

Judges

Chapter 18

Danites Take the Levite and the Idol

In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the people of Dan was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in, for until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them. 2 So the people of Dan sent five able men from the whole number of their tribe, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to explore it. And they said to them, "Go and explore the land." And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there. 3 When they were by the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. And they turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here?" 4 And he said to them, "This is how Micah dealt with me: he has hired me, and I have become his priest." 5 And they said to him, "Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether the journey on which we are setting out will succeed." 6 And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The journey on which you go is under the eye of the LORD." 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. 8 And when they came to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers said to them, "What do you report?" 9 They said, "Arise, and let us go up against them, for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. And will you do nothing? Do not be slow to go, to enter in and possess the land. 10 As soon as you go, you will come to an unsuspecting people. The land is spacious, for God has given it into your hands, a place where there is no lack of anything that is in the earth." 11 So 600 men of the tribe of Dan, armed with weapons of war, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol, 12 and went up and encamped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. On this account that place is called Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim. 13 And they passed on from there to the hill country of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah. 14 Then the five men who had gone to scout out the country of Laish said to their brothers, "Do you know that in these houses there are an ephod, household gods, a carved image, and a metal image? Now therefore consider what you will do." 15 And they turned aside there and came to the house of the young Levite, at the home of Micah, and asked him about his welfare. 16 Now the 600 men of the Danites, armed with their weapons of war, stood by the entrance of the gate. 17 And the five men who had gone to scout out the land went up and entered and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the 600 men armed with weapons of war. 18 And when these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" 19 And they said to him, "Keep quiet; put your hand on your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?" 20 And the priest's heart was glad. He took the ephod and the household gods and the carved image and went along with the people. 21 So they turned and departed, putting the little ones and the livestock and the goods in front of them. 22 When they had gone a distance from the home of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house were called out, and they overtook the people of Dan. 23 And they shouted to the people of Dan, who turned around and said to Micah, "What is the matter with you, that you come with such a company?" 24 And he said, "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?'" 25 And the people of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows fall upon you, and you lose your life with the lives

of your household.” 26 Then the people of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his home.

27 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. **28** And there was no deliverer because it was far from Sidon, and they had no dealings with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth-rehob. Then they rebuilt the city and lived in it. **29** And they named the city Dan, after the name of Dan their ancestor, who was born to Israel; but the name of the city was Laish at the first. **30** And the people of Dan set up the carved image for themselves, and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were **18:1** *In those days ... no king*. Implies that the account was written at a later date, when there was a king for Israel. (TLSB)

Dan ... no inheritance. They were presumptuously trying to seize land that God had not allotted to them. (TLSB)

seeking. The Danite allotment was at the west end of the strip of land between Judah and Ephraim (Jos 19:41–46), but, due to the opposition of the Amorites (Jdg 1:34) and the Philistines, they were unable to occupy that territory. (CSB)

18:2 *Zorah ... Eshtaol*. Towns originally assigned to the Danites (Jsh 19:41), proving that these Danites were not totally bereft of an inheritance, as they claimed, but simply wanted something more. (TLSB)

18:3 *recognized the voice*. Perhaps they recognized him by his dialect or accent. (CSB)

They may have known him from Bethlehem, or they may have recognized his regional and tribal dialect. (TLSB)

18:5 *inquire of God*. The request is for an oracle, probably by using the ephod and household gods (see note on 17:5). God had already revealed his will by the allotments given to the various tribes (Jos 14–20). They were searching for an oracle that would guarantee the success of their journey. (CSB)

18:6 *Go in peace*. The Levite gave them the message they wanted to hear. He was even careful to use the name of the Lord to give the message credibility and authority. (CSB)

under the eye. The Lord is watching over them. (TLSB)

18:7 *Laish*. The journey northward was about 100 miles from Zorah and Eshtaol (v. 2). This town is called Leshem in Jos 19:47. After its capture by the Danites, Laish was renamed Dan (v. 29), and it was Israel’s northernmost settlement (see 20:1; 1Sa 3:20; 2Sa 3:10). Excavations there have disclosed that the earliest Israelite occupation of Dan was in the 12th century B.C. and that the first Israelite inhabitants apparently lived in tents or temporary huts. Occupation of the site continued into the Assyrian period, but the town was destroyed and rebuilt many times. A large high place attached to the city was often extensively rebuilt and refurbished and was in use into the Hellenistic period. (CSB)

Called Leshem in Jsh 19:47 and Dan elsewhere, at the extreme north of Israelite territory, past the allotment of Naphtali, near the source of the Jordan. (TLSB)

