A culture is a complex set of expectations that are placed upon human behavior by the collective members of a community. Since community determines the character of its own culture, it is a dynamic that is subject to the community’s needs, desires, experiences, and history, and is subject to changes that can come gradually and unnoticed, or quickly as the result of a seminal event.

Submitting to one’s culture is a choice. I am reminded of a dairy farmer who as a man of faith brought up his two children (one adopted) in that faith. The son inherited the farm as well as the wide-open faith in God for which his father was well known. He passed this faith on to his six children, who then passed that faith onto their twenty-four children. Now, each of the children of the twenty-two who are old enough to know the LORD have joined the body of Christ. This family who trace their ancestry to this one great-grandfather now number about one hundred. The two elders have since died, and prior to his death, the son told me, “Jack, I have left nothing to my children.” He was thinking in terms of the state of the dairy farm that, though successful, had a balance sheet that equated its debts with its assets. Rather astonished, my answer was, “You gotta’ be kidding me!!” “Look at the legacy that you have left, a legacy of faith that is a miracle in today’s anti-faith culture.” These two men established a culture of faith that has passed down to all of three subsequent generations, and will pass down through numerous more.

We may be encouraged to know that the true story of this one family, though unusual in today’s society, is not unique. God’s plan is that the nuclear family would be the basic community of faith, and when He is part of that family, He can accomplish His purposes through them.

God’s plan also involved the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel in a similar way. God’s purpose was to reveal Himself through this family, and ultimately fulfill a plan to redeem all who would turn to Him in faith through a legacy of faith and obedience that would run through the descendants of Abraham from generation to generation.

However, the pattern that characterizes the legacy of faith necessitates one simple act: the fathers (and mothers) of faith must pass their faith to their children.

We find that in ancient Israel this did not tend to be the pattern among those whose lives are recorded in scripture. Though we can read about great men and women of faith, it is also evident that most of these did not pass that faith on to their children, and their legacy would skip generations until some event would bring some of the people back to the LORD. We find such a period of time between the
death of Joshua and the anointing of King David when, though a remnant of faithful always remained, few of these had any influence in the nation, and much of what took place during that time illustrates what happens when faith is not passed down in the family. It also illustrates that more than a single family is affected by this pattern of apostasy, as those family members who reject God have the predominant influence in the shaping of the culture of their nation.

THE NEW NORMAL: CORRUPTION OF THE FAMILY

Judges 17:1. *And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.*

We are introduced to an Israelite by the name of Micah. The name means, “One who is like…” Actually, the Hebrew text includes in this one instance his full name of Micahjehu, which means “One who is like Yahweh.” The implication is that Micah was named by people who had a form of reverence for God, and when a son was born to them, their choice of this name would serve as a prophecy of his character. They had hopes that he would become a man of faith who is in the image of Yahweh. We will find as we learn more about Micah that he was quite familiar with the tools and traditions of Yahwistic faith, but was rather short on that faith himself.

Micah lived in a time when Israelite had become “Canaanized.” That is, they turned away from the LORD and in their apostasy became a part and participant of the pagan and wicked community in Canaan that they had been sent into to destroy. It would seem that every subsequent generation would experience a “new normal” as the nation was on a continual slide down a slippery slope of moral decline with each generation accepting as normal numerous behaviors that were considered absolutely unacceptable by their parents. The last five chapters of the book of Judges do not refer to the work of any judge, but rather chronicles the decline of the two then largest tribes of central Israel, a decline that is the result of the repeated acceptance of this “new normal.”

Judges 17:2. *And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son.*

Our introduction to Micah is followed immediately by his confession to a crime of stealing a large amount (about 25 to 28 pounds) of silver from his mother. This narrative serves to illustrate the pagan and superstitious character of Micah’s home. It is curious that the amount of silver is the exact value that each of the lords of the Philistines offered to Delilah, in the previous chapter, to betray
Samson. The idea behind “1100 pieces of silver” is actually more of a metaphor for great wealth. With the number 1000 the largest number in their vocabulary, the number 1100 refers to an amount that is larger than their largest single number. Basically, Micah had taken her mother’s “life savings” that represented great wealth.

Micah’s mother’s response to the theft was to curse the one who took it. Curses and blessings had much emotional power over people during these ancient times. People feared the believed power of curses. Apparently, Micah overheard his mother’s curse of the thief, and fearing the consequences of the curse, he felt it would be wise to return the stolen silver. Micah’s fear of the power of the curse points to his pagan beliefs, and his lack of faith (or obedience) to the LORD. We might note that Micah’s act of thievery was in and of itself indicative of the shortening of his name as Yahweh was not seen in his behavior. He was in no wise similar to Yahweh as he despised his own mother by stealing from her.

