

JUDGES

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Judges chapter 17 as we continue our study through the Word of God. As we move into Judges chapter's 17-21 they are not necessarily in chronological order but they are more of an appendix just filling in some information that occurred during this period of the Judges. In these chapters the Lord is giving us a picture of the hearts of the people and He does that by showing what is being manifested in their lives.

In Judges chapter's 17 and 18 the focus is on the spiritual condition of the people and it is not pretty. And it truly begins with the leadership of the people and as the leadership moves away from God, as they dive into idolatry, it is not long before the rest of the people join in and follow them. That is what we see here and I am sorry to say this is what we are seeing in the days we are living in. We have leaders teaching that there is no blood atonement, that there is universal salvation, that even the devil gets saved! I realize that is hard to believe that so-called Christians are teaching that but one of the most popular authors of our day, the author of *The Shack*, believes these lies of the Devil, these doctrines of demons and many Christians are jumping on that band wagon. They may deny it now but when they are reading his material and saying it is the greatest book they have ever read, that it has helped them draw closer to God, then it won't be long until they follow this man's false doctrine! And let me say this, what about the Bible, I thought that was the greatest book ever written and it will help us draw closer to God? The only way you will be able to stand against the false doctrine coming into the church is God's Word!

Let me show you what I mean as God gives us some insight into the leadership in Ezekiel's day, the spiritual condition they were in as we are told in Ezekiel 8:6-12,

“Furthermore He said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary? Now turn again, you will see greater abominations. ‘So He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall. Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, dig into the wall’; and when I dug into the wall, there was a door. And He said to me, ‘Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there.’ So I went in and saw, and there — every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls. And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. Each man had a censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up. Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, “The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.”””

And as I have said, as the religious leaders go so too will the people, they will follow right along and once there is spiritual apostasy then moral degradation, immorality will flow and that is what Ezekiel also shows us in Ezekiel 9:9, **“Then He said to me, ‘The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of perversity; for they say, “The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see!”””** And we will see the moral decay as we get into chapters 19-21 in Judges.

And think about how quickly they turned from the Lord after seeing all that the Lord had done for them, how He delivered them and brought them into the land of Canaan and because they did not drive out the enemy, because they thought they knew what was best, they turned from the Lord and are in apostasy! What a warning to us to stay close to the Lord and obey His Words to us for it is what is best and if you doubt that, by the time we finish up these 5 chapters over the next few weeks, you will see that apart from God there is only death and destruction, not only spiritual, but physical!

One more point before we move on and that is the time frame of these chapters and from the context, it seems that this happened very early on in the book of Judges, possibly during the time of Othniel the first Judge. The reason I say that is that in Judges 18:30 we see Jonathan mentioned and it says “**the son of Manasseh**” but that was probably done purposefully by a scribe to protect the reputation of Moses because he was the grandson of Moses and he was very evil! Also, the last 3 chapters also were probably occurring very early on because in Judges 20:28 we read of Eleazar, the grandson of Aaron mentioned.

With that said, let’s begin reading in Judges chapter 17, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study His Word and we look at the religious apostasy that was occurring in the land of Israel!

JUDGES 17**VERSES 1-2**

1. The name Micah means, “who is like YAHWEH.” What a great name and the reality is, that is all it was. It did nothing for Micah. How can I say that? Look at what he did. He stole 1,100 shekels of silver from his mother and then he gets a little nervous because she put a curse on the person that stole this silver. And it was worth a lot for in Judges 17:10 ten shekels a year was a decent wage! So he confesses that he stole her silver and instead of rebuking him she tells him, **“May you be blessed by the LORD, my son!”** And notice that **“LORD”** is in capitals and thus she is speaking of Yahweh! What a messed up family. She calls for the Lord to bless her son the thief! This again just shows where they were at as a people and it was not good!

VERSES 3-4

1. Now this is interesting to me. He gives his mom back the silver shekels he stole and she then dedicates this back to the Lord. Sounds good but she will use this money to make carved images and molded images with! Not only that, but out of the 1,100 silver shekels she got back, she only used 200 of them for the Lord. And these idols, look how easy it was for her to get these molded and carved images made in Israel! She did not have to dig through the phone book to find an idol maker because they were well known! What a sad state of affairs!