Sidonians. A peaceful Phoenician people who engaged in commerce throughout the Mediterranean world. (CSB)

They followed the customs and culture of the Sidonians. (TLSB)

had no dealings. They did not feel threatened by other powers and therefore sought no treaties for mutual defense. (CSB)

They were physically isolated because of the mountains that separated them from the Sidonians and other potential allies. (TLSB)

18:10 *God has given it.* They assumed this from the word of the idolatrous priest (v 6). (TLSB)

18:11 *six hundred men.* As leaders of the tribe of Dan, they represented the entire tribe's migration to its new location in the north. Cf. the 600 men who constituted the remnant of the tribe of Benjamin (20:47). (CSB)

18:14 Danites wanted the priest and his cult objects so their new settlement would have a religious shrine. (TLSB)

18:16–17 The Danites, too weak to take possession of their own territory (see note, 1:34), were not only willing to attack a peaceful people, but they also plundered Micah despite the hospitality he showed them. (TLSB)

stood by ... the gate. Ready to leave. (TLSB)

went up. The shrine may have been on a hill or on the second story of a building. (TLSB)

the priest stood by ... the gate. He had already been collected by the soldiers. (TLSB)

18:18–20 Describes what happened when the Danites entered the shrine (v 17). The Levite priest seemed willing to go along with the robbery. He also showed his bad character, betraying his earlier benefactor out of ambition to serve more people. (TLSB)

18:19 *a tribe and clan.* Only one clan from the tribe of Dan is ever mentioned—Shuham (Nu 26:42; called Hushim in Ge 46:23). The Danites appealed to the Levite's vanity and materialism. (CSB)

18:21 *in front of them.* For protection in case of attack; see Ge 33:2–3 (Jacob and Esau). (CSB)

Danites put their children and property in front, where they would be safer in the event of an attack from pursuers. (TLSB)

18:22–26 Micah's attempt to reason with the Danites failed, ending in threats. (TLSB)

18:24 *You took the gods.* Micah was concerned about the loss of gods that could not even protect themselves. (CSB)

What else do I have? The agonizing cry of one whose faith is centered in helpless gods. (CSB)

18:28 *no deliverer.* No one could rescue them. (TLSB)

Beth Rehob. Probably the same as Rehob in Nu 13:21. (CSB)

In Syria, rather than in the Promised Land. (TLSB)

18:30 *Jonathan*. The Levite is here identified as Jonathan son of Gershom, the son of Moses (Ex 2:22; 18:3; 1Ch 23:14–15). In an effort to prevent desecration of the name of Moses, later scribes modified the name slightly, making it read “Manasseh.” If Jonathan was the grandson of Moses, the events in this chapter must have occurred early in the period of the judges. (CSB)

Name of Micah’s Levite (17:7). The Levitical family established its own priestly dynasty, which lasted c 280 years. Jonathan was possibly a grandson of Moses. This indicates these events happened early in the time of the judges. (TLSB)

captivity of the land. The date of this captivity has not been determined. (CSB)

Probably not the Assyrian conquest of c 722 BC. Likely refers to the capture of the ark of the covenant by the Philistines (1Sm 4–6; c 1060 BC), referred to as a “captivity” in Ps 78:61–62. (TLSB)

18:31 *as long as the time the house of God was at Shiloh*. See Jos 18:1. For Shiloh’s destruction see Ps 78:60; Jer 7:12, 14; 26:6. Archaeological work at Shiloh indicates that the site was destroyed c. 1050 B.C. and was left uninhabited for many centuries. (CSB)

Contrasts the idolatrous shrine with the true tabernacle located at Shiloh until the time of Samuel, when it was captured by the Philistines (1Sm 4–6). Archaeologists have discovered the remains of a shrine at Dan, which later became the site of a temple set up by Jeroboam (1Ki 12:26–33). (TLSB)

Ch 18 The Danites believe it is too difficult to take the inheritance assigned to them, so they look for easier prey, acting with cruelty and idolatry. God’s commands are often difficult to obey, but acting on our own impulses only multiplies sin. The Lord had generously provided the Danites with priests and a sanctuary at Shiloh, where He promised to meet with them and grant them His mercy. Even so, the Lord meets with us and blesses us through the means He has ordained: the Word and the Sacraments. • O Lord, I, too, often substitute my own will for Yours. Forgive my self-chosen theologies, my selfish cruelty to others, and my lack of trust. Grant me refuge in Your Word and in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)