

Judges 18B

- Chinese bamboo is a fascinating plant
 - During the first four years of its life, it's a puny little thing
 - It barely grows at all
 - Standing next to full grown bamboo, it looks like a weed
 - But during those four years, it's putting down deep roots
 - And in the fifth year, the bamboo stalk will shoot skyward
 - Growing up to eighty feet in that one year
 - In some ways, we should see the three stories at the end of Judges like bamboo, as the roots of Israel's troubles
 - In previous chapters we've witnessed the people doing what was right in their own eyes
 - We saw that repeating pattern of idolatry, God's wrath and sometimes, repentance
 - Now we're learning the roots of that evil
 - And like bamboo, these stories were happening outside of view
 - But they soon lead to sin running rampant in the nation
- So these three stories are the back story of Israel's sin during the time of Judges, when they lacked a strong, godly leader
 - The first story is documented in chapters 17 and 18
 - This is the story of the sin of the Danites and Ephraimites conspiring together to introduce idolatry in the land
 - And it comes by way of a one-two punch
 - The story began with the introduction of homemade worship, a concept invented by a man named Micah, an Ephraimite
 - He was raised in an unbelieving, ungodly home

- Later, his pride lead him to hire a Levite as a personal priest officiating over a private religious service
- This is the ultimate example of a man doing what is right in his own eyes
- He was worshipping God in the way he preferred, forgetting that man can't define how God will be found
- The second punch comes from the Danites, who decided they wanted a different place to live
 - They didn't trust the Lord to defeat the Philistines in their land
 - And they weren't willing to engage in the battle Joshua told the people to wage
 - Instead, the people of Dan were willing to embark on long journey in search of land
 - Eventually setting their sights on a Canaanite town in far northern Israel, in the land of Naphtali
- They were willing to fight the Canaanites to secure that land
 - But they were unwilling to fight the Philistines in their present territory as the Lord directed
 - Had they done so, they could have enjoy the land the Lord had already given them
- Today, we see these two stream of rebellious merge into a flood that threatens to carry the nation away
 - Members of Israel are moving away from proper worship of Yahweh and from living in their appointed land, and that's an incredibly dangerous thing
 - Left unchecked, it means the destruction of the nation
 - Because Israel's identity as a nation depending on these two very things, as God intended
 - Their law and their inheritance are the defining characteristics and what distinguishes them from Gentile nations

[Deut. 7:6](#) "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

[Deut. 7:7](#) "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,

[Deut. 7:8](#) but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

- If Israel abandoned worship of Yahweh or if the tribes separate from one another, then the Jewish people come to an end
 - The covenants and God's Law are what defined them and held them together
 - But now the tribes are moving away from the Law and away from the land and each other
 - Why? Because everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes, rather than listening to the Lord
- So now we move back into chapter 18 to conclude this story, with the Danites moving north to conquer and occupy their new land

[Judg. 18:11](#) Then from the family of the Danites, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, six hundred men armed with weapons of war set out.

[Judg. 18:12](#) They went up and camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. Therefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim.

[Judg. 18:13](#) They passed from there to the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.

- As we saw last time, the Danites take a circuitous route to return to Laish
 - Rather than moving north up the costal plain and into the Jezreel valley, they elect to go east and then north into Ephraim
 - And it quickly becomes apparent why they've taken this out-of-the-way route
 - They want to stop at Micah's house
 - And their stop is not a coincidence...they want something

- In their first stop at Micah's house, they were stunned to discover Micah had established his own personal house of worship
 - Apparently, they liked the idea of their own religious system
 - The Law required Jews to travel regularly to the tabernacle to worship on certain feast days
 - But once the Danites reached Laish, they would be a long way from Shiloh, where the tabernacle stood in those days
 - Who wants to walk so far if there is an alternative?
- They've seen the future, and that future is personal tabernacles
 - It's like the first time someone proposed a personal computer
 - Before only universities or businesses could afford a computer
 - But thanks to the electronics revolution, now everyone could have one in their home
- That's how it must have felt to the Danites when they saw what Micah had set up in his house
 - So the Danites determine to steal Micah's priest to make him their own

Judg. 18:14 Then the five men who went to spy out the country of Laish said to their kinsmen, "Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod and household idols and a graven image and a molten image? Now therefore, consider what you should do."

