

Judges Chapter 17&18

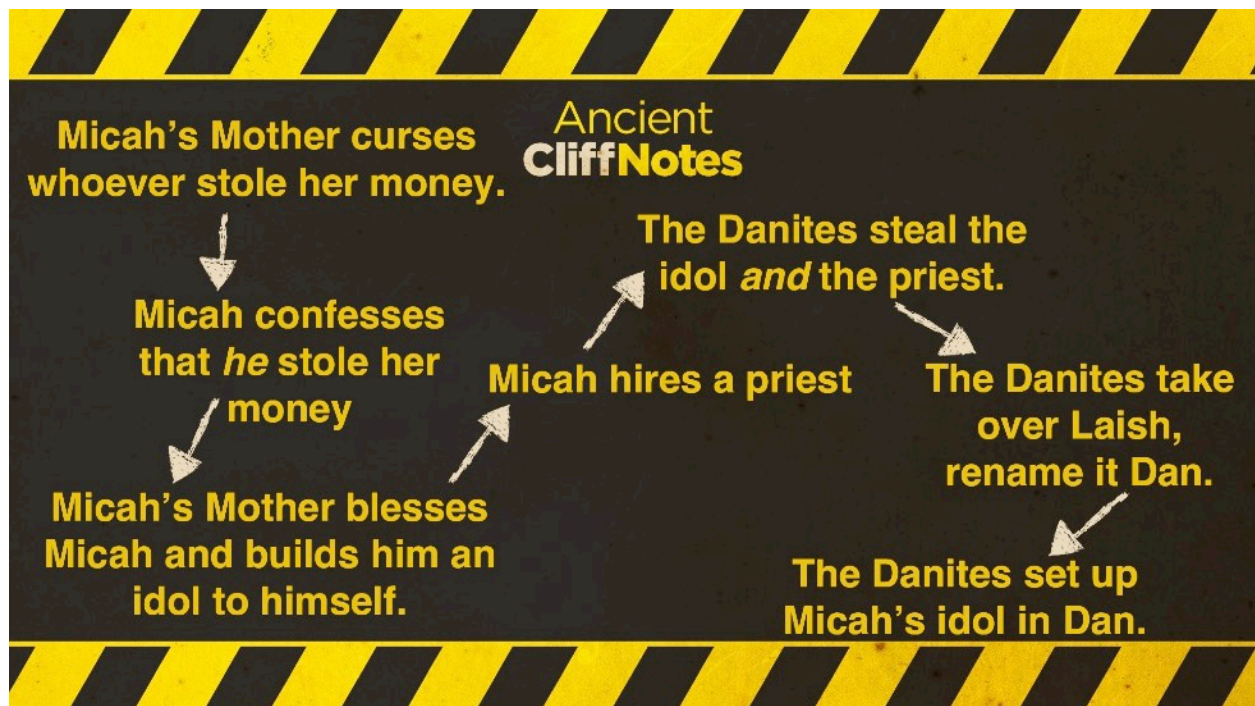
## Ancient Cliff Notes

Judges 17 & 18

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Courage Church, Detroit, MI

scriptures: Judges 17, Judges 18, Ecclesiastes 4:10, Judges 21:25, Proverbs 27:20.



A note about the passage we are about to go through... I think often when people read the Bible, they read it and just sort of roll through things, not really taking the time to fully comprehend what is actually being said... the absurdity of some of it... when I was younger I would read the Old Testament stories in order that I could check them off of my list saying that I read them, but 30 seconds after reading them if you were to ask me what they were about I could barely tell you, and if you were to ask me what I took away from it the answer would be "nothing" - but we are trying to change that with this series. We want to understand, as best as we can, these ancient stories and the ways we can apply it to our lives.

There is a single verse that shows up in chapter 17 that we will read as our basis for today, but this particular line is actually a recurring theme throughout these last few chapters of Judges. So let's read it and go from there. It's found in Judges 17 verse 6:

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

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What we are going to do today is look at the story of a man named Micah (chapter 17) and the story of a city named Laish (chapter 18) and how both demonstrate the disastrous results of a world in which everyone does what is right in his own eyes.

