

THE HOUSE OF MICAH

Jeremiah Chen

CONTENTS

- 1. Finally Made A Match!**
- 2. A Hidden Gem**
- 3. I Am His Priest**
- 4. Lifelong Journey**
- 5. Out of the Norm**
- 6. Jump Start and Simmering**
- 7. Partnership**
- 8. From Office to Resting Place**
- 9. Adventure**
- 10. Bad Example or Good Alternative**
- 11. Oh, There Are Idols!**
- 12. Israel Had No King**
- 13. End-Time Relevance**
- 14. Forerunners**
- 15. Riddle, Mystery**

Finally Made A Match!

Last December 26 was really a special day for me and Cheryl. We celebrated our 29th Anniversary and also the very first matchmaking, after numerous failed attempts in the past 29 years! We witnessed my sister-in-law's engagement on that same day! Because their story – engaged in 3 weeks after 3-months of cross-continent communication through social media – amazes many including ourselves, Cheryl then had this thought in mind: there must've been a Bible story of some sort that can properly illustrate their interesting story!

Here we go! She found it the day before their engagement when we read the Bible together on Christmas morning. That day's passage was the story of the house of Micah and suddenly she was grabbed by the striking similarity as we read it!

Judges chapter 17 and 18 recorded the whole account of Micah and its later development with the tribe of Dan in vivid details. Please read it through again if you've forgotten the details. Simply putting it in today's words looks something like this: Micah, for some bizarre reasons, has a passion in the "worship affairs" and builds a "shrine" in his house. A young Levite looking for a place to stay happens to stumble into Micah's house. Micah hires this Levite as his priest, and this "house of worship" runs smoothly and seems to bring blessings to his community. Later the tribe of Dan finds out about it, gets very interested, and forces a hostile takeover when it found a new place to settle. This worship operation moves to Dan and lasts a long time.

My sister-in-law has had a heart to serve the Lord ever since her teenage years. But after trying her best by availing herself for every possible training and serving opportunities for 40 years, she is still looking for a ministry position that can fulfill her calling. Her fiancé on his part offers financial promise and spiritual support for both the marriage and future home-based ministry (baking, cooking plus Bible study, counseling) just like Micah did to the Levite. And my sister-in-law "was content to dwell with the man" (Judg. 17:11) just like the Levite.

As we go on to ponder more into the scripture, we realize the house of Micah bears significance far more and far beyond just my sister-in-law's marriage! It can

positively impact many people's lives and reshape the Church's' landscape for the better. But many obstacles need to be removed first.

A Hidden Gem

Few people pay much attention to the book of Judges except maybe mentioning Deborah or Gideon. Many churches basically adopt this view that since the better one, namely Jesus and the New Testament, already came, Old Testament serves only the purpose of historical references and bears less authority and applicability today. But before you overlook this "little side story" of Micah, do you know that the house of Micah played a part in defining Israel/Judah kingdom's final boundary? I'm sure Micah had no idea about this when he founded his house of worship. Judges 18 tells us that the tribe of Dan had no place to settle, or "had not yet come into an inheritance among the tribes of Israel." But thanks to the "blessing" of the priest at Micah's house, the Danites successfully migrated from Zorah and Eshtaol to Laish (later renamed to Dan) and settled there. From that time on, the Bible refers the entire Israel/Judah's boundary as "from Dan to Beersheba" or "from Beersheba to Dan" more than seven times.

"During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree." (1 Kings 4:25) We all know the Promised Land was carefully measured by God and has important spiritual meanings. From this verse that describes Solomon's prosperous kingdom, would you say that Danites' migration in Judg. 18 that defined "Dan" in the verse was just a random act, or something orchestrated and maybe even ordained by God?

Most Christians, including myself at first, react to Micah's "house shrine" with mockery or disregard, deeming it illegitimate or simply another instance of "everyone did what was right in his own eyes". Would God ever use an "illegitimate" priest to fulfill His important promise? While you struggle to make sense of all this, may I go ahead and suggest that as long as we have a heart to serve Him, however imperfect or sinful we were, God can, though not necessarily always will, use us to bless a household, a neighborhood, or even a whole tribe and parts of a nation, no matter what some religious minds think. I've heard no one commenting or preaching on Micah's story this way, but that doesn't stop me from

encouraging many of you to become a modern day Micah who unknowingly and even unwillingly stumbled into his place of helping Judah and Israel cementing her last piece of inheritance in the land of Canaan.

I Am His Priest

The Danites sent five warriors to spy out the land so they could find a place to settle. The five men also happened to stumble into Micah's house and saw the Levite. They asked him three profound life questions that all philosophers also ask: "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here?" These questions, sometimes quoted at mission conferences for young people, are still ringing in many young and old Levites' ears today.

That Levite gave a resounding answer: "He has hired me and I am his priest."

Well, many of you may think this hiring is secular, this makeshift shrine is not of God, and this so-called priest is not official according to Moses' Law. But I will tell you this: not many Christians can give such an answer with confidence, and very few can even imagine he/she can impact a whole group of people, as discussed in the last chapter.

We've met countless brothers and sisters, ordained or not, seminary-trained or not, eagerly searching for a place to serve the Lord somewhere in their lifetime, and I'm sure you have, too. For them, it looks like no place needs them, no place takes them, or no place flourishes them. There are some other Levites who gave much energy, saw many offenses, or lost much passion. Whatever the case may be, if it's you my brother and my sister, listen to this: if this homeless Levite wondering around looking for a place to stay ended up being a priest for a whole tribe (or half of the nation, rather), why can't you?

