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Judges 17 - 18



Judges - Steve Gregg

In this discussion by Steve Gregg, Judges 17-18 is examined as an appendix to the Book of Judges featuring a disconnected series of stories. The first story introduces a man, Micah, who creates his own religious shrine with idols and hires a Levite as his priest, despite the Levites being called upon to serve God in a different capacity. The story of Micah demonstrates the moral confusion and lack of faith among the people of Israel during Joshua's era, and is followed by another story about the Danites who steal land from the peaceful people of Laish, aided by the same Levite from Micah's household. The discussion highlights the importance of following God's laws and fulfilling one's duties in service to Him.

Transcript

As we pass from Judges 16 to Judges 17, we pass from one kind of material to another, because up until this point, the book has been about a series of individuals, heroes, that God raised up to deliver Israel from oppressors. And although these heroes had a feet of clay, in many cases, and their flaws, they were nonetheless successful, to a large degree, in freeing Israel from different nations that had come in and defeated them and oppressed them. But Samson was not completely successful.

It would appear that his ministry was cut short by his foolishness. The Bible only says that he began to deliver Israel from the Philistines. He didn't finish it.

That was later finished by Samuel the prophet in 1 Samuel 5, that the Philistines, after that, no more came into Israel, except much later in David's time. I say much later, I mean a few years anyway. But when we come to chapter 17, actually when we come to the last five chapters of the book, we come to what almost anyone would recognize as an appendix.

It is not chronologically stories that follow after what we've read before. The judges we've read about seem to be more or less in chronological order. Whether some of them judged Israel simultaneously in different regions of the country or not, has been disputed.

No one knows for sure. But there is reason to believe that Eli, the priest whom we meet in the beginning of the book of 1 Samuel, who is also called a judge and who has judged Israel 40 years, that he was judging during the same time as Samson, perhaps in a different part of the country. But the point is that individuals, more or less chronologically arranged, have been the focus and until now, what we have in chapters 17 through 21 are two stories.

One of them occupies two chapters and the other occupies three chapters. They are not related to each other in all likelihood. Their characters do not overlap.

They seem to be individual, stand alone, isolated stories. Also, they do not belong to the later period of the judges, which we might expect at this point. But because it's an appendix, it is material that happened earlier and is now being mentioned out of its chronological order.

We know from things inside the story that they belong to the early period of the judges. The first of these stories has two streams that converge. In chapter 17, we have the story of a man named Micah and his spiritual confusion.

And he is setting up for himself a shrine with an idol in it, in his house. The details of that story in chapter 17. And he is eventually hiring a Levite to serve as a priest at his home shrine that he has set up.

Then in chapter 18, we have another strand of the story. People of the tribe of Dan have had difficulty finding a home. Now, they have been given land in the northern part of the country.

They have been given land, actually, by Joshua. But they were not able to defeat their enemies for lack of faith, apparently, and laziness. And instead of continuing to do what God told them to do and drive out the Canaanites, they decided to look for an easier place to live with less opposition.

And so they sent out a scouting team of five armed men to scout around for a city. Or a region that might be a good place for them to go where there would not be too much trouble. And those five men come to Micah's town briefly, pass through, and they find out that he has a priest and he has an idol.

And eventually they steal it from him and make off with his priest and set up their own religious center in the new city which they conquer, which is Lash. And they name it Dan. The city of Dan, that is thus introduced in the story, becomes the northernmost extremity of the land of Israel.

So that afterwards, often when the whole land of Israel is being referred to, they often say, from Dan to Beersheba. Dan in the extreme north, Beersheba in the extreme south. But the expression from Dan to Beersheba was simply a term that means the whole land,

north to south.

Now that's what this story is in Judges chapter 17 and 18. And then there's another story that begins in chapter 19 which we'll deal with another time. The time frame of this story, I said, is early in the period of Judges.

The main time indicator is that the people of Dan are out looking for a tribal inheritance, although they've been given one. They're not satisfied with it and they're looking for another. This takes us back to chapter one, verse 34, when it's talking about the early days, immediately after Joshua has divided the land up to the people.

It says in verse 34 of Judges 1 that the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley. And the Amorites were determined to dwell in Mount Harris. So the people of Dan were not able to drive out the Amorites from their land.

