

## Judges 17-18 – “Spiritual Apostasy”

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As we come to the last 5 chapters of the book of Judges, we see a clear picture of the state of Israel spiritually, politically, and socially. Many believe these chapters don't follow in a particular chronological order as we have seen through the first 16 chapters but are more so an added appendix to show the condition of Israel and how far they have spiralled down from the days they were led by the Lord in the conquest of Canaan.

If you think things have been bad in Israel through the book of Judges so far, you haven't seen nothing yet. The level of immorality, idolatry, depravity and anarchy we reach in these last 5 chapters are numbing. This period we see can be summarized by **Judges 17:6**, *"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*

- In these last 5 chapters there is no longer any judge mentioned. Nobody is being raised up to lead the nation. Darkness is setting in until we are reminded of the ray of sunlight we see in the story that follows with Ruth and a godly remnant. That story takes place in the time of the judges. But that's a small glimpse of hope in the overwhelming shadow of ungodliness we see in these last chapters of Judges.
- We see things unraveling in greater ways in the home, in ministry, and in society.

### 1. Micah and His Homemade Religion – 17:1-6

**17:1-2 - Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. <sup>2</sup> And he said to his mother, “The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears—here is the silver with me; I took it.” And his mother said, “May you be blessed by the Lord, my son!”**

We're introduced to Micah here. He's a man from the mountains of Ephraim. Ephraim is pretty much at the center of Israel geographically. As Ephraim is Israel's heartland, it's representing what is going on in the heart of Israel. There's dysfunction in this family as there's dysfunction in the nation and in their relationship with God.

Micah's name means, *who is like Yahweh?* Throughout Israel there was no good example of this. It seems as though nobody was living like the Lord.

Micah stands as a good example of this. He sees his own mom with a healthy stash of silver and he decides to steal it. It seems only when his mom pronounces a curse over the one who took it, saying it clearly to Micah (did she have a hunch?), that he confesses and comes clean that he's the one that stole it. He's in fear of anything bad happening to him from this curse.

But the crazy thing is when he confesses to his mom, she blesses him. What??

- How many parents are going to be sharing how wonderful their children are because they gave you a new fire extinguisher after setting your car on fire.
- Confession is important but there must be accountability and repercussions for your actions.
- There appears to be a lack of discipline in the home which leads to a breakdown in the family.

This is all so completely out of line. But that's the problem with the state of Israel. They've gotten out of line with what God desires for them. They've turned away from walking in obedience. And we're seeing the complete unraveling of a nation.

**17:3-4 - *So when he had returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, "I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the Lord for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you."* <sup>4</sup> Thus he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Micah.**

Here we see what seems to be some dishonesty from the mom. She had wholly dedicated the silver to the Lord, yet now she gives 200 shekels of silver. She's keeping back 900 shekels for herself. There seems to be covetousness and greed setting in?

Not only that, but she's using this silver dedicated to the Lord to do something that is so against the Lord! She's making idols!! She's breaking the second commandment found in **Exodus 20:4**, "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;*"

- I mean this is just the beginning. If we were to do a full inventory I'm sure they'd be close to breaking 70% of the 10 commandments by the time we get through the chapter.

So two idols are made. One is a carved image made and shaped out of wood. The other is a molded image made purely from the silver. And it didn't stop there...

**17:5 - *The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.***

Micah had a whole shrine where these idols could be on display. Other household idols are added to it. And he made an ephod. The ephod was the outer garment worn by the priest. It contained the Urim and Thummim, the device used to discern the will of God.

Not only that, but now Micah consecrates one of his sons to be his priest. This is nothing more than a homemade religion. He's gone completely outside of God's prescribed manner of worship and has made it convenient for him.

- Only the tribe of Levi were to be servants in the tabernacle and temple and only the family of Aaron could serve as priests. Micah is going outside of God's order to satisfy his own desires.