2. Now were these idols used to worship the true and living God? It would seem so but it was still wrong. You can't worship God any way you want. God forbid carved images. You must worship God in Spirit and in truth or you must be saved and you must worship God according to His Word or He won't accept it. Look at the golden calf the children of Israel made at Mount Sinai and the Lord rejected that and He still rejects objects that we make to worship Him by. He wants our worship, not some idol! When people lose the consciousness of God they resort to idols, stained glass windows, incense, whatever can draw them back to God instead of what can really help them, God Himself! Could these have been idols to pagan gods? It could be and some feel that way and again, that is obviously wrong, only God is to be worshiped!

VERSE 5

1. Today we would call Micah a religious man because of what he was doing but the Lord does not approve of it even today! He is not interested in religion but a relationship and here Micah takes these idols, these images and makes a worship center with them and then he takes his son and makes him the priest of this worship center. He even set up household idols or teraphim that were nothing more than gods that were worshiped to bring about prosperity and guidance! Not only did he break the Law that God established in Exodus 20:4 by making these images but his son is not from the tribe of Levi nor is he a descendant of Aaron and he had no right to be priest! And as you read all of this you may be wondering how this could happen in Israel when they were given so much from God? The answer is found in the next verse!

VERSE 6

1. Here is the reason for their failure, they had no king, no one to lead them and they did not want God to do it, thus, they did what they felt was right in their own eyes and it was evil, it was wrong. And look at how far we have come! We are no different. We call it existentialism but it is the same basic idea, if it feels right do it! There is no right and no wrong. When you take God out of the picture, Jesus, it is amazing how far people can go. And here specifically we are speaking of the church. Look at what the Emergent Church is doing, they are worshiping God the way they want, through experience and they have taken God's Word away because you really can't know what it means, words have so many meanings. Which is interesting because they do write many books and produce many DVD's to teach their doctrines of demons to the people! And the end result is people in the church do what they feel is right in their own eyes and that is not good! It brings anarchy inside the church and it brings anarchy in this world! It is as Proverbs 14:12 tells us, "**There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.**" May we not forget that!

VERSES 7-8

1. We are told that this man's name was Jonathan, who was a grandson of Moses, which meant he came from the tribe of Levi but he was not a priest, only the descendants of Aaron were the priests. That did not mean he couldn't serve, in fact he should have been living in one of the 48 Levitical cities set up for them to minister throughout the land, but he was in Bethlehem instead. And he was having a hard time finding work, maybe the people were not providing for them like they should of and thus, he goes looking for work! You can read of what Moses told them should happen in regards to supporting the Levites in Numbers 18:21-32, Deuteronomy 14:27-29 and 26:12-15.

2. Here is something that I believe is important for us to understand. God gives us a lot in life, a place to live you might say. And it is when we are disappointed in what we have, it is when we are not satisfied with what we have that we go out looking for other places to live, to try to get another lot in life you might say. And that can be where you physically live, or the person you are living with you are not satisfied with, or the job you have and the list can go on-and-on. But you get the idea. We need to be satisfied where God has planted us and when we are where God wants us to be, that is where we will grow!

VERSES 9-10

1. Micah made Jonathan a deal he could not refuse. He would get paid, a place to stay, he would be a priest, some cool clothes to wear and Jonathan grabbed at the offer but the reality is, he was a hireling, selling himself out for money. Yes, there was comfort; there was security in the house of an idolater! Don't sell yourself out to the enemy doing things you should not be doing because it will be easier for you or provide what you will need. Do what God has called you to do!

2. For Micah, to have his own personal priest would legitimize his shrine that he made. Folk's, man cannot legitimize anything we do, only God can and if we are serving Him, walking as He called us to walk, that is all we need to encourage us to continue on. We do not need man to legitimize the work!

VERSES 11-13

1. How warped the mind of Micah was. He thinks that now that he has this priest to attend to the shrine he has made, that God will bless his household. The reality was that this man was not a priest; he was only from the tribe of Levi. How could they move so far away from the truths of God? Very simply, they had nothing to guide them, and as you start getting off course, it is not long before you are totally lost, not knowing where you are.

Let me explain. Imagine if you were going to sail from California to Hawaii, and when you started you were only a few degrees off course. Not much at all. But by the time you were to arrive in Hawaii, you would be so far off course that you would miss the island completely. So how can we stay on track? Simple, you need a compass. For us our compass is the Word of God that keeps us on track. You will never go astray if you are guided by the instruments that God has given to you to keep you on track and that is the Word of God which is powered by the Holy Spirit. This Levite should have known the Word of God and he probably did, he just did not agree with it and he did it his own way!

