing preachers for the future. God is always at work raising up His man to speak the Word in power. However, in our modern day, we have come to expect that credentials are essential. So, we send our young men to Bible college and seminary, knowing that when they have completed their studies, they will be suited to begin their training to be pastors. It takes approximately three years for the young pastor to rid himself of all the fanciful ideas that fill his mind before confronting reality. Consequently, given the situation that prevails in this day, it may be best that a young preacher to serve as an associate for a period, or work in a smaller congregation in order to learn how to pastor.

In time, preachers will come to the attention of a pulpit committee. A pulpit committee is a group of people supposedly seeking the mind of the Lord as they seek a preacher to for their church. Most often this means that they intend to raid a sister congregation, luring that preacher to their own congregation. Since the larger congregations are looking for “successful” preachers who have demonstrated their ability in a smaller congregation, it means that smaller churches are constantly scrambling to find the next preacher and the larger congregations continue to ensure that the smaller churches are pastorally impoverished. The system is designed to feed larger churches with pastors trained by the smaller congregations.

The Tribe of Dan was seeking where they might settle. Originally, Dan had been assigned territory, but the inhabitants of that territory pushed back and drove Dan from the region [see **JOSHUA 19:40-48**]. They did go up against the city of Leshem, capturing it and renaming it Dan. However, the Book of Judges opens with this statement early in the book: “The Amorites pressed the people of Dan back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain” [**JUDGES 1:34**]. Samson, from the Tribe of Dan, had ultimately failed to free the Danite territory from the Philistines because the Tribe of Dan itself did not fight as God directed them. Thus, the Tribe was forced to limit their settlements to the hills of Zorah and Eshtaol. Ultimately, the Tribe sent out five valiant scouts to find territory to occupy.

As the scouts travelled, they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to Micah’s house where they lodged. While there, some of them recognised the voice of the young Levite—after all, he was originally from Dan. Recognising him, the spies asked, “Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here” [**JUDGES 18:3**]? When he had given them a brief synopsis of his journey, they said, “Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether the journey on which we are setting out will succeed” [**JUDGES 18:5**]. The young Levite responded with a noncommittal statement that is typical of many supposed preachers and prophets: “Go in peace. The journey on which you go is under the eye of the LORD” [**JUDGES 18:6**].

The scouts continued on their journey, eventually happening onto the city of Laish, a city that was isolated and unsuspecting; it could be easily overwhelmed. Hurrying back to their Tribe situated in Zorah and Eshtaol, they urged them to get ready to move quickly so they could attack and find room for their Tribe. They would no longer have to fight the Philistines, and they would be able to settle down in a place of their own.

Six hundred armed men, a strike force for the Tribe, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol, intent on taking the City of Laish. In later accounts provided in the historical writings, we never again read of the Tribe of Dan being in the south. After this, they are always located in the north. This informs us that the entire Tribe followed after the destruction of the City of Laish and likely the invasion of the region identified with the Sidonians. It was while they were journeying northward that we again encounter the young Levite hired to be a priest to Micah. He is about to receive an offer he can’t refuse.

BIDDING FOR HIS SERVICES — “Then the five men who had gone to scout out the country of Laish said to their brothers, ‘Do you know that in these houses there are an ephod, household gods, a carved image, and a metal image? Now therefore consider what you will do.’ And they turned aside there and came to the house of the young Levite, at the home of Micah, and asked him about his welfare. Now the 600 men of the Danites, armed with their weapons of war, stood by the entrance of the gate. And the five men who had gone to scout out the land went up and entered and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the 600 men armed with weapons of war. And when these went into Micah’s house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, the priest said to them, ‘What are you doing?’ And they said to him, ‘Keep quiet; put your hand on your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?’ And the priest’s heart was glad. He took the ephod and the household gods and the carved image and went along with the people” [JUDGES 18:14-20].

Nearing the house of Micah, the five spies noted that in his house was an ephod, household gods, a carved image and a metal image [see JUDGES 18:14]. The spies intimated that they should steal these items, apparently thinking they would bring good fortune to the Tribe. The five spies entered into the house and took these items while the remainder of the six hundred men waited outside. Of course, when they entered and seized these religious items, the young Levite protested, asking, “What are you doing” [JUDGES 18:18].

At this point, the priest received an offer he could not refuse. “They said to him, ‘Keep quiet; put your hand on your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?’” [JUDGES 18:19]? They were stealing not only the religious accoutrements, but now they were stealing the priest! Other than the use of force, what they did is not so terribly different from what is done when larger churches raid the smaller churches to get the person they want for their own ministry.

Their actions were not unwelcomed by the Levite/priest. The text informs the reader, “The priest’s heart was glad. He took the ephod and the household gods and the carved image and went along with the people” [JUDGES 18:20]. One must be struck by the fact that the young priest was glad. His salary wasn’t great, though it was adequate. The parish over which he presided was rather constricted. Going with the Tribe of Dan, he would have a larger congregation. He would occupy a place of some prominence. He would have a better income. He would have arrived in the religious world.