A young Levite is looking for a place to stay? Does it sound familiar, and sad? So many Christian young men and women get confused, astray, scared, and barely survive mentally and spiritually. Wouldn't it be nice if they can all find a place to live, a father figure to nurture them, and a ministry fitting their gifts to serve like this young Levite?

Our Lord Jesus has already paid the price to “hire” us for His kingdom purpose. Each and every one of us is a member of the royal priesthood. And particularly for those of you who have heard God’s call into ministry in any capacity, can you say that “he has hired me and I am his priest” in confidence? For some, maybe not until you meet the Micah like this lucky Levite did.

Lifelong Journey

Did Micah all of a sudden get interested in setting up a place of worship upon seeing the images his mom placed in his house? Probably not. I believe this house of Micah for worshipping God is long time in the making.

While meditating this Bible story in the past days, I came to realize that I myself have been operating on somewhat of a “Micah’s model” throughout my faith journey! No wonder God is leading me to dig so much into its rich meanings. I pray that my examples may inspire many.

It started with a small evangelical effort when I was in college. I organized a “faith forum” for a few classmate friends by picking a good in-between-class time slot, a nice shade, a nice table at a nice location on campus and brought some drinks and snacks each time. Many years later I learned that quite a few (other) classmates became Christians and one became a pastor. Though my forum could claim no credit for those fruits, I feel God answered my prayer, and just maybe honored my little effort as well.

In that same college period, my campus fellowship small group went to a brother’s nice mountainside apartment for a mini retreat on the Easter weekend. During the Easter morning devotion, we held communion together, which was unheard-of those days that communions be held outside of a church without any clergy.

Years went by, I moved to a new city and got married. There was a college town next to the city. We asked one guy from that college: “would you like to do Bible study with us and reach out to other students?” You probably guess what’s next. We moved into a big townhouse (actually a rectory attached to an ancient Episcopal church, vacant for rent) right by the campus and started a new Bible study group in that house with the Holy Spirit working on many young lives. We

several times asked the pastor of the city church where we attended to come here baptizing new believers (in a storage tank). Many conferences were held at the church next door in the short two years while we were there. Years later, that brother who co-worked with us also became a pastor. Interestingly, for a while we had him having regular dinner with us (for he was single and loved Cheryl's cooking).

Another decade or so passed, we had kids in preteen ages. We launched a cross-church community youth group doing Christian songs right in our house for a long 14 years until the pandemic hit, with a peak of 70 kids enrolled at one time. We had devoted young adults who volunteered shepherding the kids. They ran this youth worship band ministry while we supplied the platform and provided covers. Kids were baptized in creeks, ponds, and trash cans and some of them later developed into worship leaders or instrument players. Again, many of those young adult ministers either went on to mission fields or attended ministry schools, with one still serving as pastor's assistance now.

After the youth group ended, God continued to use our house (called Upper Room) as a place of worship and resting for men and women of God, with Levites of all sorts stumbling in. They are ex-assistant pastor, missionary, seer, charity worker, travelling worship leader, new believer, active duty serviceman, minister who has many connections, and people on fire for God. When they come, we make a place for them to stay and serve. You can imagine what would happen when these people of God gather! When they leave, the next stop in their journey awaits them.

Can you roughly figure out a common thread or two? Hosting. A physical place. Unorthodox. Starting new. Levites (past, current or future).

It has to do with Micah's personality, upbringing, spiritual DNA, and destiny. Not all are going to be a Micah, but I believe more are being called and released all over the world. And many existing ministries will be biblically confirmed as they realize Micah and that young Levite already modeled for them back in the Old Testament.

Out of the Norm

Our God intentionally teaches us a lesson, that He is God, so He can do anything as He pleases, within or beyond our “specification.” God always reserves this right of “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter.” (Prov. 25:2) so we cannot fully see certain things yet. This lesson looks very simple and obvious to all Christians, yet proves very hard for many to learn in many regards.

God himself creates and upholds natural laws, yet breaks them often by supernatural acts. Does it mean He contradicts Himself? Not at all. We simply must take both, natural and supernatural, from God.

When God’s revelation of himself morphed from laws and prophets of the Old Testament to the person of Jesus in the New Testament, the entire Israelites, especially the religious class, stumbled badly because Jesus clearly was out of their religious norm and seemed breaking many sacred laws and rules. The church cannot openly accept, not alone celebrate, that God chose Samson to manifest His great superpower, or chose Jonah as the super effective evangelist ever lived because Samson and Jonah do not fit our “biblical character norm.” God also chose Paul as an apostle in addition to Jesus’ original twelve which appeared to be the “norm. “

God used Moses, David and Solomon to build the tabernacles and temple for what we call corporate worship. But there were also those individual, on-the-spot, spontaneous, and raw worship moments that deeply caught God’s heart, such as Abraham on Mount Moriah, Jacob at Bethel, David on the threshing floor of Araunah, and Jonah in the whale’s belly.

Similarly in the New Testament, Jesus indeed preached at synagogues, but the classical cases when people encountered the son of God seemed mostly “random.” Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well; Peter and disciples were overwhelmed by Jesus’ authority on the fishing boat; the once blind man met Jesus again on the street (John 9:35-38), and so on. And most of Jesus’ teachings were given out on the streets, whether privately to the few disciples or publicly to a crowd. One key verse that clearly illustrates this picture of the “dual systems” is Acts 2:46 “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house ...” That’s right, both the temple and people’s houses!

Micah's "worship shop" was certainly out of the norm. He was not supposed to touch anything of this nature for he was only a "layman" and not a Levite. Even though there was a Levite in charge of the operation, he most likely wasn't Aaron's descendent and should not be a priest at all. This house of worship wasn't in the Law and could well be labeled as "illegal" or "unlicensed" in today's term.

