

## 1. Intro:

- a. My wife and I love watching Agatha Christie movies and mini-series because we love the detective novel kind of stories. We love the murder mystery kind of stories that when you get to the end you tie all the loose strings and you make sense of everything in the story. Once you discover who committed the crime you start to understand all the evidence all the timelines and all the testimonies. It all falls into place and you re-examine all the earlier parts of the story in your head to make it make sense.
- b. It's like an M Night Shamalan movie with a big reveal at the end. You go "ohhh wow that's what it means to see dead people". It changes everything and you re-examine in your head what just happened, or the movie will do that for you with a recap.
- c. It's like finding out "oh wow Darth Vader is his dad? That explains why he's strong with the force.
- d. Today we have a text that has a big kind of reveal at the end that should change our perspective of how we read the book of Judges and how we think about God in our lives.

## 2. Text-

18 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 priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. 31 So they set up Micah's carved image that he made, as long as the house of God was at Shiloh.

### 3. Outline and Back Story

- a. There are 5 characters or groups of characters in this chapter. I want to focus on each since this is such a large story to help us grasp what the text is saying.
- b. The 5 groups are:
  1. The people of Laish
  2. The Danites
  3. The Levite
  4. The neighbors living around Micah's house
  5. Micah
- c. But before we do that, let me ask you, did you catch that big reveal at the end? Like a movie ending that has you rerun an entire movie over in your head to see if this shocking ending could really make sense. Did you catch this ending? The Levite we've been talking about this whole time is Moses's grandson. We're not that far in time from the end of the book of Deuteronomy.
- d. And that means! Jonathan's dad was there when his dad died in the wilderness. And when he had to sit through the book of Deuteronomy all over again to hear all the commandments and all the stories like it was the first time. He experienced Jericho falling down at the sound of trumpets. Jonathan's father, his uncle was Israel's first high priest. His cousin was the second high priest of Israel. Jonathan's father's cousin died in the fire in Leviticus chapter 9 when they offered strange fire in the tabernacle.
- e. We are not that far removed from Leviticus and the book of Leviticus and the first 11 chapters of numbers are written from the foot of Mount Sinai. Time and again Jonathan's father saw the glory of God.
- f. With all this in mind, run through the story of the book of Judges again in your mind like one of those movies that have that final twist which makes you rethink everything. How does that make you feel about the state of thing?
  - i. Does it depress us to see generations of people so quickly turn away from God?
  - ii. Let me ask you another question, does it encourage you to hear that God never abandoned his promise nor his people during the book of Judges? He never stopped forgiving them when they turned and! He even kept blessing them along the way.
  - iii. The book of Judges is not so depressing when you realize that God had not given up on his promises to bless people even though people have given up on seeking to be blessed by God. But stronger than that is this: God is showing that He will never leave His people. He will never leave the people who are His. He will never forsake His own.

### 4. The 5 groups

- a. With all of this in mind let us consider the 5 groups of people in the story

b. First, **Laish**:

- i. Laish are said to be “quiet and unsuspecting” in **verse 7**. This town is in the north 30 miles
- ii. This description is incredible because the word for “quiet” also means “rest”.
- iii. “rest” is what God has been giving to Israel every time a judge has been raised up to save them. God raises a deliverer like Gideon and the land has quiet or rest for 40 years. Laish already has what Israel longs for. Peace and rest with its neighbors.
- iv. Also that word “unsuspecting” means trust. They are a trusting people with rest. Again, a nod to the fact that Israel wants to be a people who trust God and enjoy his rest.
- v. To be sure, Laish is in fact in the land that Israel was promised to inherit back in Genesis 15. So Israel is to inherit this land, but, as we’ve discussed before there is no need to come in and simply kill everyone. Israel could drive out Laish, Israel could simply set up proper worshipful practices and win over the people.
- vi. What Laish suffers in the end of this story shows us that they are real victims, and God has not forgotten the victims. He has written their name down here in the Bible, forever. Even when they aren’t Christian, God cares about the suffering of non-believers.
- vii. Perhaps you here today have been victimized by the people of God. Laish reminds us, it reminds you, that God cares about you and that God sees you. He has not forgotten about you and He remembers the sins of Christians as especially grievous until that Christian repents. He will not leave you He will bring you comfort.

c. Next, we have **The Danites**.