This could not be a defect on God's part who promised to give them land, but no doubt a defect in their own faith and their own determination. It says the Amorites were determined to dwell in the land. Apparently, Dan was not equally determined to take it from them.

The amount of determination that is brought to this seems to be the key. When God has promised that you will conquer a certain thing, that doesn't mean it's going to just be handed to you on a silver platter. You have to have a determination to put out the effort to acquire what God has promised to give you through his assistance.

Dan did not. And so we find them in this appendix, the tribe of Dan wandering around. Looking for a home because they couldn't occupy the land that they were originally given.

And thus we have this strange story followed by an even stranger one. So chapter 17 sets up the scene by introducing us to Micah and his household. Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim whose name was Micah.

Of course, he's not to be confused with the prophet Micah, an entirely different man living much, much later. And he, Micah, said to his mother, the eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and on which you put a curse, even saying in my ears, here it is with me. I took it.

And his mother said, may you be blessed by the Lord, my son. By Yahweh. Now, this obviously picks up the story after much has already happened.

There had been eleven hundred shekels of silver that his mother had had. How she happened to have so much money on hand. We don't know whether this was at one time a rich family or what.

But apparently there's no father in the family, so she's probably a widow. And it was stolen from her. Her own son stole it from her.

But she didn't know that. Unless she may have suspected it. And so in his presence, she uttered a curse upon whoever stole it.

Now, either out of superstition or out of genuine fear of Yahweh, he did not wish for this curse to come upon him. And so he sought her blessing by confession and restoring the goods. And so you remember that eleven hundred shekels of silver that was stolen and you curse the person who took it.

Well, that was me. And I want to give it back to you. And so she apparently blesses him.

May you be blessed by the Lord, by Yahweh. So she revokes the curse. And that is perhaps why he confessed in the first place that he wanted that curse lifted.

He was afraid that it would not go well for him. So when he had returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I have wholly dedicated, 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. 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. Now notice all this reference to the Lord is Yahweh.

And yet it just shows how confused the people were religiously at this time. I believe this first story in this appendix, chapters 17, 18, perhaps exists simply to illustrate to us how spiritually, how religiously confused the people were at this time. And the other story, I think, is there to show how morally confused they were.

First, theologically and then morally. And one certainly follows the other quite naturally. Once your theology gets piled up, then your morals are confused as well, because proper morals obviously grow out of a proper grasp of who God is.

Now, they knew Yahweh by name. They knew he was the God of Israel, but they apparently were totally oblivious to the fact that he had said, you shall not make any graven image or bow down and worship it. Now, it's not like they were doing this in defiance of him.

It's not like you're making graven images of Baal or Moloch. They were doing this as an act of worship of Yahweh. And they seem almost naive about the matter.

You know, I committed this silver to Yahweh to make a graven image. Reminds me of some of the high church traditions, especially Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox and

so forth, that have images. And they seem totally oblivious to the idea that this is a violation of what God said to do.

God said, you should not make any graven image and bow down and worship it. And yes, it is done. It just shows that the confusion about who God is exists even in Christianity, in some sectors.

And so it did in Judaism. They just they weren't thinking. They weren't thinking properly.

And so they made, it says from the silver, from about a fifth of the silver that was stolen in return, a graven image and a molded image. That is a carved image and a molded image. Now, whether this was one image that was carved and molded or two images has been disputed.

It looks like it's two images of different kinds. A molded image would be one that is poured into a mold. It'd be probably a solid silver poured molten into a shape, a mold, and it would take that shape.

And that's a molded image. And the other would be a carved image, usually carved out of wood and then overlaid with gold. So different kinds of idols.

Both probably were made here. And it says, and then the man Micah had a shrine and made an ephod and household idols. These household idols are the teraphim.

We've encountered them in the story of Jacob and Laban and Rachel. Rachel having stolen her father's teraphim. Teraphim were like little statuettes.

Archaeologists have found these little statuettes that could be easily carried. An idol might be a large thing in a home, a large piece of furniture, not easily moved, heavy. But teraphim were small statuettes and probably served more or less like good luck charms, superstitious means of seeking good fortune.