Whether you deem it of the Lord or not, Micah had passion. He had guts. He had convictions. He did something no one else has done before. He started a new ministry even though he was unqualified. He hosted a worship place as a layman.

The same could also be said about the Levite. It seemed like he was simply making a living from this underground makeshift shop, and any worship ceremony he performed there looked nothing more than "playing kitchen" compared to what we know of the "formal ones" in Moses' tabernacle or Solomon's temple. In spite of all these, from what we can tell the Levite ran this Micah's house seriously.

How do we know that, and how did this ministry do? Beside it facilitated the eventual successful migration of the Danites which was an expansion of Israelites' territory; the scripture gives us two more clues so that we can probably say it was pretty successful. First, when the Danites took away all the "furniture" and the Levite from Micah, a good many from the neighborhood gathered and chased out the Danites. This clearly indicates that the house really meant something to them that they didn't want to lose it. Maybe it brought them blessings of some kind. Maybe it simply helped to satisfy their religious duties. At any rate, it fulfilled its intended purpose for that neighborhood. By the way, you may not know that the hill country of Ephraim where the house of Micah was located was no small remote village at all, but a prosperous business town.

Second, the entire Danites' 600 men, though at the suggestion of the 5 spies, in a few short minutes and in one accord determined that "this stuff" – the variety of idols, ephod, and the Levite – was very valuable and worth taking by force. Why did they all like the idols? Where did they all get the idea they could have their own priest? Why wasn't anyone, not even one, in the tribe concerned that robbing and bringing those objects with them may potentially cause troubles or curses rather than blessings? Did blessings really follow those objects from the household of Micah to the house of Dan?

Though Micah sadly lost everything he built, other people benefitted from it and it lasted a long time. It had a bitter sweet ending. This unofficial house of worship was actually very lucky to change ownership and be relocated, rather than destroyed by some jealous “authorities.” When John the Baptist came out of nowhere and had an impact, Pharisees came questioning his authority. When Jesus came out of nowhere and made an impact, Pharisees did the same thing again. Now, have you ever wondered what authority were Micah and the Levite operating this ministry under?

One reason why the Bible is trustworthy is that the laws and patterns presented will be repeated time after time in real lives. When we ran our youth band and made an impact, elders and pastors from two large churches in the area came and questioned our authority. They wanted see our training materials and checked if they were biblical. They wanted to know which churches our counselors and we belong to. I also ran into several pastors who upon hearing our ministry immediately questioned “why don’t you work with a church?” Because of the way kids could enjoy playing in a band, fellowshiping in a small group, meeting new kids from other churches and schools every semester, and practicing leadership skills at our place was unique, churches had no way to duplicate it no matter how much resources they had. Because we gave our young counselors and retreat speakers complete freedom under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, kids encountered God which nowhere else could offer. God doesn’t like men to put Him in a box, whether a theology box or “church box.” He can certainly bless a mega church, so can He bless an individual passing out tracts on the street. He wants to be God.

So if you desire a good work (1 Tim 3:1), no matter in the role as a Levite, Micah, or anything else, do not limit yourself to normal church channels only. Churches encourage lay people to serve only within that church’s framework and under its authority. Yes everyone needs spiritual coverings for checks and balances, but the house of Micah says one can start a new ministry without necessarily belonging to, affiliated with, or under a particular church or established ministry. Your ministry style is between you and God and doesn’t have to conform to any conventional model. Your ministry is part of the universal church. Your small church and their big church are both of the church. Was the young Levite “qualified” to be a priest? Yes and no. No, according to the Mosaic Law, but maybe, according to Isaiah 66:21 “And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites, says the Lord.”

The Bible concluded this whole story with this: “They continued to use the idols Micah had made, all the time the house of God was in Shiloh.” (Judg 18:31)

Jump Start and Simmering

It is very interesting to notice how this “bizarre” house of worship got started in the first place. When Micah’s mother recovered her stolen money, she spent some of it to make two images for Micah, and put them in Micah’s house. This act apparently inspired Micah somehow and triggered a series of follow-up actions to complete all necessary ingredients for the house, first by him and later seemingly by God (sending the young Levite to stop by).

As I said in an earlier chapter, this was long time in the making. The mom in all likelihood already noticed Micah had a keen interest in spiritual or religious affairs. He probably had been “playing” house of God since he was a kid. But now he seemed to get lost, without a job, and even engaged in theft. Fully knowing Micah’s true passion, his mom made a decision to attempt to jump start a new business for him, and it worked! As the house of Micah is presented largely as a positive story here in this book, his anonymous mom was the hero who initiated it. You can probably guess who initiated all of our Micah-style ministries!

The two images made by Micah’s mom were like a starter kit, or a play kitchen set that induced him into the real business. We all heard stories like a boy receiving a tool set as birthday present later became a mechanic, or a baseball glove then became a baseball player. We also heard pastor’s kids playing preachers later did become preachers. I can never forget how my younger daughter wearing a Halloween dresses, holding a toy microphone before a TV/DVD set and imitating a pastor’s wife performing at concerts. Nor can I forget when they first learned worship instruments and pretended leading worship at home. These were the play sets, or startup kits that led us to the real youth band ministry. And for my two daughters, those toys and primitive playing have also led into seasoned worship leaders at churches and fellowships.