2. Remember these songs and sayings, because they do reflect what was going on in Israel and what is going on in our nation today. Frank Sinatra sang, "I did it my way!" And the Burger King saying, "Have it your way!" Or those songs from the 60's, "I've gotta be me!" or "Born free!" That just does not work because when we do what is right in our own eyes, it is not good and God will not accept it. Learn the lesson!

3. Now was Micah sincere? Yes he was. Was Jonathan sincere? Yes he was and yet they were sincerely wrong. That is the problem. Say that I am very sincere about jumping over the Grand Canyon; I have no doubt that I can do it. Does that mean I will do it? Absolutely not because it is not sincerity that counts, it is the truth and the same comes with our faith, may we not forget that!

4. It is amazing to me, but the Jonathan's and Micah's will always find each other, because they need each other. Remember what Paul told Timothy, warning him of what was to come, **“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers, and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”** II Timothy 4:3-4. You see, there will always be those seeking to satisfy self, no matter if it contradicts what God has said, and there will always be those who will teach that garbage of lies to others. For they need each other. Our responsibility, Paul says, is to, **“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”** II Timothy 4:2. You see, there will always be false doctrine out there; our responsibility is not to embrace it but expose it as error with the Word of GOD! And yes, there are seasons when people don't want to hear God's Word, but don't let that stop you. You need to be ready for whatever season comes our way and give the truth in love to a world in darkness!

JUDGES 18**VERSE 1**

1. I thought the tribe of Dan was given an inheritance of land back in Joshua chapter 19?

They were but they did not drive out the enemy, the Amorites and later the Philistines, and they wanted more land, they were not satisfied with what God had given to them.

This area that was allotted to them was by the Jerusalem mountains to the Mediterranean Sea Coast. This was also the area in which the Philistines dwelt. And the tribe of Dan could not drive them out, but were only able to take a small portion of land to live in.

Thus, most of the tribe of Dan headed northward, to Laish. This is a beautiful, fertile area at the base of Mount Hermon. But, like I said, it is always tragic to see God's people dwelling in the place that God has not given to them.

2. And did you notice once again that there was no king in Israel and thus, we see the tribe of Dan do what is right in their own eyes, it was not the will of God!

VERSES 2-6

1. Because the tribe of Dan was not satisfied with the lot they received from the Lord, they send out these 5 men, from the tribe of Dan and they head northward to find an area of land for the rest of the tribe of Dan to dwell in. They rested at Micah's house and while there they recognized Jonathan's dialect and wondered what in the world he was doing in Micah's house. Jonathan is not ashamed and tells them that Micah hired him. Since Jonathan was a priest, or so he was hired as one, these guys ask him to inquire of the Lord to see if their journey will be prosperous. And Jonathan tells them not to worry and then he tells them the reason they were not to worry, it is because God is with them! Now I truly doubt if that is what God said to him, I think more likely Jonathan was a man pleaser and just told them what they wanted to hear.

Why do I say that? Because these men from Dan were not on a mission from God, they are on their own mission and Jonathan was not a priest of God, he was appointed by man! Thus, I do not believe he was hearing from God but like many today, they use the tag, "God said . . ." and they think that legitimizes what they are saying! That is totally wrong and I don't care how sincere you are about it. And for the Danites, this area of land they will occupy will become a place of idolatry down the road, so it was not a good thing for them to be out of the will of God doing their own thing even if they felt God was in it, He wasn't! And the reality is, they go into idolatry right away and it is only going to get worse until the Assyrians finally take them into captivity with the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C.

We see this played out for us in I Kings 12:25-30 as we are told, **“Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Penuel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah.’ Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!’ And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan.”** You see how idolatry was brought into this area of Dan where the Danites were going to move to! Be careful in who you are following, where you are going, be in the will of God for it is the safest place to be!

2. You may wonder how this man of God, this representative of God could do these things? The reality is, he was not a man of God but a man who was satisfying his own hearts desire. Remember when wicked king Ahab asked king Jehoshaphat to assist him in battle against the Syrians at Ramoth Gilead. And Jehoshaphat, who was a Godly king, asks king Ahab to inquire of the Lord to see if they should go to war. And king Ahab gathers together 400 prophets and asks them that question. They responded by saying **“Go up, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king.”** I Kings 22:6. And you would think that 400 prophets all-agreeing would be enough, but Jehoshaphat said **“Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of him?”** I Kings 22:8.

And reluctantly king Ahab informs king Jehoshaphat that there does remain one more prophet, Micaiah. But the king hates this guy. Why would the king hate this prophet of God? We are told, **“Because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.”** I Kings 22:8. Remember that king Ahab is a wicked king and he is married to that wicked woman named Jezebel.