And he made an ephod, which is, of course, the cape like tunic that was made for the priests to wear. And so he consecrated his son to serve as a priest. Now, his sons were not Levites, but it's very possible at this time the Levites weren't really doing what they should do.

We have not seen much evidence in the book of Judges that the Levites or the priests were being faithful to their calling either or doing anything of significance to promote the sanctity of the Lord. Sanctity of the nation. So it may be that there is a total oblivion to the fact that the Levites were supposed to be priests on the part of Micah, or maybe he knew it, but he also knew that the Levites were not doing their job.

Maybe they were, maybe they'd left Shiloh and were seeking regular employment or something. It's hard to say. In any case, this man really innovated on the worship of

Yahweh.

In his own mind, he was worshiping Yahweh, but he was innovating new things that actually are forbidden. And this is the first time we're told in verse six, it says, In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

We have the same part of that statement again in chapter 18, verse one. In those days, there was no king in Israel. And again, in chapter 19, verse one, it came to pass in those days when there was no king in Israel.

And then the very last verse of the book, in chapter 21, we have the same statement that is found in chapter 17, verse six, now summarizing it. Chapter 21, 25, In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

So, four times we're told there was no king in Israel. And the first and the last time it mentions the upshot of that was people did what they thought was right. Now, notice what was right in their own eyes.

These people were doing the wrong thing, but it was right in their own eyes. They thought they were doing the right thing, but obviously they were not informed by the law of God, because they would have known that what they were doing was wrong. They thought it was right because the law was not apparently being promoted by the Levites as they should.

The Levites had the duty of teaching the law throughout Israel to the people. But here, there seems to be a totally naive and almost innocent ignorance of the law. They know the name Yahweh because that's associated with their people from earliest times.

But worship, they know nothing about the Torah and its dictates about worship. So, they apparently just adopt patterns from the pagan worship as they will worship Yahweh instead of the pagan gods. They seem to have intended well, but they really were misguided.

They were doing what was right in their own eyes. Now, there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah of the family of Judah. He was a Levite.

And now, Bethlehem, Judah was not a Levitical city. And so, this Levite was apparently had left the Levitical city originally and was moving about looking for another home. He had been in Bethlehem most recently, which is the same place David was later born and Jesus.

But this man was not really a native there, just probably passing through. He was a Levite and he was sojourning there, which means just staying there temporarily. The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to sojourn wherever he could find a place.

So, he just had wanderlust. He was sojourning temporarily in Bethlehem and then he just decided to find another place to sojourn, to hang out and get some new location. By the end of the story, he finds yet another location from the one he settles in here in the mountains of Ephraim.

It says, But then he came to the mountains of Ephraim to the house of Micah as he journeyed. Verse 9, Micah said to him, where do you come from? So, he said to him, I'm a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah and I'm on my way to find a place to sojourn. 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 and a suit of clothes and your sustenance.

So, the Levite went in. Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man and the young man became like one of his sons to him. So, Micah consecrated the Levite and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah.

Then Micah said, now I know that Yahweh will be good to me since I have a Levite as a priest. So, we can see that he actually did know that Levites were supposed to be the priests, but in the absence of one, he had consecrated his son to that position. He was not in any sense a Levite.

Even this man was not a priest. Not all Levites were priests. There was only one Levitical family that was a priest's family and that was Aaron's family.

The rest of the Levites served in various ways in the tabernacle, but they didn't serve as priests. This man was not a son of Aaron. In fact, his lineage appears to be given in chapter 18, verse 30.

We're not told until then at the end of the story what this priest's name was and more about him. But in Judges 18, verse 30, it says, 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. So, this man's name was Jonathan and he's said to be a Manassehite, although he's a Levite.

So, apparently there had been intermarriage between the tribe of Levi and Manasseh, which was never forbidden. Even in Jesus' ancestry, there was marriage between the Levites and the people of Judah, because Mary was of the tribe of Judah and her cousin Elizabeth was a Levite of the daughter of Aaron. So, the Levites did intermarry and so this man had Levitical blood and Manassehite blood in him.

But he had enough Levite in him to make Micah feel like, well, I'm getting closer to doing what seems best and that's having a Levite priest instead of a non-Levite priest. Now, he offered this man a job as a priest. He said, If you'd come be a priest in my house, I'll give you 10 shekels, a suit of clothing and your sustenance.