We all know the importance of at-home education and parental influence which is too common a topic. However, we cannot fail to mention Micah’s mom when studying him. Whether she knew idols were evil or not, whether there were other

options or objects for cultivating one's religious and spiritual inclination or not, whether this whole thing was pleasing to God or not remained a mystery. But we do know the following: Micah's mom saw and confirmed his gifts, and made an effort to jump start his new career accordingly, thus helping him reach his destiny, even though it looked bizarre, out of norm, or dangerous. For any mentors, coaches, spiritual covers, spiritual fathers and mothers, Micah's mom is a good example to look to.

Another anonymous figure who also caught our attention was Micah's son. After Micah finished preparing everything for the shrine, he installed one of his sons to be the priest, and this was no small matter. Do you think he made a real-sized "play kitchen set" for that son? From what we can see, Micah's act of establishing a house of worship was no joke. He was pretty serious in making one as real as possible. Do you think Micah simply wanted to benefit that son by naming him as CEO while Micah himself the board director? From common sense, not if this CEO, or priest's job was a challenging one. The only reasonable answer to me is: Micah was quite confident this particular son could do the job as a priest! Why? That son probably spent countless hours with his dad learning all the stuff pertaining to priesthood! Using today's terminology, Micah put this son "soaking" in God's presence! This kind of slow-cooking process, let's call it simmering, is another model example for parenting or mentoring. We couldn't count how many conferences, concerts, summer camps, weekly liturgical dance classes ... besides our own youth band and Sunday church year after year in which we submerged our two kids when they grew up.

Partnership

This ministry turned out to be pretty successful for several reasons. First was the principle of demand and supply at work. A later chapter of the book will address this. Second was Micah's being well-prepared. Unlike most boys who study fighter jets, watch NBA or play video games today, he probably spent a lot of time reading and "rehearsing" Moses' tabernacle. He knew exactly what ingredients were necessary for "his version" of a house of God to be ready and running. Thirdly you might also notice that the family was well financed so that it could afford to support such a ministry, had a big store front and hotel for travelers to

visit and lodge, as we read the five Danites spies stayed overnight there and found out about the Levites.

Fourthly, Micah fully understood the "... the effective working by which every part does its share ... (Eph 4:16)" principle and the importance of relationship. It's not hard to appreciate how Micah treated the young Levites as one of his sons, as most of us would like to do the same to our close fellow coworkers in the ministry who are much younger. It's not too hard to understand why Micah asked the young Levites to "be a father to me" as most of us would like to do the same to honor the authority of an office such as a priest or pastor even though he or she is much younger. And it's not awfully hard to fathom how this son-and-father/father-and-son reverse-role partnership could play out, as one probably applied to working hours and the other to family hours.

What really distinguished Micah from many though, was the fact that he did not install himself as the priest, and it's a huge deal! As we figured, he's been playing and dreaming house of God for his whole life. What role do you think he played in and dreamed to be in? Of course it's the priest, and likely the high priest as well, no question about it because there were no other official roles. When the time suddenly came that he could actually own some kind of a house of God, he must've asked himself these many questions hundreds of times: "Am I really going to fulfill my lifetime dream of being a priest? I know how to do it!" "Maybe it's better that someone else be the priest while I do the management work?" "I hope we have a Levite to be our priest, but should I wait for that, or just use one for now; if so, then is it me or my son?" "After all, is this thing for my personal wish come true, or for God to render His blessings to me?"

Micah made a wise decision by having a ministry established first with him not being the focal point, and later God provided him a Levite who became his "legitimate" priest. What did Micah do then, since he wasn't the priest or a Levite, for priests and/or the Levites were the only officials in a house of God? Well, we know that his role to this ministry was so very important. It included managing the finance, infrastructure, administrative as well as religious logistics, and peripheral businesses. I think you may call him the pioneer or counterpart of synagogue rulers as seen in the New Testament time. When you let every member do what it does the best, the working, or operation of the body will be very effective.

We've seen far too often that churches' so-called founding members control the boards, namely elders' board and deacons' board, "forever." The ensuing conflicts between them and the hired pastor or other ordinary members are also too common. Wouldn't it be nice that all ministries have such loving partnerships among their leaders as that between Micah and the young Levite?

During the time when we did the youth ministry God supplied precious young Levites to be our counselors. They were college students, college graduates, or graduate students. They came in and ran the ministry, whether teaching instruments, sharing messages, or praying for individuals, literally as their own ministry. Though I had the title of Director, we never told them what to do or what not to do unless they asked. We knew they're competent and sincere so we honored whatever they did. Once a parent came asking us to correct something the counselors did. After we explained our roles to the parent, she replied: "I didn't know you were simply landlords!" Yes, I think this was one of Micah's three roles: landlord, owner, and father.

Likewise, our student leaders, whether leading a small band or small Bible study, had the same sense of ownership. The counselors never told them what to do unless they asked for help. They were responsible for how well the songs were presented and they did it for themselves. Nobody had to push them. We trust they would do their best. The young Levite on the surface looked like a hired laborer, but he actually loved his job and loved his boss (and probably his boss' family), and vice versa.

Ephesians said it so well: "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. (Eph 4:12)" If Micah did not "excuse" himself from the priest position, both his son and the young Levite could not be equipped and the Israelite community could not be edified. His nice partnership with the young Levite proved to be an ingredient for the ministry's success. When we let our counselors freely do the work of ministry without some parents, churches, and even our own unnecessary intervention, the measure of their stature might grow to the fullest extent.