His mother’s superstitious beliefs are evident by the blessing she quickly pronounces upon Micah. With her son subject to her curse, she felt it necessary to negate the curse in order to save her son from its power. She did so by blessing him in the name of Yahweh, indicating that there was some Yahwistic background to this family, but obedience to the LORD was something that was no longer a part of their character. Their pagan and superstitious beliefs had taken the place of faith in the LORD, and was now the accepted practice in the home. This was the “new normal” for this family. The “new normal” was a syncretic form of faith, meaning that their beliefs, though originating in the true love of the LORD, were largely drawn from the variety of pagan beliefs of the Canaanites, adding their mythical/fictitious gods to what they vaguely remembered about the LORD, incorporating pagan beliefs and practices into their system of religion.

Judges 17:3a. And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son...

Taken by itself without detailed inspection, this statement might serve to illustrate a sincere faith in the LORD. Prior to its theft, she had already made a commitment to the LORD concerning the use of the silver. However, rather than be consecrated to the LORD, we might note that it was consecrated to be used as a unique and specific gift for her son, most likely to ultimately be given as a form of an inheritance. The silver was not consecrated to the LORD, and it is likely that she did not understand what it would mean to do so. She was simply interjecting the name of the LORD into her paganistic plan to provide for her son’s inheritance. Her misunderstanding of the Lordship of Yahweh is illustrated in her remaining statement.
Judges 3b – 4. ...to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee. 4 Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah.

Her purpose, from the beginning of her “dedication” of the silver, was to use it to produce an idol that would serve to bless Micah with some form of provision and protection from her pagan gods. Promising to return the money to him, he restored it to her. We might assume that 900 shekels of silver were returned to their previous place to be kept against the day of his inheritance. However, as a “reward” for his return of the silver and as a hedge against the curse she had unwittingly pronounced against him, she held back 200 shekels, about five pounds to be used as an idol, a graven image, that would protect him from the consequences of the curse and his sin against his mother. This was indicative of her pagan views concerning forgiveness and atonement.

A “graven image” describes an object that is made by human hands but given some form of authority over those in its presence. The word, “graven” often describes an idol that is carved from wood (graven, or carved) or shaped from pottery and then covered with silver or gold (molten) that is then shaped and polished to make the object, often a sculpture of a pagan deity that often takes the shape of animals, a human, or a combination of characteristics of both.

Giving such supposed authority to man-made objects draws people’s attention away from an acknowledgement and subsequent relationship with the true and living LORD, placing their dependency on powerless myth rather than placing their lives in the hands of the LORD who will provide for them and protect them.

People today are still subject to idols. If an idol is any man-made object that we give authority to, we may find that we give our time and resources to such man-made objects when we should be dedicating them to the LORD. It could be that boat in the back yard that is requiring a monthly mortgage while one argues that they have no money left after their bills to support the work of the kingdom of God. It could be a sports team that creates an obsession, drawing one’s time and resources away from the LORD. An idol can be any object that takes us away from God’s true purpose in our lives. For us, part of that “new normal” can be one where we unwittingly worship idols by our attitude and actions, and are fully accepting of that behavior as we rationalize away its sinfulness. It is not unusual for us to fill our homes with such idols.
**Judges 17:5.** *And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.*

Micah’s collection of idols served as talismans to provide for his needs and to protect him from anything he might fear. Believing that they had power, he filled his house with a variety of them, establishing a significant shrine to his pantheon of mythical gods. In a similar way, it is easy for us to fill our houses with objects that we think will serve to provide for our needs and protect us from things that we fear. When we do this, we will tend to rely on them instead of relying upon the LORD who can truly provide for our real needs and protect us from our real threats.

Micah had so many household idols that his shrine “required” the services of a priest to keep it maintained. Yahwistic tradition and doctrine proscribed very specifically the source, purpose, and character of the priesthood. Priests were to come from the tribe of Levi, be trained in God’s Word and in the skills of service in the temple. The entire work of the Levite was to glorify God by serving in the temple and by serving the Israelite people as regional “clergy.” The scriptural place of service for the Levite was in the Temple (which at this time was in Shiloh) or in a Synagogue.

Being ignorant of the Word of God, Micah did what he thought would be a good thing to do. He fabricated a priestly robe of his own design (an ephod), fashioned many of his own gods (teraphim) and declared his own son to serve as his priest. Of course, Micah’s interpretation and understanding of the priesthood was simply a product of the state of his culture at this time. This was the “new normal for Israel,” a now normative cultural state that is described in the next verse and in several other locations in the book of Judges:

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

What happens to an entire culture when it rejects the authority of the LORD? Having rejected the authority of God, they rejected God’s Word which at that time included the Law of Moses. Apart from God’s “Law,” people will substitute it with their own. Where God’s Law is built upon God’s infinite wisdom, the rules that people develop to form their culture lack that wisdom. Without the LORD, people can do nothing other than establish for themselves what they think as normative. Consequently, 100 different people can form 100 different “truths,” believing in them and submitting themselves to them with just as much sincerity as a faithful Christian would do with God’s Word.
THE NEW NORMAL: THE CORRUPTION OF THE CHURCH.