Many of you are probably familiar with the famous sermon by Paris Reidhead called Ten

Shekels and a Shirt, where he talks about the wrong motivations for serving God and he uses this story of this Levite. This Levite should have known better than to compromise his calling, although we don't know how much he knew. The Levite might have been more or less on the same level of ignorance with the general public.

He knew he was a Levite, but even the general public knew that Levites are the right people to be priests, but he might not have known much more or he might have and he might have compromised what he knew to do. He went in to serve as a priest, though he didn't have priestly pedigree. He served in a shrine that had a silver image of a god.

He served wearing an ephod that was not the ephod of the priests in Shiloh. In other words, he didn't follow the scripture. He didn't follow God's law, but he was offered a job and so he did it and he did what he was paid to do.

Which is, of course, something that a lot of people in ministry do. A lot of times people who enter the ministry have good intentions that they enter the ministry because they want to serve God, but it becomes a career. It becomes similar to other jobs in which there is guaranteed income if you do what you are told by your boss.

Your boss, in this case, is an organization called a church. The church then dictates what you do and what you'll be paid for doing it, just like Micah did with this Levite. The problem is, once you've turned the ministry into a paid profession, then you begin to think of it as a paid profession.

You begin to apply to it many of the same principles that people do in other professions. And that is, I could get paid more by someone else. It's a promotion.

And this is what this Levite is eventually going to do. The people of Dan more or less steal him from Micah and say, listen, would you want to be a priest over one family or over a whole tribe? Well, over a whole tribe, especially if they pay their tithes, that would be really much more lucrative. And the priest takes him up on that.

In other words, he's basically selling his services to the highest bidder. I won't say that ministers do that all the time now. But, and I'm sure many ministers would turn down a lucrative offer if they felt it compromised their convictions.

But for many, the ministry is just a profession. And if you get an offer at a better deal somewhere else, you'll go there. In many cases, for some individuals, it's not so much a matter of what would God be leading you to do, but what will make you the most money.

And in many cases, what you will teach or not teach is determined by the people who pay you. I've mentioned on other occasions, a friend of mine who was attending a church of a particular denomination, which I could name, but I won't. And he gave to the pastor recordings of my lectures on End Times, which was a different view.

My lectures presented a different view than that denomination's official view. In fact, that particular denomination requires their ministers periodically to sign a statement. So every couple of years or so, I think, has a list of all the distinctives of their denomination, including certain eschatological ideas that the denomination stands for.

And to be a minister there, you have to sign on to this list every few years to reaffirm that you still stand in the distinctives of the denomination. Well, this minister was given my lectures and he listened to them. And my friend who gave him the lectures later was talking to him and said, well, what did you think about those lectures on the End Times, on eschatology? And the minister said, well, they actually were, you know, pretty persuasive.

And it seems like they could be true. But he said, I would lose my position as a pastor in this denomination if I believe that. So, in other words, that's the end of my interest in the subject.

You know, I don't want to consider something which might convince me to do something that would cause me to lose my job. My job being the ministry. But that's where my paycheck comes from.

That's where my mortgage is being paid off. That's how my children's Christian school is being paid for. That's where my groceries are coming from.

I can't really let my inquiry into theology lead me anywhere other than where my denomination will permit me to go because they're my employer and I can't bear to lose my job over something like following truth, if that's what that is. So, there is this financial motivation that gets a hold of the man in ministry once he allows it to. And the first step in allowing it to, I think, is probably when a person accepts a paid position in ministry and begins to see it as a salaried job.

I'm not saying that every man who takes that step will take the other steps. A man may take that step and remain really uncompromised and refuse other strictures or things that are put upon him for job security. And so, I'm not saying that every minister who has a salary is compromised.

But that's the first step in that direction. It may not itself represent a compromise of his convictions, but it puts him in a position to be pressured in ways that he would not be if he was not viewing his ministry as a job at all and not motivated by a financial motive. So, this man was offered a change of clothes and ten shekels a year and his food, probably a place to live too.

And he got to serve full time in the ministry for this one man who was doing all these things wrong. The Levite may have known more than Michael. We don't know.