From Office to Resting Place

Adventure

We've served in churches along the years, actually several of them, and know what it's like being in a church. If you ask me what's the biggest difference between "within the norms" and "out of the norms" I would say the latter is much more exciting than the former which all slowly run into routine ruts. The house of Micah had a very strange arrangement. It was open to all whoever stopped by, probably 24 hours a day, with a "covering" business of a hotel or Airbnb. Thus Micah could never know in advance a Levite would come and upgrade his makeshift shrine. He would never expect that five spies from the tribe of Dan would come in and later take all that he had. Neither would he know his ministry would later help the Danites find their new territory. It was this random and unexpected element that made the house of Micah interesting.

I know you want to ask: Micah lost everything, now what? Let me ask this then: Where do you think this roller-coaster ride would lead Micah next? Would he get depressed, blame God, sit in a self-pity pit, give it all up and back to his old days of jobless and stealing? Or, at the encouragement of his neighborhood folks he rekindled his passion, regrouped, and continued his journey of running a house of God? Some people feel fainted or ill after a roller coaster ride and never want to try again, but most others simply cannot resist the thrill, even though the experience hurt a little bit. Nobody knows what happened to him later, but I would guess Micah belongs to more of the latter type or scenario.

There were two parts to the young Levite's departure. First, it appeared as an "authentic" hostage-taking for it was indeed done by Danites' armed soldiers. But it also appeared the Levite willingly left Micah because "So the priest's heart was glad (Judg 18:20)." Did Micah view it as the Levite's breach of their partnership, or even a spiritual son's betrayal of his spiritual father? Or was Micah very sad to see his priest and son leave, but happy for his promotion? Danger, threat, loss, or hurt are always part of an adventure.

Another interesting and related element of out-of-the-norms ministries is their fleeting nature. The "local congregation" seemed like faithful followers, but the keys that defined the house of Micah were the priest and all the accessories, which

simply came and went. The “adverse keys,” i.e., the Danites, also came and went. You may point out the whole endeavor was somewhat short-lived. Yes, longevity is indeed a blessing as regular churches seek to last long. But for ministries like the house of Micah, their mission was to fulfill the specific purposes of that particular moment.

Our own Micah’s-model journey was nothing short of roller-coaster experience with people of both Levites and Danites coming and leaving. There is not enough room for all these happenings to be told here. I hope these stories may interest you to get on the same fun ride of serving God as a Micah.

When I was still in that college town, I had a brief encounter with a man of God. We met in a weekend conference where he traveled over 500 miles to attend. He only knew that I lived in a house right adjacent to a church in that town. A couple days after the conference ended, he knocked on my door, saying he found me by literally asking around from church to church in town! He stayed for dinner and overnight. We had a good time talking about God. He gave me two wood picture frames that he made himself. I forget his name but the two frames are still being used in our office today.

We started our youth ministry from scratch and it was certainly very rough. In the beginning, we had 2 other small groups joining force with us only to see them parting their ways shortly later. But God at the same time sent an amateur musician to the U.S. from overseas and we happened to meet his sister at a music store and learned about it. That musician gave us a real good jump start in singing while playing instruments. But he left soon after as well. We were on our own for a while, until one day our nephew brought in his friend and the friend’s dad, who was a worship-music enthusiastic. This was kind of our first Levite.

When we invited our church pastor’s teenage daughter to join us, the church’s former worship leader and his adult daughter also joined. We had a good time together for about a year until I found out they considered this worship team belong to the church. This was quite similar to what the Danites did to Micah.

We were back to ground zero, being dead, buried, and then resurrected after a couple months. One day my older daughter’s friend along with her brother walked in. They picked up instrument playing in no time. Soon other kids joined. The

next year we spotted this one girl entering college and one guy freshman in college, both full of the spirit and fully into worship music, and invited them to be our “priests.” That set sail a 10-year wonderful journey when about 7 or 8 young Levites came in and left as priests with countless beautiful moments engrained in everyone’s soul. The pandemic came. The last Levites went on for her next season, similar to the young Levite being “promoted” from Micah’s house to Dan’s house.

Lifestyle heart of worship no membership

Bad Example or Good Alternative

I’m fully aware that probably 99% Christians regard the house of Micah as a bad example because it was full of images (or idols) of all kinds. I will spend the next chapter diving into this issue. But before that, let me post this question for you to ponder: If you and your loved ones simply wanted to worship the God of Israel – certainly according to the Law of Moses back then– where would you rather go?

You would most likely suffer the horrifying and demoralizing abuse by the Eli gangs if going to Shiloh the “official” house of God. Or you might choose to go to Dan’s lesser known place where the priest seemed to do his job faithfully but with some strange pagan statues in the background.

God let the two houses of worship exist at the same time, without saying which one pleases Him more than the other (yes the ark of covenant was in Shiloh but later captured by the Philistines and never returned). It looks to me they were both bad, or equally bad! Now if God could bring out the great prophet-priest-judge Samuel from Eli’s corrupt house, and bring the tribe of Dan to their destiny through Micah’s idol-filled house, He sure can use any ministry however imperfect to bring out something good as He pleases. God deeply cares about His sheep. When He sees a shepherd not doing his job right, he will raise up another one so some sheep can be taken care of.

By the way, have you ever wondered why Moses' grandson Jonathan was "attracted" to Dan's house of God, which basically was a relocation and upgrade of the house of Micah? Hum, maybe this wasn't too bad of a choice after all.

Oh, There Are Idols!

We are all very quick to completely write off the house of Micah (and the subsequent house of God in Dan) because there were a bunch of idols in it. Well, I was a big one of this "we" until carefully examining the scriptures and our own realities. Don't assume for one minute I'm condoning anything about idols or images. I am no progressive! I am just as jealous as anybody in the room.

