**Judges 17 & 18, What happens when you neglect and reject God's word?**

Today we are going back to the book of Judges to go back to where we left off. We left Judges after the story of Samson in order to study Ruth together. We saw in the book of Judges the moral and spiritual decays spiraling out of control. In the midst of chaotic time of Judges, we saw Naomi, Ruth and Boaz shining brightly with their godly character and their devotion to God. Now, we are returning back to Judges, specifically to chapter 17 and 18. These two chapters along with the chapter 19-21 form the double conclusions for the book of Judges.

**Micah and his mother (**[**Judges 17:1-6**](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judges%2017.1-6)**)**

In Judges 17, we are introduced to a character named Micah. His name means, “*Who is like God?*” But, as we will see, his meaningful and godly name didn’t translate into godliness for him.

His mother was quite wealthy. Someone stole eleven hundred shekels of silver from her. A yearly wage of ten shekels would make eleven hundred shekels, worth 110 years of wages. That is a lot of money.

There was an article titled, “*Children Who Steal*”[1](http://docs.google.com/#sdendnote1sym) by American

Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. In this article, it says that children by the age of three to five years old are able to understand that taking something which belongs to another person is wrong. And, here were the recommendations to parents when their children are caught in stealing.

* tell the child that stealing is wrong
* help the youngster to pay for or return the stolen object
* make sure that the child does not benefit from the theft in any way
* avoid lecturing, predicting future bad behavior, or saying that they now consider the child to be a thief or a bad person
* make clear that this behavior is totally unacceptable within the family tradition and the community

I would add to this list why stealing is wrong from the biblical perspective as well. What did Micah’s mother do when her son stole from her?

Having lost the huge amount of her wealth, the mother cursed the thief, not knowing that it was her own son who stole from her. Matthew Henry comments, “Outward losses drive good people to their prayers, but bad people to their curses.” We don’t know the nature of Micah’s mother’s curse. But, it was severe enough to scare her son into confess how he stole from her.

Having confessed his sin of stealing, according to [Leviticus 6:1-6](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Leviticus%206.1-6), Micah was required to do the following. He was to present his guilt offering to the Lord at the tabernacle. Another word, he was to confess his sin before the Lord and offer a guilt offering through the priest to receive forgiveness of his sin. And, on the same day, he was to pay back a fifth of the value on the top of the principal to his mother whom he stole from. The only thing he did was to pay back the principal he stole from his mother. His mother didn’t say anything about what he didn’t do right, what he needed to do to make things right, how he could walk in God’s way.

Instead, when Micah brought the money back to her, she replied, “*The LORD bless you, my son!*” in verse 2. Perhaps, she was proud of him for having come out clean. She continued, “*I solemnly consecrate my silver to the LORD for my son…*” This appears to be a great expression of worship, devotion to God; to dedicate all eleven hundred shekels of silver!

But, then she went on to say, “…*to make a carved image and a cast idol. I will give it back to you*.” What appeared to be a solemn consecration and devotion to the LORD turned out to be nothing more than “deviation to self-serving idolatry and demon-worship” according to Matthew Henry. She hired a silversmith to make the image and the idol with two hundred shekels of silver; she pocketed the rest.

Verse 5 tells us that the carved image, the cast idol Micah’s mother made along with an ephod and other idols, household gods, were all placed in a shrine in Micah’s house. Micah then installed one of his sons as his priest.

Micah didn’t deal with his sin of stealing in God’s way; it is not surprising that he disregarded God who prohibited him from making any carved images or cast idols according to his second commandment ([Exo. 20:4](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exo.%2020.4), [23](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exo%2020.23); [Lev. 19:4](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev.%2019.4)). He made an ephod just like Gideon did again against God’s laws; he also made idols, teraphims, which were used for inquiring the will of gods, not the God of Israel; he also installed someone other than a Levite as a priest, his own son ([Exodus 29:9](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exodus%2029.9); [Num 16:10](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num%2016.10)). Not to mention his ethically and morally deprived action to steal from his mother. To have a personal shrine was against the law which permitted only one place for true worship according to [Deuteronomy 12:5-7](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deuteronomy%2012.5-7):

But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; 6 there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. 7 There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you.

All this took place in Micah’s home in the hill country of Ephraim, not too far from Shiloh, which was the legitimate place for worship where tabernacle was placed during the period of Judges.

What was going on with this family? Verse 6 tells the story, “*In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit*.”

There was an appearance of doing what was right; confessing sin and returning the stolen money, consecrating the returned money to God… but for everything else they did as they saw fit, not according to God’s will.

**Micah And the Levite (**[**Judges 17:7-13**](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judges%2017.7-13)**)**

The story of Micah and his mother is followed by the story of Micah and a Levite in the rest of chapter 17.

17:7 introduces to us a young Levite. He is said to be from Bethlehem, but left Bethlehem in search of some other place to stay. From 18:30, we learn that this young Levite was Jonathan, son of Gershom who was the son of Moses. Joshua 21 lists specifically designated 48 Levitical cities where Levites were to live. Bethlehem was not one of these 48 cities. The way God intended was for the Levites to live by what people offered to God. But, because the Israelites failed to obey God’s laws, the support system for the Levites failed as well. This explains why this young Levite was in search of some place to live.

This young Levite, Jonathan a grandson of Moses, came across Micah’s house in the hill country of Ephraim. And, Micah having learned Jonathan was a Levite offered him a yearly pay, clothes and food to become his spiritual father and priest. Verse 12 tells us that the Levite became Micah’s priest and lived in his house. And, verse 13 tells us how this made Micah feel, “*Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since this Levite has become my priest.*” It felt so right for Micah to have this Levite as his own priest at his own home for the worship of the carved images and the idols; he was convinced that the LORD was going to bless this arrangement.