I wonder how often this happens today in the way that people want something tangible. They want to be able to see something or feel something in their worship. And in so doing they break away from God's prescribed means of worship to seek after that which becomes an idol. Something that we must add to enhance our worship.

Jesus said it well in **John 4:23–24**, *"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. <sup>24</sup> God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*

- We don't need idols, images or enhancements to worship God. We must do so from a heart of gratitude and do so in obedience to how He calls us to worship Him.

But what's happening here is what we see in vs. 6...

**17:6 - *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.***

There's no strong conviction to follow what God desires. Everyone is doing what they feel is right.

This family that began to forsake the law fell into serious error and decay. And when the family breaks down so does society. The family has often been seen as the fabric of society. This is why Satan is so keen on going after the family unit. If he can disrupt the structure God intends for health in the home (which is to have two parents lovingly raising their family according to the truth of God's Word) then he knows it will have devastating results in the rest of the culture.

- We've seen this ring true in our day and it certainly was in this day too.

## 2. Micah Mistakes Religion for Godliness – 17:7-13

**17:7-8 - *Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he was a Levite, and was staying there. <sup>8</sup> The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find a place. Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.***

This Levite was wandering around looking for his place. Levites were called to serve in the tabernacle and eventually in the temple. And they were to spread out around the land teaching the other tribes the ways of God. But this guy was on the move. He's looking for his place when he had a place all along. But it seems he's become discontented and is looking for better opportunities.

- It's easy to become discontented when we are looking to this world to find contentment. But we were never meant to find contentment from this world. Our place is in the heavenlies. Jesus said, *"I go to prepare a place for you"* (John 14:2). Jesus is to be our contentment and joy.
- **Colossians 3:1–2**, *"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."*

This Levite came to Micah, and this presented a great opportunity for Micah.

**17:9-10 - *And Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" So he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find a place to stay." <sup>10</sup> 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.***

Micah is thinking, *I have a genuine Levite here. He's much closer to fulfilling the work of a priest than my non-Levite son. Let's hire him to do the work. This will surely cause my worship to be that much more accepted before God.*

Micah sweetens the pot. He's going to give this Levite room and board, 10 shekels of silver a year for spending money, and a new Armani suit.

- Now remember, only the descendants of Aaron could serve as priests. This Levite should have quickly put Micah in his place and said this was all wrong.
- But he got pulled in because he's been looking for his place and looking for contentment. So when the offers came, he took it.

**17:11-13 - *Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him. <sup>12</sup> So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah. <sup>13</sup> Then Micah said, "Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!"***

This Levite just became a hireling to a mixed-up Micah who was nothing more than an idol worshipper. The Levite's discontentment led him to bad company. And because he is looking for his place through worldly opportunities, he will be led to follow other bad company later on as well.

Micah is an example of how many people live their lives today. They add elements of Christianity and think that because they've implemented some truth, God will be pleased and show them favour. But God is not interested in being a part of your life. He's not interested in you adding a part of Him to where you feel like it's religious adequacy. He's not interested in half-way devotion.

- Micah thought that all the other wrongs could be overlooked because now he has a Levite. In his mind he's getting closer to the Biblical form of worship. But it's still 100% idolatrous. It's still manmade religion. And thus it's completely wrong.

"Though modern man may not make a graven image, he still displays much of the same attitude about worship which guided Micah down a dead end street. Biblical worship is God-centered, not man-centered. To please God must be the ultimate obsession of the worshiper. God cannot be pleased when his specific commands about worship are either violated or ignored." <sup>1</sup>

God wants to be our life exclusively. He wants worship to be wholehearted and in line with His Word. May we be sure to worship in spirit and truth and to worship God for who He is not what we can experience from it.

<sup>1</sup> Smith, J. E. (1995). *The Books of History* (p. 199). College Press.



### 3. The Tribe of Dan is on the Move – 18:1-21

**18:1-2 - *In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them. <sup>2</sup> So the children of Dan sent five men of their family from their territory, men of valor from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and search it. They said to them, “Go, search the land.” So they went to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there.***

The Danites did receive their portion of land, but they failed to follow God’s Word to drive out the inhabitants there. Their land was down along the southwest coast, Philistine country. And the Amorites caused problems for them too.

