

Judges 17:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And there was a young man out of Beth-lehem-judah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there.

Analysis

And there was a young man out of Beth-lehem-judah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. This verse introduces a wandering Levite who will become Micah's hired priest, further corrupting Israel's worship. The phrase "Beth-lehem-judah" (literally "house of bread") is ironic—this town would later be David's birthplace and ultimately the Messiah's (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1), yet here it produces a compromised priest. The description "of the family of Judah, who was a Levite" indicates he lived among Judah's tribe while belonging to Levi's tribe—Levites had no tribal territory but lived in designated cities throughout Israel (Joshua 21).

That this Levite was "sojourning" (gar, גָּר, residing temporarily) in Bethlehem suggests he had abandoned his assigned Levitical city and responsibilities. Levites were supported by tithes and offerings (Numbers 18:21-24) and assigned specific duties at the tabernacle. His wandering indicates the breakdown of Israel's worship system. From a Reformed perspective, this Levite exemplifies ministry undertaken for personal gain rather than divine calling—what Peter warns against: "Feed the flock of God... not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (1 Peter 5:2).

Historical Context

Levites were distributed throughout Israel's tribes in 48 designated cities (Joshua 21) to teach God's law (Deuteronomy 33:10) and assist in worship. During the Judges period, this system deteriorated. Many Levites, lacking proper support

from a disobedient populace, abandoned their posts. This Levite's presence in Bethlehem, apparently unemployed and seeking work, reflects widespread neglect of the Levitical system.

Bethlehem in Judah (distinguished from Bethlehem in Zebulon, Joshua 19:15) was a small town that would gain significance through Ruth, David, and ultimately Christ. The irony that this corrupted Levite came from the future birthplace of the perfect High Priest underscores how far Israel had fallen. His willingness to serve in Micah's unauthorized shrine for money (verse 10) foreshadows mercenary ministry warned against throughout Scripture.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do ministers today sometimes abandon their calling for more lucrative or comfortable positions?
2. What does this Levite's willingness to compromise for employment teach about the danger of treating ministry as a career rather than a calling?
3. How does neglect of proper support for faithful ministers contribute to spiritual decline in the church?

Interlinear Text

וְיָהִי	בָּעָרֶךְ	מִבֵּית	לִקְרָם	יְהוּדָה
H1961	And there was a young man	H0	out of Bethlehemjudah	of Judah
	H5288		H1035	H3063
מִמּוּשָׁפֵךְ	וְיָהִי	לֹא	וְיָהִי	וְיָהִי
of the family	of Judah	H1931	who was a Levite	and he sojourned
H4940	H3063		H3881	H1481
שָׁמָן				
H8033				

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 2:1 (Parallel theme): Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

Micah 5:2 (Parallel theme): But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.