Judg. 18:15 They turned aside there and came to the house of the young man, the Levite, to the house of Micah, and asked him of his welfare.

Judg. 18:16 The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the sons of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate.

Judg. 18:17 Now the five men who went to spy out the land went up and entered there, and took the graven image and the ephod and household idols and the molten image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men armed with weapons of war.

Judg. 18:18 When these went into Micah's house and took the graven image, the ephod and household idols and the molten image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?"

Judg. 18:19 They said to him, "Be silent, put your hand over your mouth and come with us, and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?"

Judg. 18:20 The priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod and household idols and the graven image and went among the people.

- The Danite army is 600 men, armed and ready to battle the Canaanites in Laish
 - And the five scouts bring them back to Micah's house to show them the worship system Micah has established
 - Micah's idea excited the flesh of these apostate men
 - These five scouts knew that this discovery would inspire similar feelings among the rest of the Danite army
 - In fact, they were depending on it
 - They wanted this strong force to compel the priest to leave Micah and serve the Danites in Laish
 - First, they go to the home of the Levite and strike up a conversation, reminding him that they were there earlier and he had helped them
 - Then the group goes to the home of Micah, where they proceed to begin stealing all his implements of worship
 - Once the Levite realizes that he's taking part in a theft, he objects
 - So the Danites tell him to shut up and don't challenge what's happening
 - Then they make him an offer...he can be a priest in a bigger place for more people...a promotion
 - This is an offer that a career-minded apostate Levite can't turn down
 - So he agrees to go and serve the entire tribe of Dan
- There is so much wrong with this scene, it's hard to know where to begin in breaking it all down
 - First, you have the Danites bullying and threatening a man they believe will bring them closer to God
 - Men can act so strange when it comes to imagining how to find God, can't they?
 - If they truly believed that this man could serve as an intermediary to God, how could they expect him to be a sympathetic representative under these circumstances?

- He's just witnessed these Danites stealing, which was punishable by death
- And now he's being forced to go along with the theft and to uproot and leave with them
- Yet the Danites expect this man to lead them to a blessing from the Lord
- This is the same kind of thinking that leads men to steal idols and kill innocents and do all manner of terrible things in the name of their god
 - Such men never stop to consider the hypocrisy of using sin to find holiness
 - In their warped and perverted hearts they find sin compatible with a pursuing and pleasing a deity
- Anyone can claim to be acting in name of his god, but that doesn't mean their actions are truly inspired by God
 - For example, the Crusades were atrocities committed in the name of Jesus
 - The Inquisition was torture committed in Jesus' name
 - The prejudices of the past century were often perpetrated in the name of Jesus
 - And this same twisted logic leads men and women today to seek out prosperity messages or other lies instead of the truth
- These are no different than the Danites' distortion of Jewish worship
 - Sinful man will always want God packaged in ways we prefer, beginning with Cain and continuing into today
 - Sinful men want to believe that what they want is also what God wants for them, though in reality they're simply pleasing their flesh
 - And the enemy is only too willing to support that desire
 - The enemy is able to counterfeit anything of God...except holiness
 - So you can always find the lie, because when holiness is absent, then so is God

- Secondly, there's the question of why these Danites even cared about observing religious practice in the first place?
 - If they're not willing to conform to God's Law in all respects, then why give any attention to it at all?
 - They're going to a lot of trouble to have a Levite as their priest
 - And to capture all these artifacts
 - They are determined to observe a religious practice similar to the one Moses gave them though they want it on their own terms
 - Here's a second insight into the depravity of men's hearts
 - Men need something to worship but the sinful heart never finds true worship on its own
 - We were created to worship the God Who made us in His image and breathed life into us
 - A yearning for fellowship with the Creator has always been a part of human nature
 - Our soul is wired to seek someone or something to worship
 - But Paul says that the sin of the Garden distorted our appreciation of God and over time directed our worship to other things
 - Because we don't know the Creator, we substitute other things to worship

[Rom. 1:20](#) For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

[Rom. 1:21](#) For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

[Rom. 1:22](#) Professing to be wise, they became fools,

[Rom. 1:23](#) and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

- Fallen man didn't walk away from worship
- We exchange true worship for something false