- i. The Danites are the unfaithful cowards of the story. Yet, they are God’s people.
- ii. First of all they have a long history of doing what they do here: They see something, make an incorrect judgement on that thing being good, then they take.
- iii. The tribe of Dan comes from their forefather Dan, who’s mom did the same thing. In Genesis 30 you can read the story of conception and all these actions show up. Rachel sees that she’s barren, gets mad and takes her servant and gives it to Jacob so that she can have a child. Then she judges that child to be hers and calls that child “judged” or “Dan”. Of course this is what sin is described as in Genesis 3, if you read that you will see that Eve sees the fruit, judges it to be good, then she takes it.
- iv. That’s just the origin story, keep going and you see this pattern play out a lot in the story of Israel in various places. In the book of Judges alone you see this pattern when Samson sees and takes a “daughter at Timnah”. He sees and takes the honey from the Lion’s carcass.
- v. So in this story Danites see the land of Laish in **verse 9** “we have seen the land”, they judge it to be “very good” in **verse 9** and in **verse 27** they “take” the gods (like their mother Rachel took gods from her dad) and they take the city of Laish.
- vi. The Danites are not very good at judging, even though their name means judged. They didn’t start well and they continued to perpetuate the wrong judgement and making the wrong decisions, they kept creating victims along the way.
- vii. Big question here though is this, if Israel was supposed to take that land, couldn’t the tribe of Dan just go up there anyway? The answer is, of course, no! The text is showing them as cowards and unfaithful because in **Joshua 19:47-48** they are specifically told the

land that they are supposed to take. The land they were supposed to take is between Eshtaol and Zorah, right in the center of the nation of Israel just north of Judah. It is very specific here that God told them exactly what they could have.

- viii. Then in **Judges 1:34** we read that the tribe of Dan not only couldn't take that inheritance of land, the Amorite who were living there bossed them right out of their inheritance. So the tribe of Dan was sitting there not having conquered the land that God had promised. Did God fail them? No, they did not drive them out because of their unfaithfulness to YHWH. This is the clear context for **Judges 1 and 2** which describe the failures of receiving what God had given. So Dan was unfaithful.
- ix. Unfaithfulness makes us more cowardly. Violent men usually are cowards. They can't take faithfully what God had given them so they take twice the number of men that Gideon needed to defeat a mighty army, and they attack a quiet and unsuspecting town. Compare Gideon's bravery of bringing 300 torches at night and not burning anything down, to the Danites having twice as many men and using their torches to burn down a city.
- x. They are cowards as well because if you notice how they ask the Levite the question in **verse 5** it's very suspect. "Inquire of God" in Hebrew really reads as "inquire of the gods" or "inquire of a god". The word "Elohim" is so generic that it makes you wonder if they really wanted to know what YHWH the "God of gods" had to say they are probably afraid at what He'd might say.
- xi. One thing is for sure, had they asked YHWH about whether or not they should take Laish, YHWH would have told them "I already told you want to do, be faithful to me, remove your idols and simply go and take the inheritance I have actually given you". They don't want to hear that, and they don't want to check the scriptures. They could just do a quick scroll check and see, yep, there it is- we are supposed to have the land of the center of Israel, not the land to the north.
- xii. They are also cowards because as they head north to pillage Laish, they put their children in front of them – **verse 21**.
- xiii. We will never have the boldness we need to claim what God has given us, if we move in the power of our own strength.
- xiv. Life will seem too hard, and we be looking for easy routes, we'll always be looking for weaker people to position ourselves against.
- xv. If you are here today and associate yourself with the Danites then Repent! turn to God and He has an incredible land inheritance to give you! He will bless His children, and there is still time to turn to Him. The quicker you do, the more you move in the power of the Spirit because you will be working with God instead of against Him.
- d. The next character in this history to talk about is **Jonathan the Levite**
  - i. This one is quite tragic as we've mentioned, I'll let JT talk more next week about it but let me just say this one thing. Jonathan the Levite is the religious mercenary for hire. He grew up in the church and knows all the right rituals, and he even has the gear.
  - ii. Here is the question that this Levite poses for all of us: Are we really inquiring of God, or are we inquiring of "the gods"?

