

Exegetical Notes – Judges 18:1-31  
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Background: When Joshua died, the conquest of The Promised Land was only partially completed. In large part, Israel had followed the instructions of YHWH regarding the taking of the land and the destruction of the indigenous population who lived there, but Israel had not followed God completely. Large sections of the indigenous population remained and were not under Israeli control.

From the time of the occupation (around 1380 BC) until the beginning of the Monarchs (1050 BC) Israel was a THEOCRACY, a nation whose king was God. Israel was supposed to listen to and follow the word of the Lord, but as we have already seen, Israel was not good at following the instructions of YHWH. Her failure to do so left her in trouble time and again. Partial obedience to the word of the Lord is disobedience to the word of the Lord and always leads to disaster. “Judges provides many examples of the principle that OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW BRINGS PEACE, WHEREAS DISOBEDIENCE MEANS OPPRESSION AND DEATH” (Charles Ryrie). This is the constantly repeated lesson of the Book of Judges. Judges is the story of the time in Israel’s early history when “Every man did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6 and 21:25). This always results in chaos and disaster.

In the Book of Judges a recurrent theme emerges: Step one - The people are following the will of YHWH; Step two - The people stop obeying the word of the Lord; Step three - An enemy arises that oppresses the people of God; Step four - The people cry out to God for help; Step five - God answers Israel’s prayer by sending them a deliverer (a judge to lead her, a Messiah); Step six - The people repent and return to the Lord. Then, the process begins again. Judges simply repeats this pattern over and over again. God’s people are “stiff necked and disobedient.” God is forever faithful. If God’s people would follow God’s word, they could save themselves hardship, worry, pain, etc. But they choose to do what seems right in their own eyes.

## Judges 18:1-31

### Verses 1-4

*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. <sup>2</sup> So 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. <sup>3</sup> When 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?” <sup>4</sup> He told them what Micah had done for him, and said, “He has hired me and I am his priest.”*

- See Judges 1:34. The Danites had not driven the Ammonites out of their assigned territory. Since they did not do as the Lord commanded and were still not willing to do what God had commanded, they resolved to find a better place for themselves to settle. Remember that this was the time, when everyone did what seemed right in their own eyes.
- The Danites sent spies to go and find them a place to settle. The spies went to the territory given to the tribe of Ephraim. When the spies came to the house of Micah (see Judges 17), they decided to rest for the night. As they were there, they recognized the voice of the Levite that Micah had hired to serve at the shrine Micah had built. This may mean that they knew the Levite was not an Ephraimite because of his accent. They inquired as to how the Levite came to be in Micah’s household and he told them that Micah had hired him to serve as the priest of Micah’s shrine.

### Verses 5-6

*<sup>5</sup> Then they said to him, “Please inquire of God to learn whether our journey will be successful.”*

*<sup>6</sup> The priest answered them, “Go in peace. Your journey has the LORD’s approval.”*

- Apparently because of the priest’s Levitical connections, whatever they may have been, through him the spies decided to ask YHWH to bless their

search for a new home for the tribe of Dan. They apparently did not understand that what they were doing defied the will of God.

- The priest told them that YHWH approved of what they were doing.

### **Verses 7-13**

***<sup>7</sup> 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.***

***<sup>8</sup> When they returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their fellow Danites asked them, “How did you find things?”***

***<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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.”***

***<sup>11</sup> Then six hundred men of the Danites, armed for battle, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> From there they went on to the hill country of Ephraim and came to Micah’s house.***

- The spies went to Laish (see Joshua 19:47). Laish was a small town north of Israel which had no internal government and was protected by Sidonians, but it had little value and was far away from its protectors. The spies agreed that the Danites should attack this town and claim it as their own.
- 600 Danites, armed for battle, marched out to capture Laish. Eventually this small army came to the house of Micah.

### **Verses 14-21**

***<sup>14</sup> 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.” <sup>15</sup> So they turned in there and went to the house of the young Levite at Micah’s place and greeted him. <sup>16</sup> The six hundred Danites, armed for battle, stood at the entrance of the gate. <sup>17</sup> 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?"***

***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.***

- When the Danites were at Micah's house the spies told them about the ephod and the idols in Micah's shrine. The Danites resolved to take the valuable items that were in the shrine. As the army stood guard at the gate, the spies entered the house intending to steal the items in the shrine.
- Part of the Levite's assignment was to guard the contents of the shrine. When he tried to stop the spies from stealing the items in the shrine, they offered him a better job as the priest of their tribe.
- Pleased with the offer, which he readily accepted, the Levite took the items in the shrine himself and left with the Danites.
- The Danites arranged their group to look like a peaceful group of nomads and moved on.

#### **Verses 22-26**

***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?'"***

***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.***

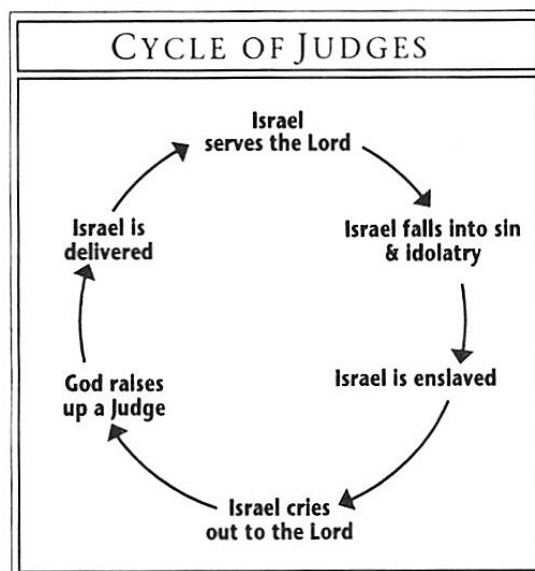
- When Micah realized that he had been robbed, he set out after the Danites. He challenged the Danites to battle. But they told him to back off. Micah realized that he was outnumbered, so he went back home without his belongings.

## Verses 27-31

***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. 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.***

- The Danites continued on to Laish. They sacked and burned the city. Then they rebuilt the city and called it Dan. They settled there.
- They set up the idol which they had stolen from Micah as their god and worshiped it all the time that the Tabernacle of YHWH was at Shiloh.
- They hired Jonathan, the grandson of Moses to be their priest. (We do not know if Jonathan replaced the Levite or whether the Levite was Jonathan the Grandson of Moses all along.)



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