But they reluctantly bring this man, Micaiah in before these two kings. And as they bring Micaiah in they tell him to speak as the other prophets have spoken. In other words they wanted him to be a man pleaser, to speak as they spoke! They wanted him to encourage the king, and they were not concerned with the truth. So the king asks Micaiah what they should do, and, almost sarcastically he says **“Go and prosper, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king!”** I Kings 22:15.

The king recognized what Micaiah was doing and said to him **“How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?”** I Kings 22:16. He didn't want to hear the truth because he couldn't handle the truth and yet, he knew that this prophet was lying and wants him to speak forth. That is very interesting and because of what the king said, Micaiah lets him have it. He tells him that Israel will be defeated in this battle, and king Ahab would not return from the battle. His reward for speaking the truths of God was he got punched in the face, locked in prison and fed bread and water. The king did not want to hear the truth but wanted his ears tickled by the words of his false prophets. What Micaiah said came to pass, but we still see that kind of garbage spoken today, the tickling of people's ears instead of the truth of God found in the Word of God!

People do not want to hear the truths of God. They want to be told that all roads to lead to God and not just the narrow road. So when you speak the truths of God, many don't want to hear it. They don't want to hear of a righteous God who is coming to judge those who have rejected His Son Jesus Christ. So they speak of a God of love, negating that He is also a righteous Judge and will judge the wickedness in this world. As much as people don't want to hear it, Christ is coming in judgment against a Christ rejecting world. No matter how much they try to deny that fact, it will come to pass, for God has said it. We need to fulfill the work of the ministry that God has given to us and share the Word of God in season and out of season, if they want to hear it or if they do not want to hear it! The men of Dan had their ears tickled by Jonathan, but again, I don't think it was of the Lord. Jonathan gave them the answer they wanted to hear.

VERSE 7

1. Laish was a city about 25 miles north of the Sea of Chinnereth or Kinnereth; we know it as the Sea of Galilee. And this area is very lush, had a large amount of vegetation, a good water supply and the men of Dan felt that this would be a great place to raise a family or really relocate their tribe to. As for the people of Laish, they were a peaceful people, and because of their location, they were isolated from other nations who might be able to help them in case of a war. The men of Laish were not strong militarily and because of all of this, the tribe of Dan felt it would be easy to defeat them and the land was ripe for them to live in.

VERSES 8-13

1. So these five spies return home and tell their brethren what they found, this fertile land that should be easy to take from the people of Laish and 600 men gather with them to go and fight to attain this land. And they come to Micah's house. Now it would seem that Micah's house was the place to stop by as you are passing through the area! Maybe it was known for it's shrine or just a place to rest before you continued on in your journey! Why was it easier for them to fight against the people of this distant land then in the land that God had given them? Maybe the reason is that the grass is always greener on the other side, but the reality is, they use more fertilizer! May we be content with what God has given to us and fight for what God has given us. May we not go outside of God's desire for us!

VERSES 14-17

1. As these five men, along with the 600 who were standing at the gate, come to Micah's house, they go in and take the carved image, the ephod, the household idols and the molded image! Why did they do this? I guess they wanted to worship God by these things and to do that they needed to take them! They didn't even think twice about this, they just go in and take them!

As strange as that sounds, people do all kinds of evil in the name of God. Way back in the 1990's, in the Los Angeles riots, there were many looters. And a reporter happened to come upon three men who were looting a store and he asked them what they had taken. The first two men refused to answer and they just spewed out some profanity and continued on. Interestingly enough the third man said, "I got some gospel music. I love Jesus!" That is amazing to me because what he was doing contradicted what he said about his love for Jesus! May our words and actions match our love for the Lord!

VERSES 18-21

1. Here is a picture of a hireling or a person who is only doing the work for money and position and not for the Lord. These men threaten Jonathan and then they offer him a better position with them and he takes it! Jonathan is not a true shepherd of God but is only interested in his own well being! Jesus put it like this in John 10:12-13, "**But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.**"

Many do the same today; they are not interested in the flock that God has entrusted to them but always looking for bigger and better things for themselves! That is sad and that is not a true shepherd of God!

2. Why do the men of Dan place the little ones, the livestock and the goods in front of them? Because these men of Dan recognized that Micah might not appreciate what they did, so they place the young, the livestock and their goods in the front, so that if Micah attacks from the rear, they would be ready for him. Their behavior illustrates their serpent behavior mentioned in Jacob's prophecy for this tribe back in Genesis 49:17, where we are told, **“Dan shall be a serpent by the way, A viper by the path, That bites the horse's heels So that its rider shall fall backward.”** This tribe was treacherous and as we are seeing, they are introducing idolatry into the tribe and by the time we get to Kings, it is out of control!