The Levites at least did or should have had the law. They were supposed to be teaching

the law to the other tribes of Israel. So, this man may have been acquainted with the law.

And if he did, then he would know every day that what he's doing in the house of Michael is a violation of what Moses said should be done in the worship of God. But he could just put that out of his head if he knew such things. He could just put it out of his head, realizing that this is the side of the bread the butter is on.

Doing it this way is the way that I'm getting paid to do it. And men who sell themselves into ministry must be careful to not let the deceptiveness of riches or money allow them to compromise. The irony is that most ministries don't pay really that well anyway.

It's not so much the deceptiveness of riches. It's more or less the deceptiveness of just basic sustenance and security. But even that has led men to make compromises in their ministry that they would have known better than to do, but they kind of turn a blind eye to it because that's just where their money's coming from.

Chapter 18 continues the story, but from another angle. Now we have the Danites and their issues. In those days, there was no king in Israel.

And in those days, the tribe of Dan, the Danites, was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in. For until that day, their whole inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not yet fallen to them. So, the children of Dan sent five men of their family from the territory, men of valor from Zorah and Eshdael, which are the areas that's where Samson was buried between those two areas, to spy out the land and to search it.

Remember, Samson was of the tribe of Dan also. That's the Danite territory. 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. So, in their traveling throughout the land looking for an opportune place to relocate their whole tribe, they stayed in the house of Micah, which may have been serving as something of a lodge.

He may have made his shrine sort of a community worship center and also took in a little extra money by taking in travelers. And so, these men stayed in his house. And while they were at the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite.

Now, does that mean that they had encountered him elsewhere and knew him? He was from Bethlehem, not from Dan. So, I don't know that they would have ever met him before. It's possible that Levites talked differently than other people.

I don't know if they had a different accent or if they maybe just talked about things other people didn't talk about so much that you could tell he was a Levite by his talk. In any case, they recognized him for what he was and they turned aside and said to him, who

brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here? And he said to them, thus and so did Micah for me. He has hired me and I have become his priest.

So, they said to him, please inquire of God that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous. And the priest said to them, whether he just said it on the spot or first inquired of God and came back with this answer, we don't know. But he said, go in peace.

May the presence of the Lord be with you on your way. So, it seems as if he's saying God is on your side in this matter. And perhaps he was, given the fact that they didn't have the guts to take the land that they were given from the Amorites.

Still, maybe there was a plan B that God would allow. And that's for them to find something that they did have the courage to conquer. So, these 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.

Apparently, Laish was a city made up of Sidonians, which was not Jews. Sidon was entire, were cities north of Israel, outside the territory in Lebanon. And so, these were apparently Sidonians who had removed themselves from most Sidonians.

They were isolated and therefore were not part of a coalition that could have come to save them if they were attacked. They were vulnerable. But, they had never been attacked and they were dwelling safely in the manner of, they lived in the way the Sidonians lived.

I don't know if that is referring to Sidonians generally were felt secure and were never molested by other people. Or, if there was more of a peculiar lifestyle of Sidonians they were living as, but living without interference from outsiders. There were no rulers, it says, and there were no Sidonians near to really basically team up with them to resist an attack.

Then the spies came back to their brethren in Zorah and Eshtael and their brethren said to them, what is your report? 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 that you may enter and possess the land. 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 earth.

So, they apparently had good internet there and maybe a major international airport because they didn't lack anything that's on earth. It is interesting how little they had to

have in order to not lack anything that is on earth in those days. Probably buildings, crops, some form of government.

All that was available on the earth was these things. There just wasn't much. It is amazing how much we take for granted needing conveniences and things like that to consider ourselves comfortable and have all that a place should provide.

But there wasn't much. But they had all they needed. Now, these were secure people that were going to be attacked by hostile Danites, unprovoked.

However, this was seen as a continuation of the conquest of the land that Joshua had urged the people to do. It just happened to be not the portion of the land that Dan was given. But, nonetheless, the Sidonians were in Palestine and therefore, in a sense, were fair game to be driven out.

And 600 men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshdol, armed with weapons of war. Then they went up and encamped in Kirgith-Jerim in Judah. Therefore, they call that place Mahanadan to this day.

