

Immediate Context

The remaining five chapters of Judges tell two separate stories. Both serve to provide insight into the welfare of the tribes of Israel on a national and a spiritual basis. Chapters 17 and 18 address the inheritance of the tribe of Dan. Chapters 19 through 21 address a crisis with the tribe of Benjamin and Israel's first civil war. One theme defines both of these narratives: *"In those days there was no king is Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25) This statement serves as a warning to us as we read these texts: **this is descriptive truth (telling us what they did), not prescriptive truth (telling us what we should do).**

Judges 17:1-6 – Micah and His Mother

Our experience with the tribe of Ephraim has not been positive in Judges. The Ephraimites argued with Gideon after they were not initially called into battle against the Midianites (Judges 8:1-3) and then with Jephthah after he did not call them to fight against the Ammonites (Judges 12:1-6). They tended to be a prideful tribe. Micah was an Ephraimite. What kind of man was he? **He was a man who would steal from his own mother. He was also one who believed in God (or a god) and was fearful of the consequences of a curse. His idolatrous understanding of worship was clearly influenced by the Gentiles; it wasn't based upon the Word of God.**

Why did Micah confess his theft to his mother? **His confession followed her curse upon the one who stole her money. It is likely that he was afraid of the consequences of the curse.**

Micah's mother seems to have a godly sentiment in response to the return of her money. What is likely behind her actions? **Having cursed her son, whom she loved despite the fact that he stole from her, she may have been trying to appease God to offset the curse she unknowingly pronounced against him. By dedicating the money to God, perhaps she believed the curse would be lifted.**

Identify the errors in the actions of Micah and his mother in verses 3-5.

- She dedicated the silver "to the Lord" but gave it to her son rather than the priests of Israel (Leviticus 22:2).
- She made a graven image for worship (Exodus 20:4).
- He made an ephod, which defied the ephod of Israel's high priest (Exodus 28:4).
- Micah defied the Levitical priesthood by making one of his sons a priest (Numbers 17).
- Micah made idol gods (Exodus 20:3).

Did Israel have a king? See Deuteronomy 33:2-5 and Judges 8:22-23. Yes, the Lord was their king. He established a priesthood and maintained a house of worship and a means by which He could give both general (law) and specific (Urim and Thummim) direction to His people. Israel had a king, but Israel did not recognize the authority of their king. They lived as though they had no king. **Ultimately, a king is a source of authority; the Israelites lived as people who had no source of authority and therefore did whatever seemed right to them.** The choices and consequences of such a lifestyle are on display in these chapters.

Judges 17:7-13 – Micah and the Levite

The young Levite sojourned (temporarily lived) in Bethlehem before heading into the hill country of Ephraim. It is important to recognize that the Levites were given specific cities to live within the allotment to the other 11 tribes of Israel. Bethlehem was NOT one of those cities; therefore either this young man or his parents had ventured out of their allotted city to live within one of the other cities of Judah.

Why is this young Levite on the road? He was looking for a new place to live for a while. He had wander lust. He was not content with God's prescription for him so he was out looking for something "better." **He has already identified himself as a man of moral compromise.**

How can we describe the transaction that took place between Micah and the Levite? This is auction block religion. The Levite sold his services as a man of God to Micah for 10 shekels a year, a suit of clothing, room and board. Micah thought he was getting a deal to have a real Levite as a priest; however this was a compromised Levite acting in a capacity that was contrary to God's will. It is important to recognize that Micah obviously had an awareness of God's law if he recognized the significance of the Levitical priesthood. However, he didn't care to follow all of God's laws... just those that were convenient. **This represents much of American cultural Christianity, which seeks to use Christ's name but has no regard for His will or authority.**

What was the attitude of the Levite? He was content. He thought he had found what he was looking for (a place to sojourn) and was happy about the arrangement. He was quite comfortable.

Why did Micah worship the Lord? Micah wanted God to bless him. Perhaps he was still worried about the curse cast by his mother or perhaps he just wanted more and therefore believed that having a genuine Levite priest would coerce God to bless him. Micah viewed God as a tool to be used rather than as a king to be worshipped and obeyed.

