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JOURNEY TO ISRAEL 2.0  
December 4 -13, 2017



Looking For A Place by Ray Haynes

**“In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” Judges 17:6**

Four times in the Book of Judges we are told that “there was no king in Israel in those days”. Why, because Moses and Joshua had defeated and killed thirty-one kings to cleanse the Promised Land of their authority so the Israelites could be free to follow God. Instead, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes”. Sounds a bit like America today.

I do hope you can join us as we return to Israel in December. One of the places we’ll visit is the site where the story of Judges 17 took place. If you’re like me, visiting will cause you to ask, “Is the King leading my life, or am I just doing what I think is right, and choosing to do only what I agree with?” Although the story appears at the end of the book of Judges, it actually took place as the first judge was ruling.

Moses had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, both were Levites. But after the death of Moses, it was Joshua and Caleb who led the people, not Gershom or Eliezer. The mantle of Moses did not fall on his sons, nor on Gershom’s son Jonathan. The generation that saw the mighty hand of God deliver them from Egyptian bondage through Moses, died in the desert. The generation that conquered the Promised Land, was not diligent to seek God in their own lives let alone pass it on to their children.

**“When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals.” Judges 2:10-11**

So, God delivered them into the hands of their enemies, but also raised up judges who helped delivered them, including Othniel, the son of Caleb’s younger brother Kenaz. He was the first Judge of Israel and delivered the people from the King of Mesopotamia, leading to forty years of relative peace and calm. It was around this time that Ruth arrived in Bethlehem to yield her life to Boaz and to Israel’s God, joining the line that led to Christ. It was also the time that Jonathan, the grandson of Moses, a Levite attached to the tribe of Judah, “departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find a place.” Jonathan had no reason to search for a place. God had already ordained a perfect “place” for Jonathan. As a Levite, his entire family was called to serve God together in Bethlehem, but Jonathan wanted to make his own way. Ironically, the Hebrew word for “place” also means “to stir up trouble”. As he headed north through the territory of Ephraim, he encountered trouble in a man named Micah.

**“The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Judges 17: 5-6**

In Micah, Jonathan found a kindred heart. Although Micah was not a Levite, he felt justified to construct a replica of the Tabernacle of Moses which was at Shiloh, and then filled the place with idols.

Even without adding all the false idols to the place, he was deep in sin. Meeting Jonathan sent him down even deeper. **“Micah said to him, “Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten shekels of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance. So the Levite went in.” (Judges 17:10).** Not content to be a faithful priest and son of an honorable priest in Bethlehem, Jonathan jumped at the chance to be an apostate priest and father to an idolater, even though a common laborer would have made thirty to forty shekels more per year. And Micah, who was hopelessly trapped in idolatry, rejoiced at his supposed good fortune, **“Now I know that the Lord will prosper me because I have a Levite as priest”. Judges 17:13**

Micah’s thought process brings up a few more self-evaluating questions: “Do we have a King in our lives leading us, or are we looking for a place”? Do we think our actions insure that “God will do us good”? Have we fallen into the trap of thinking that the means aren’t as important as the end? If we can get away with it, do we stretch the definition of what is good or acceptable?

The desire to find a place, apart from what God offered, was spreading far beyond Micah and Jonathan. About six hundred men from the tribe of Dan found the struggle to drive out the Philistines from their land to be too much, so they headed north in search of a quieter place. When they happened by Micah’s house and met Jonathan, they emptied the place of all the idols and treasures and invited the Levite to become a priest to their whole tribe.

Since the compromise of idolatry had come so easily to Jonathan, it’s not surprising that he became the High Priest of the first organized system of idolatry established in Israel. There in the town of Dan, he and his sons after him, became pagan priests with Micah’s carved image for four hundred years. Then when Jeroboam became the first King of the Northern Tribes he installed two golden calves as objects of worship, one in the temple in Dan and the other at Bethel, where he created a second order of non-Levite priests. These abominations would continue for another three hundred years until the Assyrians came and took Israel away into captivity.

What’s probably most appalling is that during the centuries Jonathan’s priestly line embraced idolatry and apostasy they were careful to follow all the priestly laws that Moses had passed down about making offerings. As they dove headlong into immorality and debauchery, they comforted themselves in their meticulous attention to biblical priestly detail, all while sacrificing to an idol. It seems unfathomable until you apply the same thinking to our daily lives.

Is our life or ministry a means to an end? Has God become a means to an end for us? Do we compromise so we can do things that make us happy? Do we rationalize that what we’re doing isn’t hurting anyone else, but don’t recognize the golden calf in our heart? Is salvation and heaven the end, and Jesus just a means to get to it?

Jesus left Heaven, not to find a place, but to make a place for us to be near to His Father. So, when God judges sin and casts it into the sea of fire, will our life be free of sin, or will we be clinging tightly to sin while only reflecting the appearance of true religion? Are we living so that our lives, while suffering or rejoicing, might give Him glory? Are we His reward or are we still looking for a place for us? These are all questions capable of exposing the Jonathan lurking within us.

**“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” Philippians 3:10**

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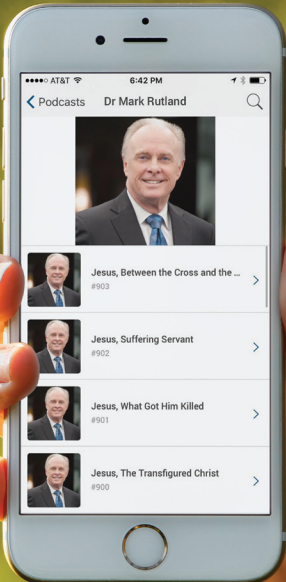
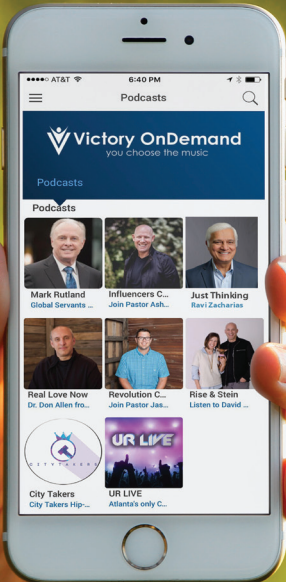


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