

Judges

Lesson 32

Most graven and molten images were small. But with two hundred shekels of silver to use, the images must have been quite large. Because they were large, Micah not only worshipped them, but he built a shrine around them, created a priestly ephod, and hired one of his sons to be his priest of the idols at the shrine in his house. How sinful?

We must also address the writer's words, "*In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.*" Now we see where the writer is going with this story. All the surrounding cities and nations had kings keeping their laws, but Israel did not. There must have been a circling of the wagons at this time that a king was needed. The groundswell for a king was no doubt growing. Because there was no king to enforce the law, and because it was clear that judges could not enforce the law, the people did as they wished without regard for the Law of the LORD. Samuel, our writer, has probably said this in this passage because he could not stop the people from worshipping false gods.

2. The Tragic Invitation of a Graven Image

a) Levite Looking Temporary Place to Stay (17:7-9)

With a full shrine and the son dedicated as a priest in the home of Micah, we come to the tragic invitation of the graven image with the visit of a Levite looking for a temporary place to stay. Verse 7. "*Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there.*"⁸ *Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he might find a place; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah.*⁹ *Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to stay wherever I may find a place."* (17:7-9)

The wording in this passage is a little challenging to grasp. The Levite was not from the tribe of Judah. He was a Levite, a descendant of Levi. The Levites were priests stationed all across the Promised Land in Levitical cities. The Levitical family of this young man was stationed in Bethlehem. "... and he was staying there..." found in the last part of verse 7 meant that that was his permanent home. However, he decided on his own to leave Bethlehem and serve as a Levite in another area of the Promised Land. He made his way to the tribal area of Ephraim and landed in the house of Micah for a time of rest from his journey. The young man told Micah who he was and where he was from.

b) Levite Offered a Permanent Place to Stay (17:10-12)

Upon finding out that the young man was a Levite, Micah offered the Levite a permanent place to stay along with a yearly salary and the appropriate clothing to be a priest. Verse 10. "*Micah then said to him, "Dwell with me and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year, a suit of clothes, and your maintenance."*" So the Levite went in.¹¹ *The Levite agreed to live with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons.*¹² *So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah.*¹³ *Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest."* (17:10-12)

Micah asked the Levite to be a "father and a priest to me." That did not mean that Micah was looking for the young man to take his father's place in reality. By this time, all priests, in general, were beginning to be looked upon as fathers in the faith. Surely, if Micah became sideways with the young priest, he would have fired him and found another.

We might catch a clue to the normal yearly salary of a person by what Micah was willing to pay this young man. It was ten shekels per year. We might also assume that ten shekels a year was an

excessive pay, and the reason for that is that Micah needed to pay the young man more than he could have thought he would ever receive anywhere else. Look back at Delilah. All the Philistine lords gave her the same value to out Samson. According to 1st Samuel, there were five lords of the Philistines.) When I told you they made Delilah wealthy beyond imagination, I meant it.

The young Levite agreed with Micah, moved in, and became like a son to Micah.

How old the young Levite was depended on whether or not he had been ordained into the priesthood. The ordination was completed when a Levite turned thirty years of age. Was this young man old enough to be ordained? We do not know. Micah ordained him. Micah did not have the authority to properly ordain the Levite to the ministry of the worship of the LORD. Nevertheless, Micah thought his young Levite whom he now owned would bring blessing upon him. That is far from the fact. And even though it is the end of chapter 17, it is not the end of the story of Micah and the sway of his godless images.

Chapter 18

3. The Tragic Inheritance of a Graven Image

a) The Sending of Five Men

(1) Lodge at Micah's House (18:1-2)

The tragic inheritance of the graven image stored in the shrine at Micah's house continues in chapter 18. With all that had just happened during the life of Samson with the Philistines in the tribal area of Dan, we will learn about the sending of five men from the tribe of Dan who will stop and lodge at Micah's house. Chapter 18 and verse 1. *"In those days there was no king of Israel; and in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for themselves to live in, for until that day an inheritance had not been allotted to them as a possession among the tribes of Israel.² So the sons of Dan sent from their family five men out of their whole number, valiant men from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it; and they said to them, "Go, search the land." And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there."* (18:1-2)

Dan had its inheritance. It received it from Joshua in Joshua 19:40-48. However, we also learned in Judges 1:34 that the Amorites had run the Danites into the hills in the eastern portion of Dan's tribal area and would not allow them to come down into the valley where the Amorites and Philistines controlled the area. As we discussed in that set of lessons, Dan failed to follow the LORD and destroy them in their allotment of land. Thus, the majority of Danites lived in the highlands surrounding Zorah and Eshtaol. This caused problems. As the tribe of Dan increased, the families were forced to live on small portions of land which reduced the ability to provide enough food for the Danites. To look into this more, families were living on top of families. Therefore, some new families could not establish themselves on plots of their own. The decision was made to look for more land. Five men were sent to spy out the land and find plots where the Danites could expand. On their way, they stopped for the night at Micah's house.