VERSES 22-24

1. This is kind of ironic when you think about it. Micah has to go on a rescue mission to get back his god's that were stolen. How tragic when a man's god's can be carried away. You see, idolaters worship god's that can be carried away, but we as Christians worship a God who carries us! Who do you want to worship, a god that is stolen, a god that has fallen and can't get up, a god who can't do anything, or the true and living God who is actively involved in our lives? The choice is simple; I am going to worship the true and living God!

Remember what Moses told the children of Israel regarding what God has done for them and keep in mind that He is also doing the same for us. He said in Deuteronomy chapter 1, **“The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.”** Deuteronomy 1:30-31. That is our God, He is actively involved in our lives!

2. And look at what Micah said in verse 24, **“Now what more do I have?”** His god was stolen, but how many have their god’s taken away by other things? And in the end, what are they left with? Nothing. That is Micah’s complaint, that he has nothing left. How sad! But for us as Christians, you can take everything else away from us, you can take away from us everything that is material, our health, our relationships and yet, we still have the LORD! You see, He will always be with us, He will never leave us and that should bring great comfort to us! But this statement of Micah reflects the emptiness of idolatry!

VERSES 25-26

1. These men stole these idols to worship God by and yet, look at how they acted, like animals and thus, this just shows that they were not loving the true and living God, worshiping Him but the god's that they have created in their own minds and that lead to immorality besides apostasy! And the reality is, apostasy lead to their immorality! Their words were harsh towards Micah and they basically told him to watch his mouth or he would lose more than just his gods, he would lose his life! They were living out the idea that, ***WHAT IS YOURS IS MINE AND THUS, I WILL TAKE IT!*** It is a philosophy that has emerged today and it is because people have moved away from the true and living God!

VERSES 27-29

1. So they took this priest and his idols with them to Laish and destroyed the people of Laish, and they rebuilt the city and now call it Dan after their father or the son of Jacob, one of the 12 sons of Israel. And now this will become the northern boarder of Israel and the expression, "**from Dan to Beersheba**" is used to speak of the area of land from the north to the south in Israel or all Israel. (Judges 20:1, I Samuel 3:20, II Samuel 3:10, 17:11, 24:2, 24:15).

VERSES 30-31

1. The place of worship for Israel was to be in Shiloh as we are told in Joshua 18:1. That is where the tabernacle was set up. But the tribe of Dan sets up their own idolatrous place of worship here in Laish and we have moved from individual idolatry with Micah to a whole tribe adopting idolatry and this will peak as we get to I Kings chapter 12 as a golden calf is set up in Dan to worship God by!

2. As sincere as they were, what they were doing was in direct opposition to God and that is important for us to understand today as people want to worship God anyway they want, according to how they feel and as I have said, God **MUST** be worshiped in **SPIRIT** and in **TRUTH!** That is the only worship that God will accept. I don't care how sincere you may be!

3. Now it says that Jonathan was the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, but that is not correct. Many feel that a scribe changed the name Moses to Manasseh to protect the reputation of Moses. They did not want this man of God to have a grandson that was into idolatry like this. And there are some translations that use Moses instead of Manasseh and it does fit the picture of the son of Gershom!

4. It also speaks of this idolatry continuing on in Dan until the time of their captivity.

What captivity is this speaking of? We don't know for sure but this idolatry continued on until they were taken captive, the Northern Kingdom of Israel including Dan, in 721 B.C. by the Assyrians! God was gracious, He was merciful but they refused to repent and get right and judgment came upon them because of it!

5. As I close this evening we have seen the spiritual or religious apostasy that was occurring in the land and this religious apostasy will lead to social or moral degradation because everyone will be doing what is right in their own eyes, they had no king to lead them! There is no excuse for us, we have a King, we have Jesus who rules and reigns in our hearts if we would only obey because as we draw close to Him what will flow from our lives will be good. But, as we move away from Him, as people turn from God, as they move into religious apostasy, then their actions will be evil, we will see morality spiraling downward, out of control and that is what we see in this country. The only hope for this nation is Jesus and may we be the people who shine the light of Christ to a nation that is in darkness! Next week, as we conclude the book of Judges we will see the moral decay in the nation and it is very ugly but again, they turned from God and did what was right in their own eyes and that is never good. It truly shows what was in their hearts will be manifested in their lives! May we learn the lesson!