- **Judges 1:34**, *“And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley;”*

Instead of dealing with the enemy in front of them, they retreat and look for a less hostile place to dwell.

- This will pose to be a big mistake for them.
- Sometimes we want to alleviate the problems and predicaments we find ourselves in. Yet God allows these things to further strengthen us and teach us how to overcome the enemy. It teaches us to depend on God and pursue holiness. But often times our response to these things is to run and avoid it. Because of that we don’t get the opportunity to see God work or see Him do the work in us necessary to overcome these situations.
- The tribe of Dan will turn to a more cushier country, but they will discover it’s not all it’s cracked up to be.

**18:3-4 - *While they were at the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. They turned aside and said to him, “Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here?” <sup>4</sup> He said to them, “Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest.”***

As these Danite spies made their way to Micah’s place, they hear the Levite speak and recognized a familiarity in his speech (perhaps because they were from the same region and had a distinct accent).

This gave the Levite opportunity to share what he’s doing there which peaked the interest of these Danites.

**18:5-7 - So they said to him, “Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous.”<sup>6</sup> And the priest said to them, “Go in peace. The presence of the Lord be with you on your way.”<sup>7</sup> So the five men departed and went to Laish. They saw the people who were there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. There were no rulers in the land who might put them to shame for anything. They were far from the Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone.**

They want direction from God. They have a Levite in front of them, so their hope is that the Levite will consult God. We’re just a long ways past this at this point.

The Levite responds and as far as we can see, he doesn’t even inquire of God. He just says, *All good! Go in peace, the presence of the Lord be with you...* Isn’t this just like the compromised gospel today that we hear from motivational speakers posing as pastors. *God is with you. Go in His peace. Enjoy His presence wherever you are.* Yet there’s no call to repentance and walking in truth. People are fed a positive message that is devoid of truth and it’s left them with a false assurance.

So the spies travel to the north part of Israel to Laish. They see that things are easier up there. They’re surrounded by a peaceful people who are basically minding their own business.

But again, comfortability can often be the result of compromise or lead to compromise. In this case it’s a bit of both, or a lot of both. And it won’t be favorable for the tribe of Dan because none of this is being directed by God.

**18:8-11 - Then the spies came back to their brethren at Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brethren said to them, “What is your report?”<sup>9</sup> So they said, “Arise, let us go up against them. For we have seen the land, and indeed it is very good. Would you do nothing? Do not hesitate to go, and enter to possess the land.<sup>10</sup> When you go, you will come to a secure people and a large land. For God has given it into your hands, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth.”<sup>11</sup> And six hundred men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshtaol, armed with weapons of war.**

So the Danites are ready to relocate and to take this land by force. They’re arming themselves with weapons of war, though their hope is that this will be an easy transition.

**18:12-17 -** *Then they went up and encamped in Kirjath Jearim in Judah. (Therefore they call that place Mahaneh Dan to this day. There it is, west of Kirjath Jearim.)<sup>13</sup> And they passed from there to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah.<sup>14</sup> Then the five men who had gone to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their brethren, “Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod, household idols, a carved image, and a molded image? Now therefore, consider what you should do.”<sup>15</sup> So they turned aside there, and came to the house of the young Levite man—to the house of Micah—and greeted him.<sup>16</sup> The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate.<sup>17</sup> Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land went up. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image. The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men who were armed with weapons of war.*

This new false religion of Micah’s was becoming quite popular and this group from Dan look to stop in once more. Only this time there’s a proposition to take the religious relics thinking they will aid in their journey and success.

Micah’s priest is hanging out with the 600 men at the gate not realizing what’s really going on.

