

Judges

Chapter 18

Danites Settle in Laish

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. ² So the Danites sent five warriors from Zorah and Eshtaol to spy out the land and explore it. These men represented all their clans. They told them, "Go, explore the land." The men entered the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah, where they spent the night. ³ 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?" ⁴ He told them what Micah had done for him, and said, "He has hired me and I am his priest." ⁵ Then they said to him, "Please inquire of God to learn whether our journey will be successful." ⁶ The priest answered them, "Go in peace. Your journey has the LORD's approval." ⁷ So the five men left and came to Laish, where they saw that the people were living in safety, like the Sidonians, unsuspecting 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. ⁸ When they returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers asked them, "How did you find things?" ⁹ They answered, "Come on, let's attack them! We have seen that the land is very good. Aren't you going to do something? Don't hesitate to go there and take it over. ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ Then six hundred men from the clan of the Danites, armed for battle, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol. ¹² 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. ¹³ From there they went on to the hill country of Ephraim and came to Micah's house. ¹⁴ Then the five men who had spied out the land of Laish said to their brothers, "Do you know that one of these houses has an ephod, other household gods, a carved image and a cast idol? Now you know what to do." ¹⁵ So they turned in there and went to the house of the young Levite at Micah's place and greeted him. ¹⁶ The six hundred Danites, armed for battle, stood at the entrance to the gate. ¹⁷ The five men who had spied out the land went inside and took the carved image, the ephod, the other household gods and the cast idol while the priest and the six hundred armed men stood at the entrance to the gate. ¹⁸ When these men went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the other household gods and the cast idol, 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 Then the priest was glad. He took the ephod, the other household gods and the carved image 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. 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 hot-tempered men will 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. ²⁷ Then they took what Micah had made, and his priest, and went on to Laish, against a peaceful and unsuspecting people. 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 forefather Dan, who was born to Israel—though the city used to be called Laish. ³⁰ There the Danites set up for themselves the idols, 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 idols Micah had made, all the time the house of God was in Shiloh.

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 a place. 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 (see note on 13:2). (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)

spy out. See 1:23 and note on Nu 13:2. (CSB)

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 Jos 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 relationship. 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 *father.* See note on 17:10. (CSB)

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” (see NIV text note). If Jonathan was the grandson of Moses, the events in this chapter must have occurred early in the period of the judges (see notes on 20:1, 28). (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 (see note on v. 7 regarding Laish). (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 *all the time the house of God was in 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)