Chapter 17 begins by telling us that someone has stolen 1,100 pieces of silver from Micah's mom... and so she speaks a curse upon whoever it is that stole the money...

and her son hears the curse, and he is convicted by it... because *he stole the money*. So he confesses to her that it was him that stole it, and she shows grace... which is good... but then she does something very bad. To honor the fact that Micah was honest and brought back the money that he had stolen from her, she uses some of the money to have a silversmith make an idol... a fake god statue in honor of Micah.

She gives Micah the idol.

Micah proceeds to do what anyone would do if their mother had an idol made for them (sarcastic. not really!), and he decides that you can't have a god without a priest... so he sets out to get a priest. And initially he makes his son the priest, but that doesn't seem to work out very well because a stranger from Bethlehem who is a Levite passes through, and when Micah meets him, he invites him to come and live in his house and to be the priest.

Micah tells him that he will pay him ten pieces of silver a year and cover his clothing and his living costs...

The Levite accepts the job, and Chapter 17 ends by Micah saying “Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest.”

A very strange chapter in the Bible... to say the least.

It gets weirder.

Chapter 18 begins by saying, once again... that there was no King in Israel. And there was a wandering tribe of people, the tribe of Dan who were looking for a land to call their own.

So the tribe of Dan sends out five able men to go before them looking for land to conquer... and on their way, they stop and lodge at Micah’s house. And while they are there, they hear the voice of the Levite, and they recognize him.

They ask the man, “what in the world are you doing?”

and he explains that Micah had made him priest. And so then the men are like “oh man! you are a priest!!! can you ask God if our mission is going to succeed or not?” and so the priest says “Go. The journey on which you go is under the eye of the Lord.”

which is ridiculous... remember, this is a priest for a god built by Micah’s mom.

But then it gets really crazy.

And these spy’s spy out a place called Laish. And I want you to look very closely at the words that come the Bible uses to describe this place Laish.

Judges 18:7

“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.**”

So far in the story... you have a guy who stole from his mom... then because he confessed it, she built a god to him. So this guy Micah, basically starts his own religion to this god in his house... even hires a priest...

and you have this place Laish. And Laish is a place filled with people WHO HAVE IT ALL... they have security... they lack nothing... they have wealth! But notice: they are quiet and UNSUSPECTING, and had no DEALINGS WITH ANYONE.

The NLT version puts it this way: “they had NO ALLIES NEARBY”

in other words: “There is no-one who will run to their rescue *if* we attack them... they live in Isolation... This is going to be easy.”

What the writer of Judges does here, before we get into the battle... the takeover... and what the Danites are about to do... IS HE PAINTS A PICTURE OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE, BY THEIR OWN DESIGN SET UP THEIR LIVES TO BE VULNERABLE AND OPEN TO THE ATTACK OF THE ENEMY.

And quite frankly, its an incredibly disturbing reflection of the way that our world looks right now.

We live a world that is so fueled by the way that a person can be anybody they want without knowing anybody at all. You can build a career for yourself from your bedroom without ever leaving and interacting with anyone else.

But when we seclude ourselves from accountability and community we leave ourselves open and we don't even realize it.

a lot of CHURCHES are like Laish. Because what do people do when they are looking for a church? They visit, and they look around and they ask themselves: do I fit in here? -

Which is a healthy question when you fully think about what that question is asking... but really what we think we are asking is:

are these people *like* me?

do they look like me? Do they have the same politics as me? Will they affirm me in whatever way that I want to live my life? Do they like the same college football team as I do? Do they go out to the same places as I do?

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I really want you to understand something. There is a difference between BELONGING... and being somewhere with people who are just like you, which naturally makes it comfortable to be there.

No matter how different you may feel, YOU BELONG HERE.

Truly “fitting in” somewhere means that you are a missing piece... not an identical piece. You further bring us to the completion of the puzzle. You fit IN TO what God is doing... you have something to contribute that will stretch us as a community further than we are now... to look MORE like Jesus than we did before you got here.

Fitting in does not mean that everyone is just like us!

We should be asking “Can I be used here?” and “will I grow here, more and more into who God needs me to be to make the world a better place?”

and “will this place help break in me my selfishness? will it be a place that actually helps me live a life of CONVICTION?”

is the Gospel being lived out in the community through them?”

