



## STRANGE TIMES

### PART 3

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Welcome to Let the Bible Speak. We return to our story this week in the book of Judges. It's a story about a breakdown in morals and principles that reverberated from the home throughout society. God's people needed direction. After the death of Joshua, the children of Israel fell into a moral mess. They needed to be rebuked and brought back to the truth and the way God's people were supposed to be living. They were adrift, however, with (as the book of Judges says on more than one occasion) every man doing what was right in his own eyes. That is, instead of looking to the law of God as their standard of conduct, they were using their own instincts and desires to determine right from wrong. This led to great moral and spiritual confusion as we've been seeing in this story. It is the story of a Hebrew named Micah who was an idolator – an idolator who claimed to be serving God. His mother was just like him. She participated in his sin by actually giving him an idol to worship.

As we learned last week in Judges 17, a young religious leader comes along and instead of rebuking Micah, he endorses Micah's sin by agreeing to live with him and serve as a priest within his shrine. It's hard to imagine people claiming to serve God doing all of that! Or is it? When man leans on his own wisdom and understanding instead of seeking and doing the will of God, we get into the kind of spiritual shape we see around us even today, and that is inside AND outside of the RELIGIOUS world. Today, we'll see what this failure in the family and the compromise with the religious leadership pointed to in the culture as a whole We'll read on now in Judges 18:1-6

***"In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them. So the children of Dan sent five men of their family from their territory, men of valor from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and search it. They said to them, "Go, search the land." So they went to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there. While they were at the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. They turned aside and***

***said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here?" He said to them, "Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest." So they said to him, "Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous." And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The presence of the LORD be with you on your way.""***

After what we saw last week in chapter 17, this Levite's endorsement comes as no surprise. But it led many people into sin and trouble. That's where we'll focus in the conclusion of our study today.

After inheriting the land of Canaan, some of the Israelites did exactly what Joshua warned them not to do. Shortly after Joshua died, they fell into idolatry. We could say it was hybrid form of idolatry, making images to stand for the true God – which was just as wrong. This compromise, however, allowed them to convince themselves they were still serving God while they were doing something God's word did not authorize. The first instance of this we can read about was in the family of a man named Micah. Micah was immoral and self-willed, even though he made a significant effort and show of worshipping God. According to Judges 17, he stole a large amount of silver from his own mother. She discovered the theft and cursed the thief. Micah became afraid and brought the money back to her. She is relieved because she says she had dedicated the money to God. But as good as that sounds, her intention was to have it made into a graven image or an idol to aid in the worship of God. Micah already had several of these in his house, but she decides to give him yet another one. She has the silver melted down and made into an idolatrous image and then gives it to Micah. He takes it and adds it to his household shrine and enlists his son to be a priest for him.

So, here we have a family with some serious spiritual problems. They ignore the word of God and immorally set about to serve God in whatever way they choose. But to make matters worse, a young Levite passes by who is out looking for a place to live and work. The Levites were the priests and religious leaders in Israel. Micah knows that and offers this young Levite a lucrative position serving as priest in his idolatrous shrine. The Levite should have rebuked Micah and refused to have any part in it, but instead, he agrees and moves in with Micah's family and goes to work serving in Micah's sinful shrine. So, we have a failure in the family AND we have a failure on the part of the spiritual leaders who should have cried out against this and demanded reform. The young priest doesn't do this though. He compromises himself and the truth, and it only gets worse from there.

Chapter 18 tells us that a group of men from the tribe of Dan come travelling through the country where Micah lives, and they meet this young Levite and even recognize him! Now, they are on a misguided and even ungodly mission. They intend to go and find some isolated little town up north that they can swoop down upon and take over and make that their land. They set their sights on a remote place called Laish, which was a Phoenician city north of the Sea of Galilee and near Mount Hermon. Now, since the Israelites were supposed to conquer the land of Canaan and possess it, you might ask "what's wrong with that?" There was a lot wrong with it. First, that's not the land that God gave the tribe of Dan. God was particular about where each tribe was to live. He apportioned the Promised Land in the way He saw fit, and they were to do as God, through Joshua, had instructed. God allotted a different place for the Danites to dwell in, but due to their own faithless failures, they took matters into their own hands and decided to go up and settle where they pleased – in an area that would be much easier to take and control. Second, according to the law, as recorded in Deuteronomy 20:10-15, when they did go into the land they were assigned to take, they were to first offer conditions of peace and try to settle the land that way. Instead, not only were the Danites going to a place they had no business going, but they also intended to just pounce and plunder a defenseless city, kill their people, burn the city to the ground, and

rebuild it as their own. The mission was wrong and sinful from beginning to end. But they were like many people tend to be, DOING WHAT WAS RIGHT IN THEIR OWN EYES, they convinced themselves this was a holy mission, and they wanted the confirmation of a religious leader to make them feel even better about it.

