



**SESSION OBJECTIVE: JUDGES 17:1-18:31**

To understand the spiritual condition of Israel after Samson.

## It Is (Not) Well

Thus far, the book of Judges has only gotten worse in terms of moral and spiritual failure. Israel is without a king, and though God has been gracious to raise up a judge to redeem His people each time they are caught in this cycle of sin, oppression, repentance, and deliverance, the people continuously go back to their sin. On top of that, they seem to be getting worse after each cycle. Even the character of the judges has deteriorated. The first judge was a decently righteous man (Othniel), and as you now know, the last judge was a pretty awful picture of moral uprightness (Samson). Both the people and the judges have spiraled into further and further disobedience and discord, and it is becoming more and more clear how badly they need a king. Thus, the final portion of Judges begins.

Chapter 17 begins what you could think of as the *third act* of Judges. The first act (chapters 1-2) set up the story of Judges with some background information. The second act (chapters 3-16) account for all of the judges that God raised up to judge during Israel's tumultuous history with the surrounding hostile nations. In this final act, we are left with a now far worse iteration of Israel and no judges. We see their spiritual depravity (chapters 17 and 18), their moral depravity (chapter 19), and their social depravity (chapters 20, and 21). The story ends very grimly, but on purpose. All of this is building towards what follows Judges. Ruth immediately follows Judges and provides some background context and an important lineage for King David. Immediately following Ruth is 1 Samuel, which introduces the reader to the very first Israelite monarchy. When there is no king, "everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Jg. 17:6), which as it turns out, is not right at all.

## A Made-Up Ministry

Chapter 17 opens with an Ephraimite family of which we know very little about. Apparently a woman had a sizable amount of money taken from her (1,100 shekels), and upon discovering it had been stolen cursed the thief and her son, a man named Micah, heard the curse. The story opens with Micah confessing that it was actually he who took it. Things look pretty promising in this exchange between Micah and his mother, but let's take a closer look.

### THE POSITIVES

One positive is that Micah confesses his sin to his mother (Jg. 17:2). This, in light of the recent stories we've read in Judges, is a welcome detail. Second, Micah's mother blesses her son in the name of the LORD (Jg. 17:2). That the family has centered themselves around the Yahweh tradition is also hopeful given Israel's seemingly total abandonment of the LORD. Third, the mother consecrates the silver back to the LORD (Jg. 17:3). These are surprising details for sure, but there are some major red flags as well.

### THE NEGATIVES

That Micah confessed his sin is good, but it doesn't seem as good in light of the fact that he seemed worried more about the curse that the mother pronounced on the thief than simply doing what was right. Second, Micah had already demonstrated a willingness to break not one, but two of God's commandments. Stealing is a sin (Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:19), and so is contempt for one's mothers (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Third, though the mother consecrates the money to the LORD, she then gives it back to Micah instead of to a priest. Fourth, in a strange act of idolatry, they take 200 shekels of silver and make a graven image, another commandment of God that they have now violated (Ex. 20:4-5; Deut. 5:8-9). After making the idols, Micah makes an ephod (a priestly garment), and sets up his own makeshift temple, and even ordains one of his sons as a priest.

We are then met with Judges 17:6, which serves as a theme for the rest of the book: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Here, Micah is doing just that; establishing worship, a priestly system, and a means of confession and repentance, all of which are in direct violation of what the Scripture actually teaches.

## The Levite Priest

The next portion of narrative introduces us to another individual, a Levite priest who we later discover is named Jonathon (Jg. 18:30). This Levite leaves Bethlehem looking for more work, and casually happens upon Micah and his household (Jg. 17:8). After a brief conversation, Micah seizes a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Up until this point, he had no legitimate priest, but now a true Levite has arrived and Micah offers to pay him to be his priest (Jg. 17:10), hoping that the presence of a Levite will mean definite blessing (Jg. 17:13). Micah has already crafted his own god, and now he has taken matters into his own hands once more to employ a priest. This agreement between Micah and Jonathon further demonstrate the theme set out in verse 6. Everyone is doing what they *think* is right, but it isn't.

## Dan's Depravity

Chapter 18 is really where the major details of this story come into play. We have been introduced to Micah and the Levite, and now we meet the tribe of Dan. This tribe is named after the first son born to Jacob by Rachel's maid Bilhah in Genesis 30:6. The tribe was initially given the western coast of Canaan after the

Israelites came to take the land, but given the prominence of some Philistine strongholds, they migrated north to a place called Laish. Chapter 18 details how they came to take the land.

Men from Dan came to spy out the land in Laish, but stop at Beth-Micah beforehand. While there, the men meet the Levite priest, find out why he is there, and ask for him to tell them whether or not the LORD was with them (Jg. 18:3-5). Afterwards, they scout out Laish and discover that it is favorable land for them. Judges 18:7 gives a clear picture of their disposition towards the land and the ease of invasion: “Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were there, how they lived in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting, lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth, and how they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone.” The land was good, and there was no one there to protect them from the coming siege.