There it is, west of Kirgith-Jerim. And they passed from there to the mountains of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah. 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 gods, a carved image and a molded image? Now, therefore, consider what you should do.

In other words, we're just saying, you know, just saying there's some stuff in there worth a lot of money. Gold image, a molded image, excuse me, household idols, you know, there's a lot of booty there. I'm just saying, I mean, just you just consider what you're going to do.

I'm not making any suggestions here. So they turned aside there and came to the house of the young Levite man. That is to the house of Micah and greeted him.

It's not saying that Micah is the young Levite man. Micah was his employer, but the house was where they both lived. So it was the house of the young Levite.

And of course, it was the house of Micah, his own house. The 600 men armed with weapons of war who were of the children of Dan stood by the entrance of the gate. Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land went up and entering there, they took the carved images of the image, the ephod, the household idols and the molded image.

The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the 600 men who were armed with weapons of war. When these went into Micah's house and took the graven image, the ephod, the household idols and the molded image, the priest said to them, What are you doing? 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? So the priest's heart was glad.

He was kind of forced to go with them, sort of kidnapped, but he was happily kidnapped. He was glad to go with them because they were offering him definitely a much better deal, more prestigious, probably more money in the long run. So the priest's heart was glad and he took the ephod and the household idols, which were not here.

He's stealing from his master. He didn't own them. And the carved image and he took his place among the people.

Then they turned and departed and put the little ones, the livestock and the goods in front of them. Now, the little ones, livestock and goods must mean the tribe of Dan. The 600 men were the whole tribe and they had their families with them.

So there weren't many Danites at this point. There had been a lot of them in the days of Moses when the censuses were taken. So how they came to be reduced so much? We don't know.

Maybe in their half-hearted battles with the Amorites to take their land, they lost the vast majority of their troops because they hadn't been determined enough and had not trusted God. They actually may have lost a lot of the people, but they had their cattle with them. This is not just a war expedition alone.

It's a whole clan moving from one territory to another with their families and livestock. When they went 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. That is Micah, you know, outraged that he was being ripped off by these marauders, gathered his neighbors around to come out and to make a show of resistance to these armed men.

And they called out to the children of Dan. So they turned around and said to Micah, what ails you that you've gathered such a company? So he said, you have taken away my gods, which I made and the priest and you've gone away. Now, what more do I have? How can you say to me what ails you? It's really a bummer when you've got gods that can be taken away from you by someone else.

I mean, you can lose God like Samson did, but no one can take him from you. You know, no one can separate us from the love of Christ. But anyone could come and take a false god away since that God was represented by an object that just the more powerful man could rip you off of.

So she took my gods away from me. What am I going to do for religion? What am I going to do for my faith? 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 and the lives of your

household. 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.

And so finally, they took the things Micah had made and the priesthood belonged to him and went to Laish, a people who were quiet and secure, and they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned their city with fire. 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 built the city and dwelt there, and they called the name of this city Dan. After the name of Dan, their father, that is the patriarch who was born of Israel. However, the name of the city formerly was Laish.

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. So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image, which he made all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh. Now, there's two indicators of timing here.

One is that this was clearly written after Shiloh was no longer the worship center. That happened in the days of Eli. Shiloh was destroyed and the ark was captured.

It's in the fourth chapter of 1st Samuel that this story is told. And so this writer telling this story was able to say, well, all the time the ark was in Shiloh. In other words, it was no longer there when the writer was writing this.

So he lived after Eli's time. But he says all that time the ark was in Shiloh. Micah's carved image was worshipped in Dan.

So the contrast is made. The ark of God, the ordained worship of God was in Shiloh. And all the while that the Danites were worshipping this image with the false priest, they were rejecting the true worship of God, which was still available in Shiloh.

The ark was still there. So it means there was really no excuse for this worship to exist when Shiloh was not yet destroyed. The ark was not yet captured.

It was it was just a rejection of Shiloh and of the ark and therefore of the true worship of God. Now, there's this other thing that says that this priest in verse 30, his name was Jonathan and says he and his sons were priests of the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. The captivity of the land is most naturally thought of as the time when the Assyrians came in 722 B.C. and took the entire northern kingdom in captivity.