His was going about against God’s will; yet he was so confident that God was now going to bless him so much! Isn’t this ironic?

**The Levites and the Danites (Judges 18)**

Chapter 18 begins with all too familiar saying, “*In those days Israel had no king*” in verse 1. Chapter 17 was an illustration of what happened at the individual level when Israel had no king. Now, chapter 18 addresses the broader impact at the tribal level when Israel had no king. Having no king meant that they didn’t live under God’s kingship.

[Judges 18:1](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judges%2018.1) says, “*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*.” Why were they not in procession of the allotted land from God? [Judges 1:34](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judges%201.34) answers this question. It says, “*The Amorites confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain.*” They were not able to overcome the Amorites’ presence and their pressure against them. [Joshua 19:40-46](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joshua%2019.40-46) records the actual cities and towns that God allotted to the Danites. But, [Joshua 19:47](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joshua%2019.47) says that the Danites had difficult time taking the land that was allotted to them. Instead of persisting in their effort to appropriate their God given allotment, it says, “*they went up and attacked Leshem, took it, put it to the sword and occupied it. They settled in Leshem and named it Dan after their forefather.*” Judges 18 expands this account from the book of Joshua on the Danites’ failure to appropriate their inheritance and their possession of a city not allotted to them. This is a picture of God’s people not following God’s will because of the opposition and the difficulty.

Having met the resistance and the difficult of appropriating the land God has given them, the Danites sent out five warriors to spy out and to explore the land where they might settle. They gave up on the land God had given them; instead they wanted to explore other alternatives out there.

These five warriors came across the house of Micah in the hill country of Ephraim and spent a night there. When they came near Micah’s house, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. Perhaps, his local accent gave it away. The spies asked the Levite why he was at Micah’s house. The Levite explained how Micah hired him to be a priest over the images and idols in Micah’s house for yearly wage, clothes, and food.

Anyone with even the minimal knowledge of God’s word would have seen this arrangement as downright sinful! What would these five Danites say to this renegade Levite doing as he saw fit instead of living by God’s word?

Verse 5, they said to the Levite, “*Please inquire of God to learn whether our journey will be successful.”* No rebuke against the Levite for his unfaithfulness by these five Danites! All that they cared was someone to validate their waywardness.

Verse 6*,* the Levite replied, “*Go in peace. Your journey has the LORD’s approval.*” How could this Levite pronounce God’s response to the Danites so confidently when he himself wasn’t even walking with the Lord? He couldn’t have. The Levite walking wayward couldn’t see how wrong it was for the Danites to seek validation on their sinful adventure. God already revealed to Danites what they were to do; they were to go and take the land God had given them as their inheritance. God didn’t give them Laish or Leshm as their inheritance in [Joshua 19:40-46](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joshua%2019.40-46). This Levite wasn’t speaking on behalf of God; he was speaking as he saw fit.

18:7, we learn their reasoning for wanting to take Laish. It was an easy target to them. The people of Laish were *living in safety… unsuspecting and secure* and living in isolation with no ties to other people. They were easy target! They reasoned with the rest of the Danites in verse 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.*”

The only problem with their logic was that God didn’t give this land to the tribe of Dan. God didn’t put Laish into their hands.

They ushered six hundred men from the clan of the Danites, left Zorah and Eshtaol, and came to Micah’s house, verse 11-13.

There at Micah’s house, the five spies told them about the ephod, other household gods, a carved image and a cast idol belonging to Micah’s shrine. They went in and stole them. And, they got caught by the priest, the Levite. But, when the Danites presented to the Levite to the bigger and better ministry opportunity in the tribe of Dan, the Levite gladly left with them with all the paraphernalia for the idol worship.

Verse 22-25, Micah got his people to go after the Danites to retrieve the stolen idol paraphernalia and the priest. But, they were no match to the. So, he gave up the pursuit and returned empty handed.

The rest of the chapter 18 records how they were able to overtake Laish. They burned down the city killing the unsuspecting and peaceful people. The city of Laish was an easy target. The Danites met little to no resistance and easily overtook Laish. Rebuilding the city and setting there, they renamed it Dan. In this newly gained city of Dan, they set up the idols and had the Levite, Jonathan son of Gershom, the son of Moses, as their priest. And, they had the Levite and his sons oversee the idol worship.

Verse 31 is telling, “*They continued to use the idols Micah had made, all the time the house of God was in Shiloh*.” Another word, not too far from them was the real house of God where they were commanded to go to worship God. But, they didn’t.

**Applications**

The question of today’s sermon asks is, “What happens when you reject God’s word?”

1. When you reject God’s word, you cannot tell right from wrong. So, you end up asking God to bless you with things that God has no desire to bless you with. And, the greater tragedy is that you feel confident that you are asking the right thing, that you are seeking God’s will!
2. When you reject God’s word, you get deceived by the appearance of success! Micah succeeded in securing idols and a priest for idol worship although it was completely against the will of God. The appearance of success deceives you and you begin to think that you are succeeding because you sought after God’s will. The truth is that the appearance of success does not guarantee that you are in God’s will! The only way you can walk in God’s will confidently is when you allow God’s word to make claim upon your thinking, perspective, emotion, decision, and action.
3. When you reject God’s word, you cannot deal with the root of sin. The root of the sin is doing things as you see fit instead of how God see fit. When you reject God’s word, you reject him from being your King. When you reject God, your King, you do whatever would maximize your own agenda, your gain, your pleasure. When God is not your king, when God’s word doesn’t make claim upon you, you set out to make yourself a king!