Given God's very nature of being absolutely stern on His people *worshipping idols* (and *enticing people to worship idols*), have you noticed something quite odd? Each time the Bible describes the fixtures of the house it always repeats all the idols (carved image, ephod, household idols, and molded image) and makes it sounding really bad. But lo and behold, I didn't see God condemning it in the Bible! Though I'm no scholar, I find it so rare and strange that the Bible tells of supposedly very sinful acts without consequence or God's judgments. You may think it's just the book of Judges' writing style? No. In no uncertain terms it condemns Gideon's making a golden ephod which snared the Israelites (Judg 8:27). Actually Judge paints a clear picture of God's divine ruling of Israelites: whenever they did evil in the sight of the Lord by serving other gods, troubles came.

So, why no judgments resulting from this rather "extensive" idol setup were recorded in the Bible and the Bible author did not even leave a negative comment about it? Did Danites pay the ultimate price for these idols by being cut off from the 144,000 in Revelation Chap. 7? Was judgment on Micah's idols simply a foregone conclusion which surely happened but too trivial to be recorded? Did God give up on Micah and Dan altogether and didn't bother to discipline them? Or, God knew Micah's true heart (desiring His goodness) and the idols did not cause the people really *worshipping* them.

When we sit down and think about it, Micah's practice of making and setting up lots of "accessories," namely images, ephods, etc., alongside with a priest should

sound very familiar to all of us who've been in the "business." We preach about Jesus giving sermons on the hillside, by the sea and at the well; we admire persecuted churches meeting in the cave; but we like to make everything in our own church "nice"! Everything may include stained glass windows, candlesticks, pews, lecterns, flowers, robes, crosses (of course), music equipment whether they're organs or guitar amps, etc. Even statues or portraits appearing in churches are all too common throughout the ages, whether those be of Mozart, Moses, Mary, angels, or dead saints. There're a lot more: printed bulletins, PowerPoint slides, comprehensive deacon/elder structures, or cell group systems, to name a few. These are all well-meant tools that also have the full potential of becoming idols. Should we completely write off a church whose congregation may be obsessed by its accomplishments before God renders His judgments? Should we confront something if we discern that it's evil in the sight of the Lord?

The issue of idols goes far beyond simply physical objects or organization structures. It has been a huge challenge to us since day one. If idol worshiping is the number one sin in the Old Testament, I would contend that "religion believing" is the number one sin in the New Testament. Idol worshiping without a doubt provoked the most severe anger of God. Jesus reserved the harshest condemnation for Pharisees and the religious and Paul spent the most energy battling against Jewish believers' legalism. Both practices pose the same danger of replacing God with something else, namely other gods or religious traditions. We will not discuss any "sacred traditions" or "sacred theologies" here as they are age-old debates within the church. The bottom line is: we all have them, more or less, knowingly or unknowingly.

We will never know who the "main culprit" was. Was it Micah, his mom, or the Levite, who played the most part in keeping the idols? I think they probably all compromised to certain degrees! We also never know if people coming to this shrine actually bow to these idols or not. Did the idols really represent some gods, or served only as art pieces? I have no clue from the Bible. Just guessing it's probably both. One thing we do know is that those idols remained part of this ministry. They certainly were not pleasing to the Lord but nonetheless.

As mentioned in an early chapter, some of the idols were originated from Micah's mom and given to him like a play set. Just like some athletes carry some bad

habits as an amateur until a professional coach corrects them, and just like the Jewish believers held onto the “ “ so tight

Here is another observation about the idols in the house of Micah. Among them was one kind called household idols, which appeared several times in other occasions in the Old Testament. We all remember Rachel

We would never know why the Levite did not bother to abolish all these idols. Was it because the owner Micah, or his mom, insisted on keeping them? Did the Levite reluctantly keep the idols with his conscience deeply violated, or simply go along with it? Then why did all the Danites like to have these idols as well? It looked to me that these idols were either commonly regarded as “essential,” or they were indeed attractive, or both.

May I humbly borrow Jesus’ line and say this: If any one of you or your church is without idols, let him be the first to write off Micah and the young priest.” If you insist on the ungodliness of the house of Micah and house of God in Dan, which did exist indeed, then either go reform the ungodly parts in your church or start a new one without them! Would you, my brother?

Israel Had No King

This scripture “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judg. 17:6, 21:25) is probably one of the most widely misinterpreted and misunderstood Bible verse. Tradition teaches us that it means everyone did wrong, or evil, because there was no king. Because this verse first appeared in the Micah story (17:6) and again in a shorter version (“In those days there was no king in Israel.”) in the Danites story (18:1) both involving idols as discussed earlier, most people easily take it as referring to the two ministries not right in God’s eyes. This becomes another footnote suggesting Micah’s stuff somehow isn’t right.

Many teachers even regard this verse, in its negative interpretation, as the summary of the Judges’ era simply it’s the book’s last verse. Well, there are apparent huge problems with this understanding of Judges.

First of all, what kind of king do you suppose is being talked about here, a human king, or the Lord God as King? Then, how would either of the answers make sense with the interpretation? Let's sieve through the possibilities.

If you say, the scripture means Israel had no human king, so everyone did what's right in their own eyes. The immediate response was: of course they never had a human king as of yet! Moses, Joshua, and all the judges who were their spiritual, political, or military leaders did not serve as kings. Israelites had this propensity of doing evil throughout history no matter what their leaders' capacities were. The second problem, which is also obvious, is that God did not like them to have human kings at all! They were not supposed to have a king after all! This was crystal clear in 1 Samuel chapters 8 & 12. Although God did permit the Israelites to set a king in the Law of Moses (Deut. 17:14-20), the conditions or criteria were so strict that only "super saints" could possibly qualify. This became crystal clear again when human kings ruled Israel and Judah later. Vast majority of the kings and their people did evil. The logical conclusion of this interpretation is: Israeli people's doing evil had nothing to do with whether they had kings or not.