However, it is not likely that this book of Judges was written quite so late as that. That would mean that this comment, if it's referring to that, must be written after 722 B.C. When, in fact, it's almost certainly written before 1000 B.C. So the captivity of the land

would have been like 300 years after the probable time of this writing. A couple of explanations have been given.

One is that it is referring to the destruction of and the captivity of Israel in 722 B.C., but that this particular statement is an insertion by another writer living later. After the Danites stopped worshipping at this particular shrine with this idol and with this priesthood, somebody living at a later time who knew of it could say, well, this continued until the captivity of the land. But the story was told by an earlier writer and it was maybe a later editor that stuck in that notice because he wanted a later generation of readers to know that this condition prevailed for a much longer time after it originally was set up.

The other solution is that the captivity of the land is not a reference to what happened in 722 B.C., is not when the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom. There are other notices in the book that suggest that this book was written during the time of Samuel and therefore before that captivity. But there were numerous captivities to the land.

That's the point. The book of Judges records many times the Amorites, the Midianites, the Mesopotamians or others came in and held the land captive. And so it could be one of those captivities, perhaps the first time that the northern region of Dan came under captivity from one of these others.

That's the time it's referring to, that they worshipped there until the captivity of the land. There could be many incidents that could be referred to by that term, the captivity of the land. So there's no necessity that it be the final captivity of the land that is referred to here.

So we have this story about these very confused people, Micah and Ephraim who seemed to really want to worship God. He wasn't entirely honest. He had ripped his mother off.

He wasn't really a good, honest man, but he had wanted to set up a genuine shrine and he wanted God's favor because he said, oh, Lord will really be favorable to me now because I've got a Levite. And yet his ignorance of what God wanted or his assumption that God didn't care so much about what God had said if he was aware of it was just led to so much syncretism and mixing of his pious intentions to worship Yahweh with the methods of the pagans. And of course, the church has done that too.

To whatever degree, the church either is ignorant of the Bible, and it certainly was to a very large extent in the Middle Ages. Bibles were hard to get your hands on, or may be aware of the Bible that figure that God doesn't really care whether we follow the Bible or not. And we can adopt pagan traditions to go along with it.

To whatever extent that is so, there's religious confusion. Again, the true church in the

early centuries soon evolved into the medieval church, which was very much compromised, the Roman church. They did have the Bible, but they considered the Bible was not as authoritative as other documents or other, I shouldn't say other documents, but decisions made by councils.

And there was the introduction of pagan practices, images, and the worship of the mother of Christ and so forth. These kinds of things were pagan things in the Roman Empire that just got intruded into Christianity, just like Micah's religion was a combination of the knowledge of the true God somewhat, mixed up with a whole bunch of other pagan ideas. And so, this story is there to tell us that in the days of the judges, there was a lot of confusion about religion.

And that confusion had to either be because they were ignorant of the law or not giving the law full weight. If they knew the law, they just figured, well, God doesn't require us to keep it. And so, the church gets into the same kind of problems whenever they either failed to teach the word of God and so that their people are ignorant of it, including their ministers, or else they teach it, but they don't lay any moral urgency upon the keeping of it.

So, people hear what the Bible says, but they just don't have any sense that it matters very much what they obey. And by the way, it is entirely possible for evangelical ministers to be very ignorant of the Bible. You might not think so because they've been to Bible college and seminary, but I've talked to evangelical ministers, for example, who've told me they've never read through the whole Bible before.

I've heard men who graduated at the top of their class from evangelical Bible colleges say, you know, one thing we didn't study much is the Bible. We learned some Greek, we learned some Hebrew, we learned homiletics, we learned hermeneutics, we learned church government, we learned all kinds of things, but the Bible, we only study a few books of the Bible. Sort of smattering a sampling.

So, we get some idea of what kind of what's in there, you know. And a lot of times once men have been trained at seminary, they don't really do much original study anymore. They figure they've put in their years, now they're doing the work.

The work is sermon preparation, staff management, fundraising, and things like that. So, there's a lot of ministers who really don't know very much what the Bible says. You'd think they would because of their training, but they haven't been trained in the Bible.

And so, that's the problem. Micah and his Levite are a good example of a bad example. They're a good example of what happens when the Word of God is not really governing the people of God in their worship.

And with that, we'll close. We'll take that last story in our next session.