Though Micah gathered a small band of men to pursue these priest poachers and thieves, he was intimidated into turning around when he saw that they meant to do whatever they wanted. Might makes right, so, Micah returned to his house defeated and without a priest. The summary statement is pathetic in what is presented; it speaks of the dreadful state of the Faith in that day—a day not that far removed from Moses’ leadership and from Joshua’s leadership. “The people of Dan took what Micah had made, and the priest who belonged to him, and they came to Laish, to a people quiet and unsuspecting, and struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. And there was no deliverer because it was far from Sidon, and they had no dealings with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth-rehob. Then they rebuilt the city and lived in it. And they named the city Dan, after the name of Dan their ancestor, who was born to Israel; but the name of the city was Laish at the first” [JUDGES 18:27-29].

It is at this point that we at last learn the name of the young Levite. “The people of Dan set up the carved idol for themselves. Jonathan (son of Gershom and grandson of Moses) and his descendants were priests for Dan’s tribe until the people living in that land were taken captive” [JUDGES 18:30, GOD’S WORD]. This is the shocking revelation that the reader was not expecting when the story of the young Levite was included. Moses’ grandson is exposed as an early defector from the Faith; he was a traitor to the Law delivered by his grandfather.

I want to focus on some truths that need to be emphasised in light of this sordid account. ***God has no grandchildren.*** Each individual must decide for himself or for herself whether he or she will honour God. You cannot be a Christian because your mother was a believer. You cannot be a Christian because your grandfather was a Christian. Each individual must choose to believe or refuse to believe. In Scripture, we are warned, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” [JOHN 3:18].

Again, John has written, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” [JOHN 3:36].

Moreover, because an individual had a father or a grandfather who was greatly used in the Faith does not mean that he or she will be true to the Faith. It is a factual observation that institutions noted for their adherence to the Faith seldom continue with the same zeal, the same power, into the next generation. Churches built around a powerful man of God discover that when that man passes from the scene, those following are responsible to continue with the advance of the Faith. Christian schools seem to be raised up for one generation, and the next must fight their own battles to maintain the purity of the message.

Man is incessantly creative in forming new religions. Religions multiply like mosquitoes in a stagnant pool. Within the Faith of Christ the Lord, variations of the Faith that was once for all delivered to the saints spring up constantly. Whenever a congregation deviates from what is written in our infallible guide, a new variant of the Faith is introduced. No wonder the Apostle marvelled at the defection of the Galatians when confronted by the preaching of the Judaizers. “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” [GALATIANS 1:6-9].

One cannot become righteous through disobedience to God. God’s expectation of mankind is simple enough. Micah explains God’s expectation when he writes,

“[God] has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?”

[MICAH 6:8]

The individual who would please God must seek to do the things that God would do. The godly individual is marked by justice, kindness and humility before the LORD God. Humility before the Lord means that an individual does not ignore the will of God; rather, humility before the Lord means that the individual seeks to know what pleases the Lord and does those things.

Should we not fear the One who warned, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great” [LUKE 6:46-49].

This warning is akin to another that is recorded in Matthew’s Gospel. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” [MATTHEW 7:21-23].

Credentials do not qualify one for service. I believe in education; but education is no substitute for experience. I believe in training for service, but training must not displace divine appointment. Tragically, much of what passes as preparation for pastoral service is humanism, pompous piety. There is much to be said for the training that adheres to the Word we have received. However, modern education techniques seem more geared to explaining away what is written than it does in seeking the power of the Spirit through what is written.

We have received the command that those who lead must be men of character. Education is wonderful; but education is no substitute for training in righteousness through growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The assembly of the righteous can assess the suitability of an individual for eldership through applying the criteria provided in the Word of God.

The Apostle has written to Timothy, “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil” [1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7].

To Titus, Paul has given these instructions: “I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” [TITUS 1:5-9].

Connections cannot substitute for calling. Contemporary churches make much of who knows the preacher, what recommendations he has received. The connections that are important are those with the Risen Son of God and with His Holy Bride. Does the individual who is proposed to lead have an intimate relationship with the Saviour? Is he respectful of Christ’s Bride? Does he treat her with respect?

JUDGES 17:7-13
TEN PIECES OF SILVER AND A SUIT

If he has the call of God upon his life, that man will always seek the welfare of the assembly over which the Master has placed him. For him, his pastoral labour is not a job; rather, it is a calling. He knows he must give an answer to the One who appointed him. Thus, he will speak the truth in love, holding the flock in constant prayer as he labours, always seeking the honour of the One who appoints to holy service. Though he will readily sacrifice himself for the flock, his foremost concern will be to please the One who appointed him. Paul would write, “Whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:9]. This becomes the guiding precept for the man of God.

All this I’ve said to the congregation in order to equip you for the task of ensuring that this assembly is prepared for tomorrow. One day, should Christ tarry, I must set aside this tent and face Him who appointed me to this service. You will be responsible to find the will of the Lord and to ensure that the church continues. Whether you will adhere to what is written, and that which I have preached for these few years, will determine whether you continue pleasing the Lord. If you fall into the trap of doing church as the culture has trained people to do church, you will feel good about yourselves, but you will have scant impact on society. If you seek out God’s man, however unpolished he may appear at first, you will continue serving God in power. The issue lies within your hands. Serve God. Amen.