- iii. Do we really pray and intercede to the God of gods for the people of God, or do we simply say we are but really we ask our idols answers to things?
  - iv. Do we really on our stuff, our gear, our history or do we inquire of God? That is true for Jonathan and it's true for us.
  - v. If we inquire of God, and aren't really interested in what He has to say, then we will give bad advice and put others in harms way.
- e. The next character is the group of characters, and they are **The neighbors living around Micah's house.**
  - i. These neighbors come and stand up for Micah. **Verse 22** says "they were near Micah's house" and they "overtook the people of Dan".
  - ii. So not only are they aware that Micah has these idolatrous things in his home, not only are they aware of the celebrity pastor who lives with Micah, they don't do anything about it.
  - iii. Rather, they defend Micah's cause! These neighbors represent the kind of people who not only give bad advice but get a wrong sense of injustice when their advice is rejected.
  - iv. They think they have to get up and fight the cause of Micah because he's being victimized. Micah is not a victim in this story. Laish is the victim.
  - v. May we be the kind of people of God who can judge as God wants so that when we are confronted with sin or our compliance of sin, we don't get offended as victims, rather we judge the sin as being what it is, sinful.
  - vi. When we see sin, do we empathize with the sin because we want to be compassionate to the sinner? Jesus does not do this. It can seem tricky to talk about sin in a way that Judges sinners. But in John when Jesus heals the paralyzed man he says **John 5:14 "Sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you"**. The man was in sin before Jesus heals, Jesus has compassion and heals the man, comes back to the man and this man is still sinning and Jesus tells him to stop sinning.
  - vii. If this is you, then consider your option to not tolerate evil but do it like how Jesus says to deal with these kinds of situations. He says to "remove the plank out of your own eye first, and then you can remove the speck out of your brother's eye". Meaning, if you have been tolerating sin around you like it's no big deal it probably because you have a low view of God's holiness, and a low view of exactly how much Lordship that Jesus should have in your life.
  - viii. So stop and consider that first, and what you find is that as you increase in faithfulness, God will bring other faithful people near to you (as a promise, He'll never leave alone) and you will start forming communities and cultures that simply do not tolerate or take sin lightly and that will bless the peoples around you, and even hinder the kinds of would be Danites from harming other victims.
- f. The last character in this story is Micah
  - i. Micah is the thief who is robbed. He is the sinner who has his sin fall on his own head. He is the wicked man of Psalm 7:
  - ii. **Psalm 7:15-16 "He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made. His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends."**
  - iii. Because Micah trusts in fake news religion, he's going to get fake news religion results.

- iv. Consider that his gods don't deliver him from being robbed
- v. His religious mercenary Jonathan can't help him and even betrays him
- vi. We never again hear about Micah, but his sins are felt. He corrupted Jonathan, with his money, he corrupted his neighbors by making them complicit. He corrupted the Danites by having something that their sinful hearts might be drawn to. He ultimately, when he had the chance to stop the slaughter of the people of Laish, did nothing because he was too weak to stop what the Danites were up to.
- vii. Micah's sin represents the kind of willful, ongoing rebellious sins that are blatantly obvious. It's not the kind of sin that we unintentionally do, it's the kind that unless everyone around us is cheering, we would otherwise have to do them in secret because we know it's wrong but we're still choosing to engage.
- viii. Friends, when we engage in willful sin like Micah, there are 3 things usually happen before we repent: 1. We are more likely to cause others to sin 2. We are too weak to help anyone else, or be a blessing to others. 3. If we don't repent and turn what will happen is that somehow in someway, the very sin we are keeping alive, will turn itself on us and be the very reason we fall and experience pain and loss.

## 5. Conclusions

- a. So which one are you this morning?