You may argue that these verses simply mean "In those days there was no spiritual authority in Israel." That statement is correct for there was probably a gap between the last recorded judge Samson and Prophet Samuel. You can also say the entire Judges' era between Joshua and Samuel was a huge gap. Still, the Bible used the specific word king and repeats four times. You and I don't want to change a Bible word to fit our narrative. We do want to open our mindset and let God reveal His narrative.

Then how about Israel had no king meaning God wasn't their King? Yes, if fully letting God ruled over them, they of course wouldn't do evil. But wait a minute, just when did God reveal Himself as the King to the Israelites? The first "casual mention" of this idea didn't happen until 1 Samuel 8. Why didn't the Bible author just say "they rejected God, or forsook God" like in all other places? Furthermore, the idea that "the Lord will rule over you" without human rulers was already brought out and kind of "implemented" by Gideon (Judg. 8:23), which soon resulted in a disaster! Reading the verse "Israel had no king ..." as "Israel did not have the Lord as their king ... resulting in their lawlessness" is inconsistent with how the same author described the same idea.

So, what's my take on this? One hint: Kings and Chronicles simply tell us this very logical rule: when the human king was right with God, everyone most likely also did right; and certainly vice versa. I will further expound on this.

Now, questions about the verse's second part's interpretation naturally arise as well. If "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" only means "evil in the sight of the Lord," then why not just saying that like all other places in the same book of Judges? Don't different expressions/languages have different meanings? An irrefutable proof that this interpretation is incompatible with the whole book of Judges, nor just the last 2 events of Micah-Dan and the Israelites-Benjamites war, is that there are full of *both good and evil* accounts; not all were evil.

Indeed, horrible crimes besides idol worshiping were committed in the Judges' era, such as the Sodom-like behaviors by the perverted men of Gibeah (Judg. 19:22-26), and a couple massacres by Abimelech (Judg. 9:1-49). You may also include Danites' merciless killing of all the peaceful Laish people as evil deeds. But Judges has no short supply of wonderful examples on the other hand. Don't forget that over one quarter of the named faith heroes in Chapter 11 of Hebrews (4 out of 15) are from Judges. God was intimately involved in the calling and bringing up of each and every one of the judges. The Israelites not only had good reactions when they heard the angle of the Lord in Chapter 2, they also had an amazing account as recorded in the last 2 chapters (20 and 21). The entire Israelites minus Benjamin, i.e., all eleven tribes including those in Gilead, demonstrated unparalleled unity, moral courage, godliness, humility, obedience, compassion, and wisdom in handling their war against the Benjamites.

Have you started to wonder along side with me: how do they come up with this "conclusion" that everyone did evil, and what's in their mind when they read "Israel had no king?" And more pressingly: what then does this verse mean?

To explore the hidden meaning or symbolism of this verse, I invite you to the next chapter on the very timely application of the house of Micah for today.

End-Time Relevance

When I was as young as the young Levite, I once read Watchman Nee in one of his books saying that (paraphrasing) “if King David symbolized the second coming Christ, then King Saul symbolized the Antichrist just before Him.” If so, may I “extrapolate” into this: “if King Saul symbolized Antichrist, then Judges’ era symbolized what’s before him, namely the end-time leading up to the antichrist?”

We may all define end-time differently, but we all have a sense of the current time! There are already tons of teachings, sermons and books warning us about the end-time signs showing up and everything approaching at an accelerated pace. I think the house of Micah is of particular significance at this time of 2022 and beyond.

Just like the end-time scenarios are leading us into a dangerously unknown upcoming, this study of Micah’s house in the Judges’ era is leading us into not just controversial but explosive topics. If you typically avoid end-time issues, or your church always avoids political issues, you might want to skip this chapter. If you or your church is on the opposite side of the views presented here, I certainly understand your desire to toss my book out and tell others not to read it.

Since the Israelites weren’t supposed to have a king in Judges’ era, it may well point to some other times, possibly no other than this current time now. And since “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” doesn’t necessarily mean good or evil, it may well suggest it’s neutral, possibly even in an encouraging tone. So, by God’s grace in searching His hidden treasure, my understanding of “in those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” is simply this: **“in these days the church lacks spiritual authority concerning governmental affairs; everyone uses his own discernment to do what is right!”**

The Bible is like a well-written novel. Chronologically the next book to Judges is 1st Samuel, for the book of Ruth was inserted as a side story. These verses “In those days there was no king in Israel ...” which appear four times in the late chapters of Judges serve as a perfect backdrop for the unfolding of Israelites asking for a king in 1st Samuel Chapter 8. The Israelites certainly did not need a king when Moses and Joshua were their national leaders. They did not ask for a king in judges’ era, either because the judges seemed to serve their purpose relatively well. But 1st Samuel tells us exactly why they asked for a king. It was

because Samuel appointed his two corrupted sons as judges and the people could not take it anymore! It was that simple.

Samuel's huge mistake led the Israelites from Judges' era into kings' era. The offense of Samuel's two sons was at another level compared to that of Eli's two sons. While the perversion of temple sacrifice was bad enough, perversion of justice was even worse. Since the judges, appointed by the religious leader, could not do their job right, people asked for an authority of another capacity, namely a king, to restore justice, orders and security.