- False worship can take many different forms, but it's always based in futile speculations and a darkened heart
- Finally, consider the perspective of the Levite himself
 - This is little more than employment to him
 - He hasn't experienced an encounter with the Living God
 - He is far from God
 - He's just seeking the praises of men and a good paying job
 - So when a better offer comes along, he's only too willing to pack up his tent and move to Laish
 - The Levite is not a priest, but as the saying goes, he plays one on TV
 - He's a great example of the kind of men we see serving God everywhere these days
 - Men who see godliness as a means of gain
 - Men who view ministry as a career rather than a vocation of self-sacrificial service
 - They serve for a price but the moment a better offer comes along, they bolt for the door
 - Because they were only in it for the money
 - Obviously, everyone will move around from time to time within the body of Christ
 - God may call us to serve in a place for a time
 - And then He may call us to move on in another day
 - Nothing lasts forever this side of the Kingdom
 - But when a change happens, it should be motivated by the glory of God and the needs of His people, not by our ego or pocketbook
 - If this Levite had sincere desire to serve the lord, he never would have taken Micah's offer in the first place, much less the Danite offer now

- Moreover, he would have put both Micah and the Danites to death for their apostasy at suggesting such a plan
- Clearly, this Levite isn't a man guided by the word of God
- Instead, he's doing what's right in his own eyes
- Meanwhile, Micah eventually learns of the theft, of course, and when he does, he seeks to retrieve his property

Judg. 18:21 Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the livestock and the valuables in front of them.

Judg. 18:22 When they had gone some distance from the house of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house assembled and overtook the sons of Dan.

Judg. 18:23 They cried to the sons of Dan, who turned around and said to Micah, "What is the matter with you, that you have assembled together?" ...

Judg. 18:24 He said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and have gone away, and what do I have besides? So how can you say to me, 'What is the matter with you?'"

Judg. 18:25 The sons of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, or else fierce men will fall upon you and you will lose your life, with the lives of your household."

Judg. 18:26 So the sons of Dan went on their way; and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house.

- In v.21, we're told that the Danites left Micah's town with children and livestock leading the way
 - This is an interesting detail because there is no indication that the Danites brought their own families with them
 - All we've heard about up to now is that 600 warriors left to fight the Canannites
 - Now we hear about are children and livestock, and if there are children then we know there are also women
 - Because men weren't going to take children without women to care for them
 - Secondly, they've placed these people in the front leading the group
 - That is a reversal of the normal custom
 - Traditionally, the men led the way and the rest followed

- These two details together indicate that the Danites have acquired more than Micah's idols
 - We've heard mention of the "houses" around Micah several times in this passage
 - So perhaps Micah's house of worship had attracted other worshippers who became part of a cult following
 - And now the Danites seem to have stolen the servants and livestock of these families living around Micah
 - It appears Micah has become the leader of a cult of false worship
- So the Danites robbed him of the idols and the booty of his cult
 - And they have positioned this booty in the front of their ranks because they anticipated Micah might come looking for them
 - By placing the children and animals in the front, they prevent Micah from raiding them from the rear
 - Clearly, this is treachery done in the name of following the Lord
- As they expected Micah catches them and makes a scene over the stolen goods
 - Micah complains that his "gods" have been taken away
 - Friends, if your gods can be kidnapped, then you need new gods
 - They are so impotent, they can't even protect themselves
 - Again, how curious that people worship something they make with their own hands and which they must protect by their own power
 - Why bother with such a god?
 - Isn't your god supposed to have all power?
 - Isn't your god supposed to protect you?
 - Collective, the relics of Micah's homemade temple relics were gods to him
 - This is the same thing you see today in other manmade religious systems
 - The relics aren't merely symbols of a deity