The difference between these questions, and the question of “are they the same as me?” is THAT ONE will further feed your isolation... it will add people to it, but not perspective... where the other will begin to turn you more and more into a servant of Jesus Christ.

One couple joined our church a while back, and when they visited it was hard for her, because she was used to really big churches and ours is smaller and she wasn't sure if this was where SHE wanted to be. She later told me that she felt like the Holy Spirit said to her, and I am not going to get this word for word, but it was something like “this is where I can use you. This is a place that YOU can be a part of making it stronger...” and to this day, I don't know what we would do without this couple.

They are servants, and they add a strong diversity to a group of people who, if we aren't careful and intentional it could be very easy to all look the same...

But IF everybody migrates to people just like they are, and goes to church with people just like they are, and only spend time with people just like they are...

then what happens is we come into this place and we are constantly affirming all of things that we all already believe. Church is not about that. Church is about stretching and growing and becoming more of who Jesus needs us to be, to change the world.

Tension is healthy. Well, there is a healthy amount of tension because different perspectives cause everyone to keep growing.

but if we create a culture that makes people feel like it is NOT OKAY TO BE DIFFERENT, then if they ARE DIFFERENT then what they will do is they will isolate from that culture.

Listen... I am very convicted about this... the church should NOT be an easy target. So often, the enemy finds gaps... he finds us in places of weakness where we are off by ourselves... and that is where he tends to do the most work on people.

But by design the church is a body of people TO be connected to. There really is no excuse for not be connecting with each other, living life together... sharing the things you are walking through with others. And I say that as a Pastor... who is married to a Pastor! and if you think that it is hard for you to share your struggles, I am telling you, WE GET IT.

I am case #1 for what not to do when I need allies in my life. And God is working with me on that... “you have got to talk to someone! you have got to seek council... their is wisdom in the multitude of counselors...”

We need to be intentional to create the safety net for people to know that the church IS the right place to share your life with. It should be the safest place to be known ON THE PLANET.

But it should also be a place where, because we love each other so much, we also give our ears to the feedback and council of others who may not always agree with us, but may be able to see IN US blind spots that we don't know are there in our own lives.

Micah had nobody to tell him “dude, this idol thing you have going... its a cult - its not right... He had nobody. He had his own little cult, his sons, and his priest who was only there because Micah was willing to make him priest. Which, by the way, can also be a very destructive thing... to feel like a nobody, and then meet someone who treats you like you are somebody... but who does NOT actually have your best interest at heart....

A lot of the stories we hear of people who stray in ways that we can't even imagine, begin that way. I feel like there is a whole other sermon in there just about this wanderer who became priest.

Again, if you have nobody to bounce whats happening in your life off of, you are always wandering... what happens? you end up the priest to a cult god.

So this is what happens to Micah... and this is what happens to Laish, a people quiet and unsuspecting... with no allies nearby:

The Danites, in preparation for invading Laish, first rob Micah and steal his idol god that he made... AND THEY STEAL HIS PRIEST. To me, this is actually hilarious... because this guy is not even a real priest... he was a wanderer... a sojourner just passing through and Micah had a stupid idol god and thought he needed a priest for it... But the Danites, they steal the statue from Micah... and when the priest confronts them and asks:

“what are you doing?”

they respond and say “keep quiet, put your hand on your mouth and come with us and *be to us* a father and a priest.”

and then they say “is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man, or to be the priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?”

and this is what verse 20 says: “and the priest’s heart was glad.”

He was getting a promotion. This guy is like “I don’t even know how I became priest, and now I am a priest to an entire tribe” -

He is the poster child for “fake it ’til you make it”

They should have put him in that new Nike commercial... “Don’t just be a priest for one man... be a priest to an entire tribe!” - too soon?

and Micah is really mad, and he rallies a few of his friends and they go and confront the army of Dan... but its clear that they are no match for the Danite army... so the Danites ask him “what are *you* doing? what are you even thinking, we are a whole army...?” - they actually say it like this: “what is the matter with you?”

are you insane, Micah?

and Micah says this... its so sad: “You take my gods that I made and the priest, and go away, and what have I left? How then do you ask me, ‘What is the matter with you?’”

You have taken everything from me.



