

Judges 18:1-31  
Spiritual Corruption – Part 2

Introduction

A. The Dannites set out on a quest to acquire more land (1-2)

1. Our passage today starts with a disheartening tone (1): **“In those days there was no king of Israel”**
  - a. This phrase, or a variation of it, appears three other times in the book (17:6; 19:1; 21:25)
  - b. It indicates the time in which the events of these last five chapters took place—between the conquest of Canaan under Joshua and the beginning of King Saul’s reign (the author of the book of Ruth refers to it as **“the days when the judges governed”** Israel)
  - c. It serves another purpose, however, and that is to indicate a time in which Israel had lost its spiritual and moral discernment and discipline—for it was a time when **“every man did what was right in his own eyes”** (17:6 & 21:25)
  - d. We saw this last week in our study of the three individuals from chapter 17: Micah, his mother and the Levite priest
  - e. Each of these three individuals expressed a relationship with Yahweh, the God of Israel, yet each one ignored the will and commands of God and instead attempted to pursue and worship Him in their own way, by their own rules—in essence, doing “what was right in their own eyes”
2. Today we meet the Dannites who apparently suffered from a similar condition (1-2):
  - a. In v. 1 we learn that Dan was **“seeking an inheritance for themselves to live in”**
  - b. There is something strange about this statement, however
    - 1) Dan had already been given their allotment by Joshua when they entered the land of Canaan—this are described in Joshua 19:40-48
    - 2) But, there is an interesting note in Joshua 19:47 and Judges 1:34 that explains why the Dannites were looking for land:
      - a) Joshua 19:47 (all but the NASB) indicates that they failed to conquer the land given to them: **“The Danites failed to conquer their territory...”** (NET)
      - b) In Judges 1:34 we learn that it was the Amorites that prevented the Dannites from taking possession of their allotment: **“Then the Amorites forced the sons of Dan into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the valley.”**
  - c. So, because they were having trouble in their own land, they set out to basically take (steal?) some land from one of the other tribes: **“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.”**
    - 1) Ephraim was the tribe to the east
    - 2) Ultimately, they continued further north, into the tribe of Manasseh and conquered a city there
3. So, we already begin to see a problem, and it’s really a spiritual one

- a. Moses and Joshua had given explicit instructions to the tribes that they were to drive out the inhabitants of the land (i.e. their allotted territories)
- b. They had been given God's promise that he would drive the inhabitants out before them
- c. The tribes were also instructed to help one another (i.e. the Transjordan tribes were required to help the tribes on the west of the Jordan)
- d. However, when the Danites ran into difficulty, they choose to abandon a portion of their allotment (the valley area), and search out land in an area that was given to a different tribe
- e. This was ultimately a failure to trust and obey the LORD

B. The Danites seek an answer from God regarding their quest (3-6)
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1. As the search party travels through Ephraim, they come near Micah's house and discover something that catches their attention (3-4)
  - a. They recognize the voice of Micah's priest and immediately begin to question him: **"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?"**
  - b. Their questions indicate that the Levite is out-of-place and that they were a bit surprised to see him there:
    - 1) Levites were not given their own allotment of land, but were given cities within each of the tribes
    - 2) There were four of these cities in Ephraim (Beth Horon, Gezer, Kibzaim, Shechem) but this particular priest wasn't in one of those cities as he should have been, but rather working as a private contractor on Micah's ranch (4): **"He said to them, "Thus and so has Micah done to me, and he has hired me and I have become his priest."**
2. This is where we see our second problem in this passage:
  - a. Idolatry was prohibited by the Law, and the penalty for practicing idolatry was death
  - b. Later in this passage we learn that these men were quite aware of Micah's shrine, ephod, household idols and graven images
  - c. They quite obviously knew of this priest's involvement in idolatry
  - d. Yet, instead of following the Law, they ask him to inquire of God on their behalf (5): **"Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether our way on which we are going will be prosperous."**
    - 1) This is problematic because God gave priests a way to determine His will in situations like this: it was called the *urim and thummim*
    - 2) These were either dice-like or stone objects that the high-priest wore in his breast plate
    - 3) Micah's priest likely practiced divination (that's what the household idols were used for in Canaan)
    - 4) Their acceptance of this practice may be signaled in their use of Elohim (God) instead of Yahweh (LORD) when they ask the priest to ask God if their quest will be a success
  - e. The priest gives them the answer they want to hear (6): **"Go in peace; your way in which you are going has the LORD'S approval."**
    - 1) The text doesn't indicate whether the priest actually consulted Yahweh or the household idols
    - 2) It is unlikely, however, that he received any indication or message from the Lord since he was not acting as a Levite priest, but a pagan idol worshipper

