

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

5-8-24

Judges 18

The Tribe Of Dan Sends Spies To Look For Land – Verses 1-2

18 In those days Israel had no king.

And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking a place of their own where they might settle, because they had not yet come into an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. ²So the Danites sent five of their leading men from Zorah and Eshtaol to spy out the land and explore it. These men represented all the Danites. They told them, “Go, explore the land.” So they entered the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah, where they spent the night.

18:1-2 The Danites had been assigned enough land to meet their needs (Joshua 19: 40-48). However, because they failed to trust God to help them conquer their territory, the Amorites forced them into the hill country and wouldn't let them settle in the plains (Judges 1: 34). Rather than fight for their allotted territory, they preferred to look for new land in the north where resistance from the enemy wouldn't be so tough. It was while they were traveling north that some of their men passed Micah's home and stole some of his idols.

The Danites meet with Micah's Levite – Verses 3-6

³When they were near Micah's house, they recognized the voice of the young Levite; so they turned in there and asked him, “Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? Why are you here?” ⁴He told them what Micah had done for him, and said, “He has hired me and I am his priest.” ⁵Then they said to him, “Please inquire of God to learn whether our journey will be successful.” ⁶The priest answered them, “Go in peace. Your journey has the LORD's approval.”

18:3-4 Priests and their assistants were all members of the tribe of Levi (Numbers 3:5-13). They were to serve the people, teach them how to worship God, and perform the rituals involved in the worship services both at the tabernacle in Shiloh and in the designated cities throughout the land. But this disobedient priest showed disrespect for God because (1) he performed his duties in a house. Priestly duties were to be performed only in the tabernacle or a designated city. This requirement was intended to prevent God's laws from being changed. (2) He carried idols with him (18:20). (3) He claimed to speak for God when God had not spoken through him (18:6).

18:5-6 Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous: This shows what a spiritually confused time this was in Israel. These Danites on a sinful mission met with a sinful Levite and wanted to know from a righteous God if their mission would be successful. Then the sinful Levite sent the sinning men on their way with God's blessing.

The Danites Choose A City For Expansion: Laish – Verses 7-10

⁷ So the five men left and came to Laish, where they saw that the people were living in safety, like the Sidonians, at peace and secure. And since their land lacked nothing, they were prosperous. Also, they lived a long way from the Sidonians and had no relationship with anyone else. ⁸ When they returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their fellow Danites asked them, “How did you find things?” ⁹ They answered, “Come on, let’s attack them! We have seen the land, and it is very good. Aren’t you going to do something? Don’t hesitate to go there and take it over. ¹⁰ When you get there, you will find an unsuspecting people and a spacious land that God has put into your hands, a land that lacks nothing whatever.”

18:7 They dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians: The Danites found a city nearby that was not occupied by Israelites, but by a colony of the Sidonians. This was a group that God told Israel to drive out of the land of Canaan (Joshua 13:4).

18:9 For we have seen the land, and indeed it is very good: Seeing that the land was good, and the city was not heavily defended, the Danites believed this would be a good city to conquer and take as their own territory.

They Assemble An Army Of 600 To Take Possession Of Laish – Verses 11-13

¹¹ Then six hundred men of the Danites, armed for battle, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol. ¹² On their way they set up camp near Kiriath Jearim in Judah. This is why the place west of Kiriath Jearim is called Mahaneh Dan to this day. ¹³ From there they went on to the hill country of Ephraim and came to Micah’s house.

18:11-13 Six hundred men... armed with weapons of war: Curiously, they assembled an army of 600 men to fight for the city of Laish in the land of the tribe of Ephraim; yet through this entire incident, no one desired to worship God; instead, they wanted to use God for selfish gain. Today some people go to church to feel better, be accepted, relieve guilt, and gain business contacts or friends. Beware of following God for selfish gain rather than selfless service.

Army Of 600 Men Take Micah’s Shrine For Themselves – Verses 14-18

¹⁴ Then the five men who had spied out the land of Laish said to their fellow Danites, “Do you know that one of these houses has an ephod, some household gods and an image overlaid with silver? Now you know what to do.” ¹⁵ So they turned in there and went to the house of the young Levite at Micah’s place and greeted him. ¹⁶ The six hundred Danites, armed for battle, stood at the entrance of the gate. ¹⁷ The five men who had spied out the land went inside and took the idol, the ephod and the household gods while the priest and the six hundred armed men stood at the entrance of the gate. ¹⁸ When the five men went into Micah’s house and took the idol, the ephod and the household gods, the priest said to them, “What are you doing?”

18:14-17 Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image: This was a strange combination of low morality and strong religious feeling. It was as if someone really wanted to study the Bible - therefore they stole several Bibles.

18:18 Took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image: They used violence and theft to supposedly advance a religious cause, and the priest allowed them by standing aside as they did so.