Micah, through an isolated, cultish personal religion that related to no - one, put everything he had into this weird life that he had crafted for himself... and when the foundation proved moveable, and everything he had was gone... suddenly he did not know what to do.

And the Danites basically tell him “back off, or we will kill you... you will lose a lot more than a priest and god...” and so Micah backs off... and that is where his story ends. Empty handed. Lost. Alone.

It says that he turns, and goes back home. To a house with no idols... no silver god... no priest.

verse 27 and 28:

“But the people of Dan took what Micah had made, and the priest who belonged to him, and they came to Laish, to **a people quiet and unsuspecting**, and struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. And there was no deliverer because it was far from Sidon, **and they had no dealings with anyone.**”

You may think that your world is perfect... like its going your way... like you don't need God to tell you how to live, or a church to hold you accountable... or people to check in with... but the Danites are coming... the attacks are coming.

I know that this has been a recurring theme this summer, but these passages just so vividly make the case that community is how we find health. It is how we find healing... and to pull away from people and try to do life on our own terms and in our own way IS HOW WE FIND DESTRUCTION.

I keep going back to what Solomon said: Ecclesiastes 4:10b - someone who falls when they are ALL ALONE is in real trouble.

Because there are no allies. And your world FELT GREAT before the attack... because quite frankly, its always easier to live your life in isolation from the opinions and accountability of others... that is why the Proverb

says that the person who isolates themselves seeks their own desire... because when you don't have any guides you can move whatever direction you want without any conviction about it...

Without guides... you can do whatever seems right in your own eyes. You can create a god in the comfort of your home and spend your days worshipping it... and you can even convince yourself that its the right thing to do because nobody is telling you any different.

And it often will work out for a while but it ALWAYS ends in tragedy because everybody EVENTUALLY reaches a point in their lives where they need someone to lean on... they need allies. But its very difficult to cross the bridges that you have burned.

isolation absolutely destroys lives.

in the end... Micah ends up with nothing. Laish ends up destroyed...

and the Danites end up with a fake god and a fake priest to that god. And they set it all up in their new city, the city of Dan... which they built right on top of what used to be Laish.

and thats it. That is how the story ends.

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Then you get three more absolutely disturbing chapters... if you go home and read Judges chapters 19, 20 and 21 you see even more out of control things got before they got any better. It is some of the most gruesome, difficult to read stuff in the Bible. Maybe some time we will teach on it... but there is not time today.

But then...The entire book of Judges ends by saying the same thing that we read at the Beginning... (Judges 21:25)

“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

Its significant that the writer keeps coming back to this. There was no leadership... and because of that, everyone just did whatever they felt was right. And it NEVER worked out for ANY OF THEM.

Because THERE IS RIGHT AND THERE IS WRONG... and the Bible says very clearly that OUR EYES ARE NEVER SATISFIED. (Proverbs 27:20) - so if you are living your life doing whatever is right in your own eyes, you will live a life totally striving after the wind and it will never turn out the way that you want it to, even though you will have moments when you feel like it is.

ultimately our lives must be about something bigger than just the things that we want... or the things that make us feel good...

If we do whatever it is that seems right in our own eyes, we will live lives that are always about ourselves... there is no way not too. The eyes of man are never satisfied... you always want more. But when we commit to other people, and to the way of Jesus... though we may not always HAVE MORE... we ALWAYS DO MORE... we ACHIEVE MORE... we help more people.

Jesus Christ gave up his life for the sake of the world... for the sake of you and I.

Micah is mad because he thinks he is losing the most valuable thing in his life when the Danites take his idol and his priest...

Jesus willingly allowed the Roman government to take his life.

For Jesus, life was always about serving... it was always about OTHER PEOPLE... it was always about bringing healing and restoration and life everywhere that He went... not so that He could enjoy it, but to leave it better than He found it SO THAT WE CAN ENJOY IT.

and when you live like that, it always comes back on you.

The truth is, that Jesus Christ came to this earth, lived a perfect life, and then DIED A HORRIFIC DEATH ON A CROSS... because ALL OF US DO WHAT IS RIGHT IN OUR OWN EYES...

and yet NON OF US DO WHAT IS RIGHT.

On your best day you still wouldn't measure up...  
yet on your WORST DAY Jesus died for you.