

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Micah and the Danites 18:1-31

In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

2 And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valor, from Zorah, and

from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there.

3 When they were by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite: and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this place? and what hast thou here?

4 And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest.

5 And they said unto him, Ask counsel we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous.

6 And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the Lord is your way wherein ye go.

7 Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; and there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in any thing; and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man.

8 And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brethren said unto them, What say ye?

9 And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them: for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good: and are ye still? be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land.

10 When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land: for God hath given it into your hands; a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth.

11 And there went from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men appointed with weapons of war.

18:12-21 STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

12 And they went up, and pitched in Kirjath-jearim, in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan unto this day: behold, it is behind Kirjath-jearim.

13 And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah.

14 Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren. Do ye know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image? now therefore consider what ye have to do.

15 And they turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, even unto the house of Micah, and saluted him.

16 And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which were of the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate.

17 And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, and came in thither, and took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image: and the priest stood in the entering of the gate with the six hundred men that were appointed with weapons of war.

18 And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye?

19 And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?

20 And the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people.

21 So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the cattle and the carriage before them.

22 And when they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men that were in the houses near to Micah's house were gathered together, and overtook the children of Dan.

23 And they cried unto the children of Dan. And they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company?

24 And he said, Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? and what is this that ye say unto me, What aileth thee?

25 And the children of Dan said unto him, Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life, with the lives of thy household.

26 And the children of Dan went their way: and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back unto his house.

27 And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire.

28 And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zidon, and they had no business with any man; and it was in the valley that lieth by Beth-rehob. And they built a city, and dwelt therein.

29 And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born unto Israel: howbeit the name of the city was Laish at the first.

30 And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.

31 And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

18:1,2 STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

1. *When did the events recorded in this chapter take place?*

18:1

The events recorded in this chapter occurred in the time before the establishment of the monarchy. Chapter eighteen follows immediately upon chapter seventeen, and the two chapters together form what is often called the first appendix to the book of Judges. This second reference to the lack of a centralized government is an indication of the book's having been written when the people were clamoring for a king or immediately after Samuel had anointed Saul, Israel's first king. Certainly the events did not necessarily happen after the death of Samson, although his judgeship has already been recorded (chapters thirteen through sixteen). This establishment of false worship in Dan probably occurred quite early in the time of the judges. Since reference is made to the cessation of services of the house of God in Shiloh, the events were probably not recorded until after the Philistines captured the Ark and took it away from the land of Israel in the days of Eli (I Samuel 4).

2. *Where was Zorah? 18:2*

Zorah was a city on the border of the land given to the people in the tribe of Dan. It lay near Eshtaol and Ir-Shemesh (see Joshua 19:41). This spot was the birthplace of Samson as we learn from Judges 13:2. In Joshua 15:33, the site is also listed with the cities belonging to the people in the tribe of Judah. It must therefore have been on the border between the two tribes with Judah lying on the southeast and Dan on the northwest. After the Babylonian captivity, the site was occupied by the children of Judah (Nehemiah 11:29). A modern village called Sur'a occupies a summit of a lofty hill on the north side of Wady es-Surar, better known as the Valley of Sorek. From this city the people of Dan selected certain

JUDGES

men of valor to spy out an area where they might expand their territory and settle.

3. *Where was Eshtaol? 18:2b*

Eshuol was near Zorah; and from the two cities, the people of Dan selected five men to serve as spies on their behalf as they looked for additional land to occupy. A modern site called Eshwa' which is thirteen miles northwest of Jerusalem is probably the location of ancient Eshtaol. The town is mentioned first in the list of cities assigned to Judah (Joshua 15:33), but later is assigned to Dan (Joshua 19:41). It, too, like Zorah must have been a border town; and both Judah and Dan may have occupied surrounding territory.

4. *How did the Danites know the voice of the Levite?*

18:3

Quite possibly the Danites merely were able to determine from the vocabulary used by the young man that he was reared as a Levite and was familiar with the many expressions which were typical of those used by the priests in leading the people of Israel in their worship. It is not likely that the Danites had known the Levite personally and were thus able to identify him from his speech. There is no reason for their desiring the services of a particular Levite. It was enough for them that he was of the priestly tribe.

5. *Why did the Danites require the services of the Levite?*

18:5

Joshua had been instructed to go to Eleazar, the high priest, to find out the will of God. It was his custom to inquire concerning the will of the Lord before leading the people into battle or undertaking any project of significance. Even though the Levite was established in a center of false worship, the men of Dan thought his inquiry would reveal whether or not their mission would be successful.

When the Levite informed them of the likely success of their venture, they were happy to continue on their expedition.