What does it tell us? When the church fails to properly address and administer justice in a nation; when the church loses or gives up her governmental and cultural authorities or influences; when the church calls evil good and good evil, people will look for an authority of another capacity, namely the Antichrist. To me, there is no better illustration of this part of the end-time scenario than this story of Israelites asking for a king in 1st Samuel 8.

Whether or not you agree with this interpretation about end-time, let's refocus on the verse "in those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." This verse is a key to unlock the implication of the house of Micah for the body of Christ today. This verse appears four times in Judges Chapters 17 through 21, where no particular judges were mentioned. So our understanding of "no king" is naturally "no government, no ruling authority, no law and order." At a time when chaos rules, evil rules, government fails, churches become virtual by closing in-person assemblies, and churches are deeply divided on key pressing issues such as politics, elections, and vaccine mandates among many other, it is critical that each one of us individually use our "supernatural discernment" as well as God-given common sense to make our own judgments in these important matters, which also include how you want to serve God.

Micah certainly was one who did what was right in his own eyes. He started a house of God, though with some flaws, that served not only his community and generation but also beyond. Now it's your turn and my turn. His story was written in the Bible to inspire you and me to use our own discernment to do what is right! If you feel you've got Micah's call, simply follow the Lord's lead, prepare and open your place for worshiping God, and continue to host His presence. Soon

Levites will stop by, come in, find their place and begin to minister. Their voices will be heard and recognized (Judg 18:3) by key worriers of the nation, who later will orchestrate a kingdom territory expansion. Does this excite you?

Have you noticed the interesting threads here yet? The tribe of Dan did not have a proper place to live and settle. Had Joshua still been alive, they surely would've come to him for help, such as the Ephraimites did. But Joshua wasn't there. There seemed to be no judges, either. It was during this "political leadership vacuum" time, Micah did what was right to him to start his house of God. And through the inquiry and blessing of his priest, Danites conquered Laish and got their land – a pure political event. The hidden message to us is, let me speculate, to rise up and worship God in our own places in the absence of Churches' governmental authority. And our ministries, besides the regular functions of praise, intercession, healing etc., will inevitably serve so-called political purposes to fill this gap, and eventually play a crucial role in shaping the **final** landscape of Christ's kingdom – another hint of a strong connection between house of Micah and the end-time.

I'll never forget that Friday night just before the election in 2016.

While the church still largely preaches the personal Savior Jesus, we are constantly reminded the coming Christ the King reigning over the nations on this earth. Not only that! Some of us, I pray that I be included, will reign together with Him. I just cannot imagine why we don't need training in this regard for any reasons. When man fell, he lost all that pertains to God's image and likeness, including characters as well as abilities to rule. One cannot over emphasize the importance of good stewardship, meaning good management or ruling skills over human affairs, as Jesus told many parables about it such as the parables of the talents.

If the church does not, dares not, or cannot make sound judgment or any judgment at all, on things that concern all of us every day, such as freedom, health, economy, crime, human trafficking, education, God-given human rights, etc. she is like Eli the very old priest who could barely see, stand and discipline his sons, and bound to make the same mistake like another very old priest Samuel. Old Testament prophets heard from God about current events (of course about future events, too) and spoke to them. If a church prays but fails to pray for the current events or prays

the wrong way, she may eventually lose the privilege of offering sacrifice pleasing to the Lord. It's like Covid patients first lose their senses of taste and smell, and later their ability to breathe. But thankfully at the mean time, there are a big number of houses of Micah emerging and filling the gap.

Have you ever wondered, for such a critically important task of finding a new place to settle, why didn't the Danites inquire from an official priest, a descendent of Aaron serving at Shiloh? Why did they happen to step into Micah's place by chance, happen to recognize the voice, and then inquire? Let's just leave it to God's wisdom. But shall I say this: the voice in the house of Micah then spoke to the warriors of the tribe of Dan needing a land; the voice of today's house of Micah speaks to frontline doctors, nurses, truck drivers, teachers, parents, shop owners, police officers, soldiers, scientists, journalists, judges, and politicians who bravely stand their rightful ground of truth and conscience. The young priest then served the children of Dan armed with weapons of war; the newly selected priests from house of Micah now will serve those warriors engaged in spiritual battles.

Forerunners

Martin Luther, Full-Gospel Businessmen Fellowship, China's house church,
William Seymour, Laymen's Great Awakening, IHOP-KC

House of prayer everywhere, house of Micah every block house churches

Prayer room

Riddle, Mystery

Once upon a time I stumbled onto a sermon cassette tape, in which a preacher of the Watchman Nee's stream compared the Old Testament "riddle" to the New Testament "mystery." Indeed Samson's riddle and he himself symbolize or resemble Christ Jesus in many regards. Though we are not talking about Samson - an even more interesting story than Micah - in this book, we wish to point out to readers that the Book of Judges may better be characterized by the word "riddle" than the sentence "in those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was

right in his own eyes” in its biased sense. If we read the stories of Samson, Micah and the Gibeah-Benjamin war with the lens somehow like reading a riddle rather than strictly moral stories, if we apprehend Christ and his church somehow with a mindset of solving mysteries rather than strictly keeping doctrines, we will go further, dig deeper, and fly higher into God’s fullness with much more joy.

Micah’s story, though full of drama, has been widely, or almost completely, overlooked and written off by Bible readers. Your story and my story, though also full of drama, are also overlooked by the church probably because we do not conform to their standards. Micah was unique in having a keen interest in serving God. So are you and I. Micah had his flaws and so do we. What he did some 3,000 years ago reflected and modeled what we are destined to do today. I can see myself and my life journey in Micah’s, and so can you. Your life events and my life events can be the answers to Micah’s riddle.