After reporting back to the tribe, they mobilized to go and take what was theirs, but again stop in Beth-Micah (Jg. 18:13). The original scouts remembered the Levite, the household gods, the ephod, and the carved images and sent 600 men to surround the gate while they went into Micah’s makeshift temple to take all of his belongings. With a bit of blackmail, force, and reason, the men also convinced the Levite to come with them: “Keep quiet; put your hand on your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?” (Jg. 18:19)

As the Danites leave, they place the women, children, and livestock in front of the warriors. At first this seems cowardly, but is actually an ingenious defensive maneuver. They understand that Micah will certainly come and try and reclaim what was his. By putting the most compromised parts of their tribe out front, they position their warriors in the rear which will be the first to counter Micah’s forces. Predictably, Micah tries to come and take back his belongings and his priest, but fails. Micah had procured all that was needed to carve out household gods and procure a priest by pay, and all of those things failed him. He is left in misery: “What do I have left?” (Jg. 18:24) All of his attempts at glory and blessing have failed him, and he is left alone, knowing that Dan would overtake him if he pushed them any further (Jg. 18:26). The story closes with Dan overtaking Laish, killing everyone there, burning the city, and then rebuilding it for themselves (Jg. 18:27-28). They establish their city by naming it after their tribe, Dan, and establish a house of worship with their Levitical priest to lead the way.

Many details in this story seem like they should be good. A Levitical priest and one of the tribes of Israel taking land for themselves? These seems like good parts of the story. The problem is how these events unfold. They are not the doing of Yahweh, but of sinful Israel. The Levite is a pay-for-play priest, and the land the Israelites take is not the land they were initially given. Everyone is doing what they believe is right, but they are off the mark by just a little. Unfortunately, missing the mark just a little is missing the mark completely.

## What About Now?

The major theme of this story is about how badly things go when we begin to do what we think is right rather than what God has said is right. We may get some of the details correct, but the way we go about accomplishing them often is wrought with sin and destruction. Micah creates an idol and essentially bribes a priest to work for him. The priest takes the bribe from Dan and betray his patron. Dan destroys an entire city that wasn’t meant to be theirs. The way these things happen is wrong, but not by a lot. One positive takeaway is the reality of redemption, even in light of such a bad past. Dan is not cast in good light in this story for a variety of reasons, but they will eventually end up fighting on behalf of God’s anointed, David, against the

wicked ruler Saul (1 Chron. 12:35). This story, in light of the rest of OT history, assures us that our past can be overcome by the grace of God, and we can be used positively for His glorious purposes.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Judges 17:1-6. Who are the two people in this story? In your own words, summarize it. What is positive, and what is negative? Is there anything additionally positive or negative you noticed?

---

---

2. Read Judges 17:7-13. Where does the Levite come from? What does Micah offer him? Does he accept the offer?

---

---

### Day Two

1. Read Judges 18:1-6. What tribe is introduced in this passage? Where are they going and what are they trying to accomplish? What do they ask the Levite when they are in Beth-Micah?

---

---

2. Read Judges 18:7-10. What did the spies find in Laish? What was their report?

---

---

### Day Three

1. Read Judges 18:11-13. How many men embarked on the journey to take Laish? Where did they go first?

---

---

2. Read Judges 18:14-20. In your own words, summarize the details of this passage? Do you think the Levite was given much of a choice by the men of Dan? Were there any innocent parties in this story?

---

---

### Day Four

1. Read Judges 18:21-26. When Micah confronts the men of Dan, what does he say? What is their response? Why is Micah so distraught?

---

---

2. Read Judges 18:27-31. Does Dan end up taking over Laish? How so? What is the name of the Levite? How does this story end?
- 
- 

## Week 15 Discussion: Taking Things Into Your Own Hands

One of the major themes of not only chapters 17 through 21, but the entire book of Judges, comes from Judges 17:6: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Chapter 17 and 18 highlights the spiritual failings of Micah, the Levite, and the tribe of Dan, namely because they all attempted to do what was right in their own eyes and ended up doing even more wrong. Talk as a group about how wrong this can go when you attempt to take matters into your own hands to accomplish something that only God can accomplish in your life.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever gotten in the way of God's working in your life? Share with the group how so.
2. Have you ever experienced consequences for rushing a decision that wasn't meant to be rushed? If so, share with the group about what went wrong.
3. Why do you think patience is a fruit of the Spirit? How does having patience negate the tendencies to do things "our way" as seen in Judges 17 and 18?
4. When you take something into your own hands (rather than letting God do His work in His timing), who is affected the most negatively?
5. What are some good steps to take before making any major decisions in order to avoid getting in God's way?
6. How have the consequences of your actions slowed the work of God in your life?

## Takeaways:

1. Micah, the Levite, and Dan all did what was right in their own eyes, and it was wrong.
2. The tribe of Dan took the Levite from Micah, overtook the city of Laish, and renamed it Dan.

### **PRAYER REQUESTS:**