Judges 17:7-8. And there was a young man out of Bethlehemjudah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehemjudah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.

The spiritual condition of the Israelites is further illustrated by a second individual that enters Micah’s life, a young Levite from Bethlehem of Judea. Though this is also the birthplace of King David who would establish the kingdom of Israel, and of course, it is the birthplace of Jesus Christ, there is probably no reason to draw additional inferences from the location of this Levite’s birth except that he came from a small, “no-account” village in the center of Judea. His home would also point out that he grew up far from Levitical training that would have centered around any of the forty-eight cities that were set aside for the Levites.

This young Levite would bring with him his pattern of beliefs as he leaves Bethlehem in search for a secure place to live and work, “a place.” This pattern of beliefs would also illustrate what was normative behavior for the people in and around Bethlehem. Since priestly service for Levites begins at the age of 39, he was not yet eligible for this “vocation.” However, his youth and his lack of Levitical training did not seem to stand in his way.

Judges 17:9. And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Bethlehemjudah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place.

Micah was a very “religious” man, as evident by his collection of household gods and his home-made priest that maintains his shrine. Micah encountered this traveler who, presumably, stopped by Micah’s home expecting some form of hospitality as he traveled. When asked by Micah to introduce himself, the Levite literally told Micah that he is a “priest” who is “looking for a job.” We find later that this “Levite” is actually Jonathan, a Judean and direct descendent of Moses. We will find in this one who is yet an unnamed Levite just how quickly the faith of Moses was lost, even in his own family.

We can easily observe some flaws in this Levite’s doctrine. We already understand that his youth is an obstacle to his service as a priest. Had he felt a true calling of the LORD into ministry, he would be traveling to one of the 48 cities where he could learn of God’s Word. Instead, by presenting himself to Micah as

1 Numbers 35:1-8.
2 Judges 18:30.
a priest, and without any understanding of God’s word, we can observe what had become of the Levitical priesthood at this time in Israelite history.

A parallel in today’s “new normal” would be for an untrained, inexperienced, individual to declare himself a minister of some religion who then seeks an opportunity to exercise his vocation. Such a “religion” would have no reason to be based upon the Word of God, or any biblical truth, for that matter. This is the basis for the beginnings of all of this world’s thousands of religions and cults.

Judges 17:10. And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in.

The spiritual ignorance of both Micah and the Levite is exposed in the job offer that Micah makes to the Levite. This encounter was an opportunistic move for both men. The Levite was looking for a place where he could be venerated (and compensated) as a priest, albeit a cult priest. The title, “father” should not be taken too lightly. Micah was ready to submit himself to this young, uneducated Levite in order to bring some legitimacy to his collection of idols, thinking that this ministry was the appropriate function of a Levitical Priest.

This was also an opportunity for the Levite. He was searching for some form of legitimacy of his own cultic beliefs. Micah offered him, not only that legitimacy and “respect”, but offered him room and board, clothing, and a stipend.

If the young man was truly a Levite and a sincere student of God’s Word, he would not have been attracted by Micah’s offer since he would recognize the paganism that was characteristic of Micah’s home. As a Levite, he would be training to serve in the LORD’s temple, ordained as a priest: one who is an intermediary between God and His faithful followers. Instead, this Levite is satisfied to serve in Micah’s home, ordained by Micah to serve as an intermediary between Micah and his collection of household gods.

Judges 17:11-13. 11 And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons. 12 And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. 13 Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

To Micah, this Levite was little more than one more talisman, one more “good luck charm” in his collection. The purpose of his idols was to bring him the favor of the gods that they represented. The purpose of his Levite was to bring him the favor of the God whom he knew not. The hiring of the Levite was just one more effort
on Micah’s part to receive the “favor of the gods.” Though only a few generations from the time of Joshua when the nation followed the LORD, the corruption of the faith had become insidious as one could not differentiate between the cultic worship of the Israelites and the cultic worship of the Canaanites. The spiritual state of the “church” had been completely corrupted by the “new normal” of the then current Israelite culture.

THE NEW NORMAL: THE CORRUPTION OF THE NATION.

With the nuclear family corrupted by sin, and the organized church corrupted by sin, the next victim of the “new normal” would be the nation. As we journey through our culture we come in contact with many people and are probably quite unaware of the influence that we have on them. We understand that we greatly influence the character of our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren who we will probably never meet. However our influence in our culture can also be significant, as was Micah’s family and their in-home Levite.

