



Tyranny and Idolatry in the Tribe of Dan Judges 18

Introduction

It was bad enough that one family fell into idolatry through apostasy, although Micah was probably representative of many more people. The entire tribe of Dan adopted the error and in so doing they bullied and robbed one of their fellow Israelites. They then established a center for idolatry that lasted throughout Israel's independent nationhood until God finally judged them for idolatry. He allowed them to be taken into captivity. Israel returned from exile cleansed of its idolatry but without its sovereignty from that day to this. Although they exist once again today as a nation, their existence has been buttressed by the western democracies, mainly America.

Outline of Judges Chapter 18

- I. Danites Seek Land - Judges 18:1-26
- II. Danites Seize Laish - Judges 18:27-29
- III. Danites Set up Idols - Judges 18:30-31

I. Danites Seek Land - Judges 18:1-26

- A. Dan's Desire to Migrate - Judges 18:1

In those days there was no king in Israel. Israel lacked a central authority which would right wrongs, mete out justice, and govern. They had drifted away from seeking God as that authority. The case of the tribe of Dan is a striking example of trying to work things out apart from God's word and will. In the tribe of Dan, see the outcome of this mode of living -- the tyranny of the strong over those who are weak. We live with either the Law of God or the law of the jungle.

1. No success in settling their allotted land

Dan represents the worst case of failure to possess their possession of allotted land. According to Joshua 19:41-46, their land was given to them along with the other tribes. Afterwards, most of the tribes failed to complete the job of routing the enemy, with the result that they were continually plagued and influenced by the pagan cultures around them. Dan not only failed to rout the enemy but went so far as to vacate their territory and move away.

2. Fierceness of the enemy

Dan's territory was held by the most ferocious and tenacious of the enemy peoples. The Amorites and the Philistines were strong in the land, had many chariots,

and held the monopoly on iron. Yet Dan could have overcome them by faith as Joshua and Deborah had done.

3. No faith

Dan failed to settle their portion of inheritance due to lack of faith. By faith in God, their forefather Jacob had conquered the mighty Amorites single-handedly with his sword and bow. When he was dying he had said to his son Joseph, *Moreover, I have given to you one more portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow* (Genesis 48:22). Is our failure to do more for Christ defensible or is it a failure to proceed in faith? Are we overwhelmed by the might of the enemy and our own weakness, or are we willing to believe God's promises and overcome with whatever tools we have. In what way would God have you step out in faith to serve Him today? In what situation do you need to stand up and be counted as one who trusts in God?

- B. Spies Sent Out - Judges 18:2-10

Five spies were dispatched to find a suitable place to live. This is reminiscent of the original spying mission ordered by God and organized by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:1-3). Only in this case there were no orders from God.

1. Lodging at Micah's house - 18:2

Micah's house must have been on the main road, for when they came to the hills of Ephraim, like the Levite, they stopped there.

2. The Levites's words - 18:3-6

The spies *recognized the voice of the young Levite*. Was it from past acquaintance with him, his unique accent, or his youth? We do not know. They superstitiously asked him for guidance as if he were a fortune-teller. The Levite readily played the role of seer, and glibly replied, *Go in peace, may the presence of the Lord be with you on your way*. How easily he exceeded his authority! Only the high priest with Urim and Thummim could discern God's will and give guidance (Exodus 28:30).

3. Laish discovered - 18:7

The five spies moved north and inland until they came to Laish, twenty-five miles north of Galilee and twenty-seven miles east of Tyre and Sidon, in the Lake Hule area. What they saw looked good to them and it

seemed that it would be easy to take the land. Laish was vulnerable in four ways.

- They had no defenses. They lived quietly, safely, and securely in the manner of the Sidonians.
- They had no government or rulers in the land who might put them to shame for anything.
- There were no nosy neighbors. They were far from the Sidonians.
- They had no allies or ties with anyone.

This is an ideal living situation as long as no one wants what you have.

4. Report of the spies – 18:8-10

Upon returning to Eshtaol and Zorah, the spies said, “Let’s go!” They gave five reasons (one each?): it was a good land, secure, spacious, God had given it into their hand, it lacked nothing.

C. March of the Six Hundred - Judges 18:11-26

1. Arrival at Micah’s house - 18:11-26

The tribe sent ahead six hundred soldiers armed for war. On their way, as they passed through the mountains of Ephraim, they came to Micah’s house. The five spies told them of the ephod, idols, and teraphim and told the soldiers to consider what to do. Some action was evidently expected. One would think it was to destroy the evidences of disobedience to the second commandment! An army is supposed to uphold the law.