(2) Question Micah's Levite (18:3-6)

Near Micah's house, the five men recognized the voice of the Levite. When that occurred, we heard the question of Micah's Levite. Verse 3. *"When they were near the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young man, the Levite; and they turned aside there and said to him, "Who brought you here? And what are you doing in this place? And what do you have here?"⁴ He said to them, "Thus and so has Micah done to me, and he has hired me and I have become his priest."⁵ They said to him, "Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether our way on which we are going will be prosperous."⁶ The priest said to them, "Go in peace; your way in which you are going has the LORD'S approval."* (18:3-6)

No doubt, the Danites were acquainted with the Levite in Micah's house. How this came to be, we do not know? The tribal area of Dan was right on top of the tribal area of Judah. However, the Levite was from Bethlehem, which was due south of the tribal area of Benjamin. Therefore, it was probable that as the Levite was searching for a place after he left Bethlehem, that he made his way through the hills of Dan's territory and met these men in the congested area.

When the Danites said to Levite, "*Who brought you here? And what are you doing in this place? And what do you have here?*" it is clear that the men knew that the Levite was out of place. The answer of the Levite proved that he was in the wrong place doing the wrong thing. But acting as a hired priest of the false worship of Baal and Ashtaroth, with whom the Danites were thoroughly acquainted, caused the Danites to seek a word from the priest concerning their journey. The Levite did the same thing as Micah's mother; he mixed the name of the true LORD with his godless priesthood position. He gave them the blessing to proceed by saying, "*your way in which you are going has the LORD's approval.*" It does not mean that the men actually had the LORD's approval. Had the LORD wanted the Danites in a different tribal area, they would have received it under the authority given by Joshua. It was not.

(3) Discover the Town of Laish

(a) A Town at Peace and Secure (18:7)

Leaving Micah's house, the five Danites discover the town of Laish, a town at peace and secure. Verse 7. "*Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were in it living in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure; for there was no ruler humiliating them for anything in the land, and they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone.*" (18:7)

"Laish" was the Hebrew name for this village, even though it had a Phoenician/Sidon name. The five men will call it Laish; however, the name Laish will be changed to Dan when it is captured. It was four miles from Paneas, at the base of Mount Hermon, forty miles north of the Sea of Galilee. The temple of the god Pan was located in Paneas. It was the only place where the worship of Pan existed in the walls of a building. Everywhere else in the world, Pan, the half-goat, half man-god, was worshipped in the fields. These five men had found one of the most pagan areas in the world to acquire. It was actually in the control of Sidon but far enough away from Sidon that the Sidonian government did not hold a true control of the area. It sat in a slither of land just above Lake Meron (also known as Lake Hulah), which should have been taken as tribal land for either Naphtali or East Manasseh, but never was included in either.

(b) Report the Town at Peace and Secure (18:8-10)

Upon discovering the land, the men returned to their homes to report the town at peace and secure at Laish. Verse 8. "*When they came back to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers said to them, "What do you report?"*"⁹ They said, "*Arise, and let us go up against them; for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. And will you sit still? Do not delay to go, to enter, to possess the land.*"¹⁰ *When you enter, you will come to a secure people with a spacious land; for God has given it into your hand, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth.*" (18:8-10)

Standing in Laish, it is one hundred and twenty miles back to Zorah and Eshtaol. For those of us living in south Texas, Laish to Zorah was just about the same distance as Galveston, Texas, to Madisonville, Texas. Although it is only a two-hour and thirty-minute drive today, in that day, it was at least a hard six or seven-day walk. Because of the Sabbath, it might have been at least an eight-day walk.

We need to notice that the five men have declared the new land to be God's will. God did not declare this. The only authority they had was that of a false priest to a false set of gods.

(c) Danite Army Lodges at Micah's House (18:11-13)

Upon the report of the men, the invasion was crafted. We see that the Danite army lodges at Micah's house on the way. Verse 11. *"Then from the family of the Danites, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, six hundred men armed with weapons of war set out. ¹² They went up and camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. Therefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim. ¹³ They passed from there to the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah."* (18:11-13)

We would think that the army of six hundred men headed directly north for the one hundred and twenty miles, but that was not the case. The army actually left the Zorah area and traveled about a day's journey north-east into the tribal area of Judah to the area west of Kiriath-jearim. It stood about ten miles from Jebus, the city that will be renamed Jerusalem when King David captures the city. In the future, when the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines for seven months but then sent back to the nation of Israel because of the harm it was causing in the wrong hands, the Ark would rest in Kiriath-jearim for twenty years until David moved it to Jerusalem in his eighth years as king and first full year with Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The Danites gave Kiriath-jearim a nickname – Mahaneh-dan. The name simply means *the camp of Dan*.

Leaving Mananeh-dan, the army camped at Micah's house where the Levite was the priest, and the graven images were stored in the shrine.

(d) Danite Spies Tell of Micah's Idols (18:14)

Camped at Micah's house, the Danite spies tell of Micah's idols. Verse 14. *"Then the five men who went to spy out the country of Laish said to their kinsmen, 'Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod and household idols and a graven image and a molten image? Now therefore, consider what you should do.'*"