The Levite Goes With The Army From The Tribe Of Dan – Verses 19-21

¹⁹ They answered him, “Be quiet! Don’t say a word. Come with us, and be our father and priest. Isn’t it better that you serve a tribe and clan in Israel as priest rather than just one man’s household?” ²⁰ The priest was very pleased. He took the ephod, the household gods and the idol and went along with the people. ²¹ Putting their little children, their livestock and their possessions in front of them, they turned away and left.

18:19-21 Put your hand over your mouth: This was a threat. They commanded the Levite to stop objecting or be attacked. So the priest’s heart was glad: His heart was glad because he was filled with mercenary ambition. The Levite did not care about Micah, only for the pay and status that he might get by being the priest for a whole tribe instead of a mere family.

Micah’s Foolish Idolatry Comes To Nothing – Verses 22-24

²² When they had gone some distance from Micah’s house, the men who lived near Micah were called together and overtook the Danites. ²³ As they shouted after them, the Danites turned and said to Micah, “What’s the matter with you that you called out your men to fight?” ²⁴ He replied, “You took the gods I made, and my priest, and went away. What else do I have? How can you ask, ‘What’s the matter with you?’”

18:24 Micah made idols and hired a priest to run his personal religion. When the men of Dan took his idols and priest, nothing remained. What an empty spiritual condition! An idol is anything that takes God’s place in a person’s life. Some people invest all their energy in pursuit of money, success, possessions, or a career. If these idols are taken away, only an empty shell is left. The only way to protect yourself against such loss is to invest your life in the living God, whom you can never lose.

Tribe Of Dan Refuses To Give Micah His God Back – Verses 25-26

²⁵ The Danites answered, “Don’t argue with us, or some of the men may get angry and attack you, and you and your family will lose your lives.” ²⁶ So the Danites went their way, and Micah, seeing that they were too strong for him, turned around and went back home.

18:25-26 Lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life: This event and these words illustrate the general lawlessness in Israel during this long period of the Judges. The children of Dan stole Micah’s idol simply under the principle of “might makes right.” When Micah saw that they were too strong for him: They were too strong for both Micah and his gods. One should never have a god that needs protection.

Dan Conquers The City Of Laish And Rename It Dan – Verses 27-28

²⁷ Then they took what Micah had made, and his priest, and went on to Laish, against a people at peace and secure. They attacked them with the sword and burned down their city. ²⁸ There was no one to rescue them because they lived a long way from Sidon and had no relationship with anyone else. The city was in a valley near Beth Rehob. The Danites rebuilt the city and settled there. ²⁹ They named it Dan after their ancestor Dan, who was born to Israel—though the city used to be called Laish.

18:27 Just because the Danites successfully defeated Laish doesn’t mean their actions were right. Their idolatry showed that God was not guiding them. Today many justify their wrong actions by outward signs of success. They think that wealth, popularity, or lack of suffering is an indication of

God's blessing. But many stories in the Bible indicate that evil and earthly success can go hand in hand (see, for example, 2 Kings 14:23-29). Success doesn't indicate God's approval. Don't allow personal success to become a measuring rod of whether or not you are pleasing God.

18:29 And they called the name of the city Dan: The city of Dan will become the most prominent northern city in Israel. The phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" (Judges 20:1, 1 Samuel 3:20) will become an expression meaning, "from the north to the south of Israel" indicating all of Israel.

The Tribe Of Dan Officially Adopts The Idolatry That Began With Micah – Verses 30-31

³⁰ There the Danites set up for themselves the idol, and Jonathan son of Gershom, the son of Moses, and his sons were priests for the tribe of Dan until the time of the captivity of the land. ³¹ They continued to use the idol Micah had made, all the time the house of God was in Shiloh.

18:30-31 The tribe of Dan had stolen Micah's idols, and now they set them up in Laish. Although the Danites were actually denying God by worshiping these images (Exodus 20: 1-5), they probably assumed they were worshiping God through them (see the note on Exodus 32: 4-5). Worshiping images of God is not worshiping God, even if it resembles true worship in some ways. People repeat the same mistake today when they claim to be Christians without really believing in God's power or changing their conduct to conform to his expectations. Godliness cannot be merely a claim. It must be a reality in our motives and in our actions.

18:31 Shiloh was probably destroyed during the events reported in 1 Samuel 4 and 5, not long after the time described here. Because Shiloh was the religious center for Israel, all adult males were required to travel there for certain religious feasts. The tribe of Dan, however, set up idols and priests in the new territory they conquered. The fact that they were over 80 miles away from Shiloh may have been their excuse for not fulfilling the law's requirements. This act was a further demonstration of their disregard for God.

18:31 The true worship of God should have been maintained through the Levitical priests scattered throughout the land and the influence of the tabernacle in Shiloh. This story shows how pagan influences and moral depravity had crept into every corner of Israelite culture. Although 300 years had passed since they entered the Promised Land, they still had not destroyed the idolatry and evil practices within it. There may be a tendency in your life to allow "harmless" habits to have their own small corners, but they can become dominating forces. The values, attitudes, and practices you have adopted from the world's system can be exposed by applying the light of God's truth to them. Once you see them for what they are, you can begin to uproot them.