6. *Where was Laish? 18:7*

Laish was near the headwaters of the Jordan river. It lay at the feet of Mount Hermon and represented the northernmost point within the territory occupied by the children of Israel. Isolated as it was from the mainstream of life in Canaan, the people were not careful to erect defenses or to train men of war to protect them from invasion. Their manner of life was compared to the easy life of the Sidonians, inhabitants of the famous seaport city of Sidon, directly west of Laish. Although their manner of life was quiet and secure like the life of the Sidonians, the men of Laish had no direct connections with these Phoenician coastal dwellers. So peaceable was their life that they had no need of magistrates to keep law and order among them.

7. *How did the spies describe the land to their brethren?*

18:8-10

Contrary to the way in which the ten spies had described the entire land of Canaan to their faint-hearted brethren, the five spies sent out from Dan brought back a glowing report of the possibilities of their inhabiting the land around Laish. Certainly the territory was well watered. It lay in a fertile valley beneath the foot of Mount Hermon, and it gave great promise of providing the additional territory desired by the people of Dan. The five men sent out to see about the land urged their fellow tribesmen to arise quickly to go and possess the land.

8. *How many men of war went out from Dan? 18:11*

Six hundred men, armed for war, went out from the land of Dan along the Mediterranean seacoast to take possession of the territory around Laish on the northern border

of Canaan. When the Danites were numbered in Abelshittin, there were sixty-four thousand and four hundred men twenty years of age and older who were able to go to war. The six hundred who went out to possess Laish were thus a very small portion of the total fighting force which Dan could have mustered. The smallness of this band indicates the ease with which the spies anticipated they could take the new home.

9. *Where was Kiriath-jearim? 18:12*

Kiriath-jearim was that promontory on the west border of Benjamin which also formed a part of the east border of Dan. The spot was along the north border of the tribe of Judah and was named when the borders of all three of these tribes were given. As travelers made their way up from the Mediterranean seacoast, they came to this high hill and caught their first glimpse of the city of Jerusalem. Pilgrims were accustomed to stopping, taking in the view, and resting before they continued on their way up to the Temple during the later years of Israel's blessed history.

10. *What is the meaning of the name Mahaneh-dan? 18:12*

The term, Mahaneh-dan, means "the companies of Dan." The name was used to describe the place where the troop from Dan encamped before going on into the hill country of Ephraim as they made their way to the northern part of Canaan. The author, writing from the standpoint of one who lived in the center of the land, said the spot was "behind Kiriath-jearim," evidently signifying its location as being west of this better-known site.

11. *What were all the sacred articles in Micah's house?*

18:14

The five men who had made the original trip through the hill country of Ephraim knew of the existence of an ephod, teraphim, a molten image, and a graven image in the house of Micah. The ephod was the distinctive garment of the

priests, and one who wore the garment for

18:19-24 STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

religious purposes was considered a man who could learn the will of the Lord. Teraphim were household gods, usually small images. The Bible student will remember they were small enough to be hidden in the camel's baggage when Rachel stole such idols from Laban; her father (Genesis 31 : 34) . The graven image was probably the pedestal of the molten image which Micah made with the money he had stolen from his mother. Such an outfitting of a center of false worship indicates an extensive practice of idolatry, and the objects were of great interest to the men of Dan.

12. What was the proposal made to the Levite by the men of Dan? 18:19

The men of Dan told the Levite to put his hand on his mouth. He had asked them what they were doing, and they had instructed him not to make any outcry as they made off with the sacred objects of Micah's sanctuary. To induce him to cooperate with them, they asked him to accompany them and serve as their tribal priest. The carnal nature of this man is emphasized as the author of Judges says his heart was glad. He considered it to be a position of great prestige when he was asked to be a priest to a whole tribe. His position as priest to Micah was one of service only to one man. Without any regard to the rightness or wrongness of his position with the Danites, he considered only the fact of his being a religious leader among several hundred people.

13: What was Micah's cry? 18:24

The people who lived around the house of Micah gathered together and accompanied him as he went after the men of Dan. The concern of these other men indicates the spread of the idolatry practiced by Micah. What started out to be a private worship of an individual had become a matter of concern to several families. When Micah overtook the men of Dan, he made a pitiable cry,

"Ye have taken away my gods. . ." This was similar to the cry made by Laban when he overtook Jacob. He said, "wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?" (Genesis 31:30). Such is the dire strait into which one may fall when he worships gods made with hands.

14. How did the men of Dan answer Micah? 18:25

The men of Dan were quite sure of their military prowess. They told Micah to cease his crying after them before some of them lost their self-control and turned upon him. Micah saw the strength of the men of Dan and knew he would be unable to fight against them. He took the advice of the men and turned back from following them. Thus the man who had stolen from his mother, had taken the money which was in question and secured a graven and molten image to be the central part of a false worship presided over by a renegade Levite, and finally had watched as his objects of worship were stolen turned back empty-handed and sick of heart.

15. Why did no one attempt to save Laish? 18:28

The men of Laish had not entered into any alliance with a stronger power to protect themselves. Even when they were threatened by the invading Danites, they did not make any overtures to kings or governors of nearby cities and territories. Since they had felt removed from the mainstream of activity in Canaan and the surrounding areas, they made no provisions on their own for protection against outsiders. Truly "they had no business with any man." Thus the men of Dan were able to overpower them and take possession of the town and the land adjacent to it.