2. Confiscation of idols and priest - 18:15-20

But armies are also famous for taking what they want. Someone has said that “might makes right”. Civilized nations have learned to put the military under civilian government so that the nation is ruled by force of law and not by the law of force.

The Danites took Micah’s shrine. When the Levite asked, *What are you doing?* they made him an offer which was better than any Micah could give him. He could be priest of a whole tribe! He had the opportunity to expand a work he should not have been in anyway. It seemed that he willingly, even gladly, went with them. He took charge of the idols and joined the Danites (18:20).

D. Rebuff to Micah and His Neighbors – Judges 18:21-26

The Danite army, with their newly acquired priest and idols, moved on with the civilians and livestock in front of them.

1. Micah's pursuit - 18:22

In the meantime, Micah’s neighbors rallied around him and they all chased after the army. When they caught up with the Danites, the soldiers asked Micah, *What ails you, that you have gathered such a company?* Micah answered, *You have taken away my gods, which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have?*

2. Micah's emptiness - 18:23-24

What a dismal and pathetic question. *Now what more do I have?* Micah was bereft, rebuffed, and empty. Idolatry is always empty and emptying. The psalmist says that those who make idols become like them (Psalm 115:8, 135:18). Furthermore, those who worship something other than God experience dissatisfaction and emptiness.

On the other hand, the worship of God is satisfying, as Jesus taught the woman at the well (John 4:22). She was accustomed to going again and again to fill her water jar. Then she met Jesus. When she believed His words, she left her water jar and went to tell everyone about the One she had found who gave true and lasting satisfaction (John 4:28).

E. Retreat by Micah and His Neighbors - Judges 18:25-26

The Danites advised Micah to be silent and threatened to kill him and his household if he did not go back. So he and his neighbors wisely turned around and headed home. Micah was poorer but wiser. The army was too strong for him. His idols had not protected him. Indeed, they could not even protect themselves.

II. Danites Seize Laish - Judges 18:27-29

A. The Secure City Struck and Burned - 18:27

Laish was a pleasant, quiet, and peaceful city far from the crowds, the hustle and bustle of commerce, and the pressures of life. They were self-sustained and self-supporting. Everything they needed was right there. What could possibly spoil their existence?

But, as in the case of the three little pigs, a wolf came looking for dinner. The wolf was Dan and Laish was dinner. The Danites did to the unsuspecting Laishites that which they should have done to the enemy in the land God had allotted. They struck them with the edge of the sword and they burned the city with fire.

B. No Deliverer - 18:28

There was no deliver because it was far from Sidon, and they had no ties with anyone. Be careful of being too self-sufficient, of getting too far from others, or too far from God. No man is an island. We need each other. We have a powerful enemy. Peter warned, *Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter 5:8). It is good to have family, friends, neighbors and business associates. Do you have a network of people who are mutually supportive? Do you cultivate friends? Are you a church member ready to give as well as to receive help?

Still, no matter how many friends and acquaintances we have, there is only one who can deliver us from the enemy. Is the Lord your rock and fortress and deliverer (2 Samuel 22:2)? Do you take refuge in Him as your shield, your salvation, and your stronghold (Psalm 18:20)? Have you sought Him and asked Him to deliver you from all your fears (Psalm 34:4)? When you are poor and needy and feel forsaken by friends, it is the Lord who will take thought of you and deliver you (Psalm 40:17).

C. New Name - 18:29

They called the name of the city Dan. But the original name, Laish, is not lost. The Bible has preserved it for us. It is possible that at the final Jubilee, the Judgment Seat of Christ, everything will be put right. Land, families and belongings may be restored to their original owners (Leviticus 25:10, 27:21). In the millennium, the Lord Jesus Christ will rule a restored earth where each will have his or her own place (Micah 4:4). Laish may be Laish again.

The city of Dan became the northern extremity of Israel's territory (1 Samuel 3:20). *From Dan to Beersheba* described Israel as we would say "from Maine to California".

III. Danites Set up Idols - Judges 18:30-31

A. Dan's Legacy of Idolatry - Judges 18:30

The children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image... until the day of captivity. The looted idols, brought to Laish, became Dan's legacy of idolatry to the nation. *Until the day of captivity* could refer either to Tiglath-Pileser's capture of the people of northern Galilee (2 Kings 15:29), or to the capture of the Ark by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:11).