Judges 18:1-10 – Dan Seeks an Inheritance

Dan was given a tribal allotment by Joshua (see *Joshua 19:40-48*). Why weren't they able to occupy the land given to them? See Judges 1:34-36. Dan had initially made progress in occupying their inheritance but over time the indwelling Amorites pressed them up into the less fruitful hill country while the Amorites remained in the more fruitful valleys. Their lack of spiritual fortitude was reflected in their loss of land and livelihood to the Amorites.

How did the Danites recognize the voice of the Levite? Apparently this Levite got around and had spent some time during his sojournings in the land of Dan. They had made his acquaintance before and recognized him at this encounter.

How did the Levite describe the reason he was living with Micah? He described his attachment to Micah as an employer/employee relationship. There was no indication of attachment to Micah or a calling of God to further validate or grant any permanence to his presence there. **If someone were to ask you why you are where you are, what would you say?**

What is odd about the Danites request for the Levite to inquire whether God would bless their journey? They were inquiring about God's will for a journey they had already begun from an illegitimate priest serving false idols.

What did the blessing of the Levite mean? See *Psalms 33:18*. He stated that the Lord was watching over them and would bless their journey. To have the eye of the Lord upon you is a blessing for those who fear God and seek to follow His commandments.

What authority did the Levite have to give this blessing and did it have any legitimacy? As we will learn later, this Levite did not descend from the priestly lineage of Aaron, so he had no business acting as a priest in the first place. He was also acting as an idolatrous priest in opposition to the prescribed teachings of God's Word. He had no legitimacy and I don't believe his blessing carried any authority to it. Don't be fooled just because God allowed the Danites to be successful on their journey and take over a different land. **There are lots of false prophets and false servants who prophecy and do things that look successful in the eyes of the world but are not successful in the eyes of God.**

What were the primary factors behind the decision of the Danites to take the land of Laish? The land was prosperous and the people were wealthy, unready for attack, and unattached to others who might come to their aid. The Danites could not overcome the powerful Amorites so they needed a weaker adversary. In the process of giving up on the Amorites, they left an infestation of Gentiles in the Promised Land that would remain a burden on their brethren.

What was the moral justification for taking this land? Is it legitimate? Review Joshua 19:40-48 and Judges 1:34-36 again. God had given them other lands but they did not occupy it because of their lack of faith. To say that the Lord granted them a different land was only a statement to make them feel better about what they were going to do. In reality, God's will was not a factor in their decision making. **People will often use God's name to put a gilded edge on their personal choices. That doesn't make it legitimate.**

Judges 18:11-26 – One Levite Price, Going Once, Going Twice, Sold...

What do we learn about the Danites in verses 14-17? They were superstitious, idolatrous, and unashamed thieves.

What do we learn about the Levite in verses 18-20? Though initially concerned about the theft, he had no real loyalty to Micah; he was ambitious; he would compromise his commitments for gain. He was also a coward because he joined the Danites in the middle of their entourage. There is no mixed emotion in him about this transaction. He is happy!

Is it better for the Levite to be the priest to a tribe rather than the priest for the household of one man? Who determines what is best for a man? The decision of the Levite was not based upon seeking God's will. Should a man leave the pastorate of a small flock to take on the ministry of a larger church just because the opportunity presents itself? Are we to always run to the bigger and better opportunities? It is clear that their way of thinking is worldly and completely out of step with God's callings and His established Word. When we look at the full scope of what is happening, perhaps we could phrase this question differently. Is it better for a false priest to deceive a family or to deceive a whole tribe? I believe the answer to this question is clear.

What was the net gain/loss for Micah as we look back to the beginning of Chapter 17 when he initially stole the silver from his mother? He has lost everything that the money was invested in; he has accumulated additional sin and the pain of this humiliation and destruction of relationship with the Levite. **Nothing good and enduring was gained from his sin, despite what looked like a period of prosperity.**

Judges 18:27-31 – Dan Finds a Home

The tribe of Dan successfully takes the land from the people of Laish by the sword and establish a center of cult worship that competed with the Lord's tabernacle in Shiloh. They had a Levitical priest, who happened to be the grandson of Moses (or perhaps Moses and Gershom were just significant names on his family tree). Was this a successful mission for the tribe of Dan? No, they may have obtained temporal worldly success but there would be eternal consequences for this sin. What they did and how they did it did not please God. They had also abandoned their responsibility to overcome the Gentiles within their inheritance and the Amorites would now prove to be a problem that their brethren would have to overcome.