- They take on deity themselves
- Catholics are taught that the wafer they eat in their communion meal is actually the body of Jesus
- Many religions bow and pray before statues
- After a short time, it becomes impossible to separate the relic from deity
- Even we need to be careful not to confuse the physical for the spiritual in our worship of Christ
 - We can over emphasize the building where we gather, or the people who serve us or even the Bible itself
 - We must remind ourselves that our build is not “God’s house”
 - Nor are our ministers more holy or closer to God than we are
 - Nor is our printed Bible a holy and sacred object
 - All of these things are merely conveniences we lean upon in our relationship with the Lord since we live in a physical world
- In his protests, Micah says in v.24 that all he has has been taken by the Danites
 - With his house of worship gone and his priest defecting and his servants and livestock gone, his reason for living is gone
 - Micah’s dignity, power and importance were all attached to his counterfeit worship business
 - Worship is supposed to be about the deity we seek to please
 - But for Micah was about pleasing self and worshipping ego
 - Now that these tools have been taken from him, he has nothing left he says
 - Idolatry is always an empty thing in the end
 - One day idols fail us, and whether that day comes in our earthly life or in eternity, it will come
 - And usually, they fail us many times over
 - Wealth or power or fame or wisdom or looks...they all fail eventually

- When your life brings hard questions that have no easy answers, idols will remain mute and impotent
- But God's word has answers
- And God's Spirit leads us to a peace and understanding that counterfeit worship simply can't equal
- As Micah contemplated the loss of everything, he panicked because he knew he had nothing
 - You and I worship a God that can't be confined to one place
 - He doesn't live to give meaning to our earthly lives, he offers us eternal life
 - He doesn't simply provide for our days in this world, he has set aside an inheritance in the Kingdom to come
- When the Danites hear Micah's protests, they threaten him
 - They tell him that if he keeps protesting, then he dies
 - They sound like organized criminals, making threats and forcing others to submit to their treachery
 - As a result, Micah is left without his false temple
 - But his sin will now travel on without him
 - The Danites carry Micah's idolatry into their new home

Judg. 18:27 Then they took what Micah had made and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burned the city with fire.

Judg. 18:28 And there was no one to deliver them, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone, and it was in the valley which is near Beth-rehob. And they rebuilt the city and lived in it.

Judg. 18:29 They called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father who was born in Israel; however, the name of the city formerly was Laish.

Judg. 18:30 The sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land.

Judg. 18:31 So they set up for themselves Micah's graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh.

- The Danites reach Laish and destroy the town in a cruel and unnecessary way
 - The remote location of the town prevented the inhabitants from calling for help
 - Ironically, the Canaanites originally picked this place because it was so remote
 - In the end, that made it vulnerable too
 - After arriving, they establish a new priesthood, beginning with the Levite who went with the Danites
 - Only now does Samuel reveal the man's name, Jonathan
 - Samuel waits to reveal the man's name because he is a descendent of Moses through Gershom
 - The name Manasseh is almost universally understood to be a reference to Moses
 - But Moses' name was changed by later scribes to preserve Moses' name among Jews
- Samuel's point is to shock the reader in Israel with the truth of this man's identity
 - Just think...a direct descendant of the Law giver is himself leading the people into idolatry!
 - In fact, it may be possible that this man is only two generations removed from Moses himself
 - Which if true would date this story to much earlier in the time of Judges
 - In any case, my how far the people have fallen!
 - Idolatry plagued Israel for over six centuries
 - Countless sin and depravity took place among God's people because of the disobedience an Ephraimite and the Danites
 - As a result of their part in instigating idolatry in Israel, these two tribes are missing from the list of tribes in Revelation 7
 - In Revelation 7, the Lord will bring faith again to Israel in the last days through 144,000 Jewish men

- But none will come from the tribes of Dan and Ephraim
- This text doesn't say, but not all the Danites made this trip to Laish
 - Some remained behind in the land God allotted them
 - But the tribe disappears in time
 - Over time they become captives of Philistines through intermarriage and conflict
 - Notice the mention of the captivity in v.30, indicating God's judgment on this nation
 - By the time you get to 1Chronicles, the tribe has completely disappeared from the record of tribes in Israel
- So our first story is reveals a breakdown of the religious structures of Jewish society
 - Israel is following other gods in a systematic fashion
 - They are leaving behind the proper priesthood
 - They are moving away from the house of God
 - And they are forgetting both the God Who saved them and the place He gave them
 - Next time, we begin the second story of the three that end Judges, which brings us to the end of the book
 - That story will reveal a breakdown in the social fabric of the nation
 - Leaving us with the third and final story to be found in the book of Ruth