16. Where was Beth-rehob? 18:28b

Beth-rehob was in the northern part of the territory occupied by the Israelites. Nearby was the valley in which Laish, or Dan, was situated. The valley itself formed the upper part of the lowland around Lake Huleh, through

which the central source of the Jordan River flowed. The name of the town means "house of the street," and the spies sent out by Moses went as far north as this site when they spied out the land (Numbers 13:21) . The entire area around Beth-rehob was isolated from the other communities in the northern part of Canaan, and the men of Dan saw in it a place admirably suited to their intentions of expansion.

17. Why did the men rename the city? 18:29

The name *Laish* had no meaning to the men of the tribe of Dan. When they took the city, they renamed it, giving it the name of the founder of their tribe. Dan was the son of Jacob by Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid. He was the fifth son born to Jacob and was the first son born to any mother except Leah. God saw that Jacob did not love Leah as much as he loved Rachel; and He dealt kindly with her, allowing her to bear four sons to Jacob before any son was born to another mother. Rachel saw her womb was closed and gave Bilhah, her handmaid, to bear a son to Jacob in her name. She named him Dan, saying God had judged between her and Leah and heard her petition. The word Dan means "judge." The troop of men who went out from their inheritance on the seacoast in the heart of Canaan thought it fitting to give this name to their new home. Since this was on the extreme northern border of Canaan, it became common in later years to signify the extent of Israel by saying it reached from Dan, the northernmost point, to Beersheba, the last important town on the southern border.

18. Who was Jonathan? 18:30

Some think the young Levite, who first served as Micah's priest, was named Jonathan. His genealogy *is* given, and he is identified as being the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh. How he could be a Levite and still be a son of Manasseh is not clear; and many commentators

point to another manuscript reading which is as follows: "Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses." We do know that Moses had a son named Gershom (Exodus 2:22), Moses was the son of Arnam, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi (Exodus 6:16-27). Which reading is better? Many commentators believe the original reading was the latter and that a scribe, unable to believe a son of Moses would enter into such a false worship, deliberately changed the reading. On the other hand, since the worship was false through and through, it seems better to suppose the Danites secured the services of a Manassite. The men of Manasseh were their neighbors to the south and east, and the Danites would have no twinge of conscience in making such a man to serve as priest. This was the way Jeroboam established his false worship in Israel's later history. Jeremiah wrote, "he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi" (I Kings 12:31). These Danites probably did a similar thing in making a man of Manasseh a priest. *19. What was the "captivity of the land"? 18:30*

Many Bible students jump to the conclusion that this is a reference to the Babylonian captivity. If so, this verse could not have been written by Samuel. Samuel died before David was made king in 1010 B.C. The Babylonian captivity did not begin until around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Reference here is evidently to the dreadful Philistine captivity of the land which reached its height when the Ark was captured and taken from Shiloh (I Samuel 4). The Philistines oppressed the Israelites at this time until the people of Israel hid themselves in caves and tombs. They took away all their weapons of war and made them go to Philistine black-

smiths to sharpen their plowshares, coulters, axes, and

mattocks (I Samuel 13:20).

20. *How long was the house of God in Shiloh? 18:31*

Joshua established the Tabernacle in Shiloh soon after he led the people of Israel into the Promised Land (Joshua 18:1). The center of Israel's worship was at this spot all through the times of the judges, a period of not less than three hundred years. The God-fearing parents of Samuel, Elkanah and Hannah, made their way to this spot yearly in order to worship (I Samuel 1:3). Eli was high priest there at that time. Reference is made to a yearly feast at Shiloh in the time of the civil war which resulted in the near-extermination of the tribe of Benjamin; for the last two hundred surviving men of Benjamin were allowed to catch wives for themselves from among the daughters of Shiloh who went out yearly for the feast held there (Judges 21:19, 20). Only when the wicked sons of Eli took the Ark into the battle against the Philistines was the worship there interrupted. At that time the Ark was lost, Hophni and Phinehas were killed, and Eli died when told the shocking news of the loss of the Ark (I Samuel 4:18). Reference is made to the same era by the two phrases: "until the day of the captivity of the land" (verse 30) and "all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh" (verse 31). The captivity of the land began when the house of God was torn away from Shiloh.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 18

1. Was there a king in the land when the Danites sought new land?
2. How many men of Dan went to look for a new home?
3. What was the name of the town where the Danites chose to settle?
4. To what famous people were these citizens compared? 5. How many soldiers went up out of Dan to attack the city?

JUDGES

6. Where did they first pitch their camp as they started out?
7. To what site in Judah was it near?
8. What objects of worship did they take from the house of Micah?
9. What was the name of the man established in the priesthood by Dan?
10. What new name did the men of Dan give to the site of their new home?