Judges 18:1. In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

When the land west of the Jordan was apportioned to the nine tribes of Israel (Gad and Asher took land east of the Jordan, and the Levites were given cities wherein to live and lead synagogues), the tribe of Dan was also given land. However, when they found the land occupied, devoid of faith in God, they failed to take the land. We are now several generations after the apportionment of the land and Gad still has not taken the land. It was the LORD’s will that they take the land that they were apportioned, and they would have been given it if they had approached the task in faith. However, the Danites would not take the land, in fear of the inhabitants. This left the tribe of Dan to find another solution for their problem, a solution that was not in the LORD’s will.

Judges 18:2. And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there.

In their search for a homeland that would give them little resistance, five “spies” from Dan came to Mount Ephraim and the house of Micah. Just as the Levite had

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3 Exodus 34:7.
passed stopped at the home of Micah in search for a place to find hospitality, the Danites did the same.

**Judges 18:3-6.** When they were by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite: and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this place? and what hast thou here? 4 And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest. 5 And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous. 6 And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the LORD is your way wherein ye go.

This “chance” encounter with Micah and the Levite may sound innocent enough, but it would shape the future of the tribe of Dan forever. The Danites had denied the LORD’s will by searching for another homeland, and it is evident from their question of the Levite that they were, at least from their understanding, seeking which direction the LORD would have them go. They believed that to find prosperity it would be necessary to go in the direction the LORD would have them go. Of course, if the Levite understood the Word of God, or even a little bit about the very recent history of Israel, he would have been able to give the Danites good advice: to return in faith to the land of their inheritance and watch the LORD deliver it into their hands. However, this is no Levitical Priest. He is a cultic pagan from Judah with a Levitical heritage but no Levitical training. Consequently, his words to the Danites were simply those words that the Danites wanted to hear. Literally, the Levite told them, “wherever you go, the LORD will be with you.”

As a result of his advice, the Danites put into motion a solution to their problem. The Danite army, desiring to enter the battle with the blessing of the gods, came to the house of Micah for the singular purpose of taking Micah’s household gods, including his graven silver idol, and his Levite. The Danites asked the Levite to become the priest over the Danite tribe, and the Levite gladly accepted, and led them to steal Micah’s idols. He then joined the Danites in the massacre of a defenseless Canaanite village that was not given to them by the LORD, and upon their success, they set up a shrine using Micah’s idols. The Danites had found their “promised land.”

**Judges 18:30-31.** And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. 31 And they set them up Micah’s graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.
As a result of their encounter with Micah and the Levite, Jonathan, the Danites remained in their pagan state, immersed in Canaanite idolatry, even up to the time of the exile, up to the time when the northern nation of Israel had been taken by the Assyrians, and Judah had been taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. This is a period of about four hundred years. Since the captives of the tribe of Judah were the only remnant of the Israelites who remained, the Danites disappeared as a tribe, defeated and dispersed in the destruction of Judah. As a nation, the Danites never did come to the LORD in faith. They left the land of promise that the LORD desired for them, and chose their own way, a way of the world.

The “church” during the time of the Judges was the nation of Israel, a nation that had accepted as normal and normative behavior the pagan culture that surrounded them when they entered Canaan. This pattern of cultural acceptance would continue for another fourteen generations until the nation of Israel would be assimilated into Assyrian and Babylonian/Syrian society.

What is the “new normal” for our culture today? The Israelites found the “new normal” by accepting from Canaanite culture what was an abomination for their faithful ancestors. We can observe much of the same pattern taking place today as the dissolution of morals, the destruction of the family, and immoral behavior is becoming, not only accepted, but literally heralded as “the new normal.” Groups who share a common desire for immoral behavior have won the battle for the minds of our youth, and by so doing have open inroads into the church. Churches today are ordaining individuals who openly and brazenly flaunt their immoral lifestyles, much in the same way that Micah ordained the Levite.

Israel fell away from the LORD and became immersed into pagan worldly culture simply because they turned their back on the Word of the LORD, replacing it with their own secular, pagan, and humanistic ideas. The church today falls away from the LORD for the identical reason, as the Word of God has become secondary in many of our churches to secular social issues. Such groups consider the Word of God to be archaic or irrelevant, much like the Israelites did.

Is their hope for the church today, as it is following the same path as the Israelites? With the LORD there is always hope. Like the family of faith that was mentioned at the beginning of this passage, there are families and groups all around the world that sincerely love the LORD and are serving as salt and light in the communities around them. There are thousands upon thousands of churches around the world that are spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, and millions are coming to the LORD in faith. Satan cannot succeed in destroying the faith when the light of the Holy Spirit is shone upon him by faithful followers of the LORD. Let us number ourselves among those who embrace the Word of the LORD as the only authority for living, loving the LORD as we love one another in Him, praising God, and sharing his love with a lost world that is seeking a “new normal.” God has the
answer: and that is to come to Him in faith. Let us pray and join God’s purpose to communicate His love and truth to this secular world that needs that “new normal” to be Jesus.