B. Rivalry with God's House - Judges 18:31

So they set up for themselves Micah's graven image which he made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh.

Charles Pfeiffer says, "For a time Shiloh was the religious capital of Israel (1 Samuel 1:3). But the Danites maintained their own idolatrous worship. Dan continued as a center of idolatry after the disruption of Solomon's kingdom. Jeroboam set up golden calves at Bethel, and Dan (1 Kings 12:29)" (Wycliffe Bible Commentary).

Referring to Judges 17 and 18, G.Campbell Morgan states, "In these stories we have a revelation of the beginnings of those terrible conditions which eventually issued in the ruin of the people" (An Exposition of the Whole Bible).

Applications

1. Which "idols" do you "worship" which may become a snare for yourself and others? Education, status, power, possessions, personal appearance, money, sports, home, children? These as well as health and even "self" can be idols which rival God for our time, interest, and devotion.

2. Are you experiencing emptiness and disillusionment because you need to let go of something which you adore but you know is wrong in God's sight or simply out of His will? Will you let go of a job, a friend, a dream, a habit, or indulgence? Then will you be patient until God comes in and fills the void with a joy and satisfaction you did not know was possible?

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QUESTIONS

DAY ONE: Read all notes and references.

1. a. Name two or more present day “idols” that people put in God’s place.
b. ♥ (Heart Question) Is there an “idol” in your life that you need to confess? What will you do to get rid of it?
2. a. How should those who are strong treat those who are weak?
b. How can you be a good example of this?

DAY TWO: Read Judges 19:1-13.

3. a. Fill in the blanks. *In those days there was _____ in Israel.*
b. Write in your own words what the sentence from 3.a. means.
4. A concubine was a second wife who was usually a slave and had a lower legal status than a wife.
 - a. Which character(s) in the story lived in the mountains of Ephraim?
 - b. Which character(s) in the story had “played the harlot?”
 - c. Which character(s) in the story showed warm hospitality?
 - d. Which character(s) in the story were from Bethlehem?
 - e. Which character(s) is said to have spoken “kindly?”
 - f. Which character(s) in the story left to go home on the fifth day?
5. a. What advice did the servant give?
b. Why did the Levite not listen to that advice?
c. Where did the Levite want to go instead?

DAY THREE: Read Judges 19:14-22.

6. Find Gibeah on your map. Within which tribe is the city located?
7. a. What did they do when they arrived in Gibeah?
b. Who showed hospitality this time?
c. To where were they travelling? See verse 18.
8. a. How did the old man reassure his guests
b. As they were enjoying themselves, what happened?
c. How are the men in verse 22 described?

- d. What did they want? Place a ✓ in the correct
- to know him carnally which means to abuse him
- to question him and see if he was a spy
- to celebrate his arrival with a feast in his honor

DAY FOUR: Read Judges 19:23-30.

9. a. In verse 23, what words did the old man use to describe these men and their actions?
- b. From 1 Samuel 2:12, 1 Samuel 24:17, and 2 Chronicles 13:17, what other words are used to describe men like this?
10. a. How did the old man try to protect his guest?
- b. What did the Levite do to protect himself?
- c. What did the Levite say to his concubine the following morning?
11. a. What did the Levite do when he returned home?
- b. Rewrite in your own words the following sentence “*Consider it, confer, and speak up*” from verse 30?
- c. Circle the words which you think apply to the response of the other tribes.
- outraged shocked alarmed unconcerned upset grieved
- d. What words describe your reaction to the incident in Judges 19?

DAY FIVE: Review Judges 19.

12. What kind of man was the Levite? Underline the statements below which you think are correct. Give verse(s) from Judges 19 to support your decisions.
- a. A man of God who set an example for others. vs. _____
- b. A person who looked out for himself instead of looking out for others. vs. _____
- c. A religious man who obeyed God. vs. _____
- d. A man who appeared to be religious on the outside but was actually doing what was right in his own eyes. vs. _____
- e. A man who cared deeply for God’s law and for others. vs. _____
13. Read Romans 1:28 and 32 to answer the following questions.
- a. What does God do to those that ignore their knowledge of Him as the Israelites in Gideah had?
- b. From verses 30 list some others that share their judgment?
14. What hope is there for people who have done things like this?
- 1 Corinthians 6:11
- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- 1 John 1:7-9