- 3) It is more likely, that as a priest-for-hire, he was simply giving them the answer they wanted to hear (in spite of the fact that his counsel turned out correct)

C. The Dannites claim God's favor and approval in their quest (7-10)

- 1) They discover a small, unprotected and rather isolated city named Laish (likely in the area allotted to Manasseh about 100 miles north of their own cities; 7)
- 2) They report back home and convince their fellow Dannites to go up and conquer Laish (8-10):
  - a) The land **"it is very good"**
  - b) The people were trustworthy and unsuspecting (10): **"a secure people"**
  - c) **"There is no lack of anything that is on the earth"**
  - d) But best of all, **"God has given it into your hand"**
- 3) What could possibly be wrong with this?
  - a) We first have to remember that they were taking land that was allotted to another tribe—it was not theirs to take
  - b) They had failed to conquer their own land due to their lack of obedience and faith
  - c) They asked an idol-worshipping priest to use divination to ask God whether he was on their side
  - d) They then went and found a defenseless and unsuspecting city that they could easily conquer themselves, then claimed that it was the hand of God—He was giving them the land!
- 4) I wish we could say we're never guilty of this—don't we sometimes ignore God's explicit instructions or commands, do what is right in our own eyes, and then claim that God is somehow okay with it, or worse yet that He actually is responsible for it?—especially when it turns out the way we want it to (just like it will with the Dannites)

D. The Dannites quest leads to military victory, but spiritual depravity (11-31)

1. Now here's where it gets really interesting: this story so far appears to be about the Dannite's quest to find and conquer land, but the majority of the story is actually about their idolatry—there are 31 verses in this chapter and two thirds of them focus on or describe the Dannites actions as they relate to idolatry!
2. When they come to Ephraim, they steal Micah's idols and his priest (11-26):
  - a. So, 600 men set out for Laish (11-12)
  - b. When they arrive at the house of Micah, the five leaders call on the soldiers to guard the house while they steal the idols (13-17)
  - c. They even convince Micah's priest to join and serve them by appealing to his ego (18-20)
  - d. When Micah catches up with them to retrieve his idols, they threaten to murder him and his family (21-26)
3. Their conquering of the city of Laish looks almost like a foot note (27-29)
4. The last thing the author records in this event is the Dannites setting up for themselves the idol made by Micah (he mentions this TWICE), and establishing their own illegitimate priesthood (30-31)

## Conclusion

1. These last two chapters have focused on the spiritual depravity that infected Israel throughout the history of the judges
  - a. In chapter 17 we saw Micah, his mother and a Levite priest that all had the appearance of being followers of Yahweh, the God of Israel
    - 1) But their actions didn't match their words or confession
    - 2) They worshipped God and lived their lives based on **what was right in their own eyes**, rather than what was right in God's eyes
  - b. Today, we saw something similar in the Danites
    - 1) They were given an inheritance of their own, but when they failed to drive out the inhabitants as God commanded, they took the easy road and took land that belonged to another tribe—**they did what was right in their own eyes**
    - 2) They stole the property of another man, and then threatened to kill him and his family when he came to retrieve them—**again, they did what was right in their own eyes**
    - 3) Finally, they fell deeper into idolatry—**and again did what was right in their own eyes**
2. Romans chapter 1 tells us that mankind is bent on suppressing the truth of God in unrighteousness and **doing what is right in its own eyes**
3. It seems that Israel wasn't the only one to struggle with this, however.
4. The early church struggled with this as well:
  - a. The Corinthians struggled with lawsuits against one another, turning the Lord's Supper into gluttony, sexual immorality, the abuse of Christian liberty and the spiritual gifts—**they were doing what was right in their own eyes**
  - b. The Galatians got caught up in legalism and perverted the gospel by claiming that Christ wasn't enough for salvation; one needed works of the Law as well
  - c. The Ephesians struggled with living in a way that honored their calling, by falling back into the same patterns of sin that imprisoned them prior to knowing Christ—**they fell back into that pattern of doing what was right in their own eyes**
  - d. The Colossians fell prey to false teaching and religious practices
  - e. Paul had to correct the theology of the Thessalonians as it related to Christ's return, and warned Timothy about the false teachers in the church and the rise of false teaching that would one day infect the Church like cancer and gang green—**these false teachers (just like all false teachers) simply did—and taught--what was right in their own eyes**
  - f. And, lest we forget that Jesus had strong warnings for six out of the seven churches addressed in the first few chapters of Revelation—**they were chastised for doing what was right in their own eyes**
5. Even though we are saved, we still struggle sometimes with doing what **is right in our own eyes**, rather than what is right in God's eyes
6. So, what's the solution? James has some good advice (James 4:7-10): **“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”**