**18:18-21 -** *When these went into Micah’s house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image, the priest said to them, “What are you doing?”<sup>19</sup> And they said to him, “Be quiet, put your hand over your mouth, and come with us; be a father and a priest to us. Is it better for you to be a priest to the household of one man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?”<sup>20</sup> So the priest’s heart was glad; and he took the ephod, the household idols, and the carved image, and took his place among the people.<sup>21</sup> Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones, the livestock, and the goods in front of them.*

The Levite priest initially is surprised at what this group was doing; they’re ripping off his employer. But this priest exemplifies the hireling heart. There’s no concern to serve and help others. He’s just concerned for his own welfare. He hears promotion and he’s in. It’s the mindset of selfish ambition. If this is going to help his cause, he’s in no matter how wrong it may be. He begins to take the ephod and idols and now takes his place among the people.



- We were first introduced to this Levite as he was looking for his place. And now he's moved on to a new place – among the people.
- Again, if our place is not with the Lord, if our identity is not in Christ, we will look for that satisfaction and contentment on the horizontal plane. But this satisfaction and contentment will only be found on the vertical plane. We cannot find what we truly crave from this world, it will only be met in Jesus.

As they depart they recognize there's probably going to be a confrontation. Micah isn't just going to roll over and let this happen. So this group puts the young ones in the front and the strong in the rearguard to wait for Micah to come to them.

#### 4. Micah Confronts the Thieving Danites – 18:22-26

**18:22-26 - *When they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house gathered together and overtook the children of Dan. <sup>23</sup> And they called out to the children of Dan. So they turned around and said to Micah, "What ails you, that you have gathered such a company?" <sup>24</sup> So he said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have? How can you say to me, 'What ails you?' " <sup>25</sup> And the children of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life, with the lives of your household!" <sup>26</sup> Then the children of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house.***

As Micah catches up to them I find it humorous that the Danites nonchalantly ask Micah what ails him. *What seems to be the problem that you come with so many people?* Uh, you just stole from him?? How about we start there.

But what's even more problematic is what Micah says: ***You have taken away my gods which I made...***

How foolish to follow a god that you not only had to make, but which can also be stolen. This is what Micah was living for, this is what his hope was in. And now he says, ***What more do I have?***

- How sad it is to live for that which perishes, that which is corruptible, and will never satisfy. These are worthless, empty, lifeless things. May we not base our life on such hopeless things.

So the Danites wrap things up by telling Micah to stop whining or they'll give him something to whine about. Micah sees he's in a bad position and wisely heads back home. It's about the only wise thing we see Micah do.

## 5. The Danites Settle in the North – 18:27-31

**18:27-31 - *So they took the things Micah had made, and the priest who had belonged to him, and went to Laish, to a people quiet and secure; and they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. <sup>28</sup> There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon, and they had no ties with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth Rehob. So they rebuilt the city and dwelt there. <sup>29</sup> And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel. However, the name of the city formerly was Laish. <sup>30</sup> Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. <sup>31</sup> So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.***

The Danites took the city of Laish and then called it Dan. They set up their idolatrous worship there and it was a characteristic of this city until they became so weakened and led away into captivity by the Assyrians.

- When Israel split into 2 kingdoms under Jeroboam, he had a golden calf set up in Dan for the people of the northern kingdom to have a place to worship rather than go to Jerusalem – the prescribed place to worship – and desire to stay there.
- The Danites were the first tribe to establish public idolatry in Israel. It's interesting that the tribe of Dan is missing from the list of 12 tribes that will be having 144,000 sealed as witnesses during the Tribulation period (Revelation 7:5-8).

These chapters deal with the religious apostasy that was taking place at this time. And as we pick it up in chapter 19, we'll see the social fallout from this.

“These two chapters teach us important lessons. We should obey God's Word, not disregard it, as Micah did. We should serve God faithfully as He directs, not advance ourselves at the cost of disobedience, as Jonathan did. We should also wait for God and engage our spiritual enemy, not rush ahead or run away to establish our own security, as the Danites did. Micah's error was self-styled

worship, Jonathan's was self-determined service, and the Danites' was self-seeking security.” (Constable)