I told you last week, you can find a preacher somewhere who will tell you something that is wrong is right. In fact, in some cases, you can find a LOT of preachers who will tell you that something which is wrong is right – but that doesn't make it right. This Levite gives them his approval. He tells them God will smile and be with them in their campaign. He lied and, in the process, emboldened this people to continue in sin. What a shame! What a tragedy! Let's read a little more about it in verses 3-7: "While they were at the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. They turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here?" He said to them, "Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest." So they said to him, "Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous." And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The presence of the LORD be with you on your way." So the five men departed and went to Laish. They saw the people who were there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. There were no rulers in the land who might put them to shame for anything. They were far from the Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone."

This band of spies returns to the leaders of their tribe, and they report that Laish will be an easy victory. They tell them to take their army and go ahead with the mission. And they tell them, 'by the way, on your way there, you should pass by the house of a man named Micah, because he has quite a shrine of idols in his house and he has a priest that he's hired, and all of that is there for the taking as well.' Verses 15-18: "So they turned aside there, and came to the house of the young Levite man—to the house of Micah—and greeted him. The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land went up. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image. The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men who were armed with weapons of war. When these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?""

Those spies had come back on this compromising priest and would now take full advantage of him. They told him to put his hand over his mouth and listen to their plan. They made him an offer too good to refuse. They asked, 'would you rather be a priest for one man or for a whole tribe?' They said, 'Come with us. It will be much bigger church. It will be a bigger paycheck. It will be more prestige and recognition.' Verse 20: "So the priest's heart was glad; and he took the ephod, the household idols, and the carved image, and took his place among the people." So, they just ransack Micah's house and take away his priest and Micah gets as good as he gave. Micah is outraged and he goes after this band of men but when he catches up to them, he soon finds out that he's no match. They tell him that if he knows what's good for him, he will turn around and go home. And so, he does. His own sin and lack of principle leaves him without a leg to stand on. You see, when people get involved in religious and spiritual compromise, it always turns into much more than originally intended. It comes back to bite. Micah now wants truth, right, justice, and morals, but only when it benefits him. He wants everybody to do what is right in HIS eyes. But they Danites – and this traitorous young Levite – are doing what is right in THEIR eyes. But nobody seems overly concerned about what is right in GOD's eyes. And therefore, you have division, confusion, chaos, and SIN.

This plan by the tribe of Dan turns into an even greater spiritual disaster. They go up to Laish, they plunder and burn it down, they rebuild and settle there, they rename it 'Dan', and they set up Micah's idolatrous shrine there. This self-appointed land of the tribe of Dan far to the north becomes a rival to the true and legitimate worship center which was, at that time, in Shiloh. A dark history that would haunt Israel for generations develops here as Dan becomes a hotbed of sin and false worship. It becomes the icon of idolatry in Israel throughout the years to come. Look at verses 30-31: "Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. So, they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh."

Notice, this idolatry started with Micah and his apostate family. A preacher gives it his approval, and a tribe takes it and normalizes and institutionalizes it until it becomes a thorn in the side of a nation for generations. The years roll by, and Israel gets an earthly monarchy. Only four kings in, however, an inept young king allows the nation is divided into a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. King Jeroboam assumed control over the north, and he is determined not to let his subjects be led back to the house of David and what is right. So, do you remember what he did? 1 Kings 12:29 tells us he set up alters at Bethel and Dan to keep the people away from the temple in Jerusalem. And the bible says that because a great sin unto the people. Fast forward another thousand years. John the aged apostle receives the Revelation on the isle of Patmos. He beholds the hosts of heaven, and that symbolic or figurative number of 144,000 people sealed from the Old Testament tribes of Israel, and he names the number from each tribe... except one. Do you know which one is missing? The tribe of Dan. That is likely because they became so corrupted by idolatry and sin, that they were wiped from the heavenly record shown to John.

Now friend, that's how digression and apostasy work in the church. That's how a people lose their way and drift from the law of God until they're gone altogether. That's how the truth is lost to a people for sometimes centuries. And the same principle is why there was a falling away from the church Jesus built and that the apostles revealed and the proliferation of thousands of diverse and conflicting so-called Christian religions and denominations. That's what happens when we say it doesn't make any difference, and everyone does what it right in their own eyes. That's how a culture loses its moral compass and moves away from God until God completely unknown to them. Because no one respects God's authority and the absolute, complete authority of his word. Every man does what is wrong in his own eyes. And it doesn't take long for that to happen. Friends, this story we've been learning about takes places not long after the death of Joshua and the victory of the people entering the promised land.

But I want you to see something else. Look back at verse 30: "Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land." Here, the name of that young Levite priest is finally revealed. He is called the grandson (or great-grandson) of Manasseh. But according to some scholars such as James E. Smith, the Hebrew text originally said "Moses" and it is supposed that scribes later changed it because they could not imagine a grandson of Moses agreeing to serve as a priest in a house of idols. If that is true, it certainly is startling. But it's also a warning. It should wake us all up to the danger of drifting. And if there is to be a return to God and truth, and religious unity and biblical purity, it must start at home and instructing our children and grandchildren to reverence the scriptures and to look at them as our only guide and authority. It will require religious leaders who will only preach and practice and allow a thus sayeth the Lord. When every man does what

is right in his own eyes, however, confusion abounds and so does sin and apostasy, and people, as a result, are lost.

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