

JUDGES SESSION #21

In the last session we caught the first story in the epilogue as the writer of Judges introduced us to Micah, a disgraceful thief, and his priest, a disobedient Levite
The next chapter shifts our attention to...

C. A Dissatisfied Tribe

Judg 18:1

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.

- note the early indications of the Danites' **dissatisfaction**: "seeking an inheritance" which had "not fallen to them" – it hadn't dropped into their laps
 - of course it hadn't! – God had given them a good section of the Promised Land but they had to work their way through it, clearing out the wicked Canaanites and taking possession of it; this tribe was evidently too lazy to do that
- these chapters (17 & 18) tell 2 stories; but here we see the **linkage**: Micah & his Levite appear in this second story too:

Judg 18:2-6

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. ³ 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?"

⁴ He said to them, "Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest."

⁵ So they said to him, "Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous."

⁶ And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The presence of the Lord *be* with you on your way."

- The Dan tribe's original inheritance was in the central coastal area which they left because of the opposition of Amorites & then pressure from Philistines; they moved into the hills of Ephraim; and then eventually to Laish/Dan in the far north – this story tells how they ended up in northern Israel
- when the 5 Danite spies came to Micah's home they "recognized" the Levite's voice -- probably by his accent (he was a southerner – maybe he said, "Shalom, y'all!")
- after getting the Levite's blessing, they continued on their way...

Judg 18:7-20

⁷ 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. *

⁸ Then *the spies* came back to their brethren at Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brethren said to them, "What *is* your *report*?"

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ And six hundred men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshtaol, armed with weapons of war. ¹² Then they went up and encamped in Kirjath Jearim in Judah... ¹³ And they passed from there to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah.

¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ So they turned aside there, and came to the house of the young Levite man – to the house of Micah – and greeted him. ¹⁶ The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who *were* of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. ¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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?"

¹⁹ 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?" ²⁰ 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.

- What more do we learn about the **Levite**?

- well, he is certainly not loyal; in fact, he becomes an accessory to armed robbery against his own employer! ...greedy ...eager for personal gain ...proud, lover of status

- he is, of course, no better than his employer who himself was first introduced to us as a thief ...both of them give us a memorable glimpse into the '**heart trouble**' afflicting the *national* health of the people of Israel during these Dark Ages

Judg 18:21-26 (Living Bible version)

They started on their way again, placing their children, cattle, and household goods at the front of the column. ²² When they were quite a distance from Micah's home, Micah and some of his neighbors came chasing after them, ²³ yelling at them to stop.

"What do you want, chasing after us like this?" the men of Dan demanded.

²⁴ "What do you mean, 'What do I want!'" Micah retorted. "You've taken away all my gods and my priest, and I have nothing left!"

²⁵ "Be careful how you talk, mister," the men of Dan replied. "Somebody's apt to get angry and kill every one of you."

²⁶ So the men of Dan kept going. When Micah saw that there were too many of them for him to handle, he turned back home.

- look again at **Micah** – the **idols** he had made with such pride & at such cost were completely unable to help him in this time of trouble

Ps 115:4-8 reminds us why:

Their idols *are* silver and gold,

The work of men's hands.

⁵ They have mouths, but they do not speak;

Eyes they have, but they do not see;

⁶ They have ears, but they do not hear;

Noses they have, but they do not smell;

⁷ They have hands, but they do not handle;

Feet they have, but they do not walk;

Nor do they mutter through their throat.

⁸ Those who make them are like them;

So is everyone who trusts in them.

- it is one of the **lessons** God intends His people to learn from the sad record of the Judges: when we turn our backs on the Living God and set our affections on idols of any sort, we will discover sooner or later the frustration of having forsaken the fountain of Living Water, as God declared in Jer. 2:13 (Living Bible again)...

"For my people have done two evil things: They have forsaken me, the Fountain of Life-giving Water; and they have built for themselves broken cisterns that can't hold water!"

- we also see here the effect that **one person's** sinful action can have on others
 - Micah's sin of idolatry quickly spread to infect a **whole tribe** of Israel!

Judg 18:27-31

²⁷ 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. ²⁸ *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. ²⁹ 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.

³⁰ 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. ³¹ So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

- notice how the chap. opens (vs. 1 – this tribe was “seeking an inheritance for itself”) and now see how the chapter closes (“they set up for themselves the carved image” – a sad phrase found twice here! vs. 30 & 31)
- **covetousness** leads to **idolatry** ... it did 3300 yrs ago, and it still does today!

D. A Summary

Gary Inrig calls these stories, “**Spiritual Junk Food**” that lead to destruction...

* **Micah's** story is “The Junk Food of **Self-Made Religion**”

* the **Levite's** story is “The Junk Food of **Self-Seeking Service**”

* and the **Danites'** story is “The Junk Food of **Easy Living**”

...they chose to move to an easy place, rather than fight God's enemies in the place of their original inheritance

- and the love of ease and the worship of idols went together

- the narrator adds a very significant phrase at the end of the story: they worshiped Micah's image “all the time that the **house of God was in Shiloh**”
- Irving Jensen wrote: “*It is as though God, with grieved heart, were patiently waiting in His forgotten house at Shiloh for Israel to return from their idols, their man-made priests and their own inventions, to do His holy will, adore and worship Him.*”

- So, here is the story of a **man**, Micah, and a **tribe**, Dan:

- **Micah** wanted God's favor and set up idol images to help him get it
- the **Danites** wanted more land and stole images to help them get it
- for Micah, the end result was **frustration**: he returned to his house without his god
- for the tribe of Dan, the end result was **separation**: they lived in a new land, worshiping new gods at their new city of Dan
 - they have separated themselves from God & from God's people
 - and that initial ‘crack’ widens into a Grand Canyon before their history is done
- they appear successful here; but when you trace the later history of the tribe of Dan the **tragic truth** comes out...
 - this tribe which started out by not being satisfied with what God had provided for them, slip further down sin's slippery slope to **stealing & worshiping Micah's idols**, and then eventually ‘graduated’ to worshiping the **golden calf** set up in their city by King Jeroboam – an easy thing to do after worshiping Micah's idols for years

- hundreds of years later, when the Assyrians invaded Israel the Danites were among the first to be hit, and they disappear into obscurity
 - and by the time we get to Rev. 7, the tribe of Dan is not included at all in the listing of the 12 tribes!

E. **Formula for Frustration**

We have seen here God's *Formula for Frustration*: **do what is right in our own eyes**

- like **Micah**...
 - we can try to **control** God, or manipulate Him into blessing us according to our desires
 - we may **worship** Him but on our own terms, not with dedication or sacrifice; making sure that our 'worship' doesn't interfere with our **comfort**
- or we can be like the **Levite**...
 - having no sense of loyalty to God or our employers
 - and rather than making decisions based on God's **truth** we decide on the basis of what is most **attractive** to us, letting our desire for status run roughshod over the feelings of others
- or perhaps we may sometimes be like the **Danites**...
 - **dissatisfied** with what God has given us and taking matters into our own hands to get what we want by the easiest way possible
- these were God's people trying to live successfully with the 3-letter word "**but**"
 - Henri Nouwen put it into modern terms when he wrote:
 "I love Jesus, **but** want to hold on to my own friends even when they do not lead me closer to Jesus. I love Jesus, **but** want to hold on to my own independence even when it brings me no real freedom. I love Jesus, **but** do not want to lose the respect of my professional colleagues even though their respect does not make me grow spiritually."
- ... "I love Jesus, **but**..." – what is it in your case, in my case?