

JUDGES 17-18

There are three verses which enable us to orientate ourselves in the confusion, three beacons in the fog, so to speak:

Judges 17:6

6 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit. NIV

Judges 18:1

18 In those days Israel had no king. NIV

Judges 19:1

19 In those days Israel had no king. NIV

This immediately brings us into our culture because that is the prevailing thought amongst many people today.

What happens when everyone does as they see fit? Let's follow the sequence of events (in as far as we can) Judges 17 and 18 and see what we find.

[1] FAILURE IN THE FAMILY

We have three scenarios, the first of which concerns a family. It goes wrong immediately.

Micah's name means 'who is like God?' and the answer in these chapters is, pretty much, 'no-one'.

As one commentator on this passage has pointed out, the activities recorded in chapter 17 break at least 5 of the 10 commandments:

- 1 (no other gods)
- 2 (no images)
- 5 (Micah dishonours his mother in stealing)
- 8 (no stealing)
- 10 (no coveting)

Given that both Micah and his mother link the Lord's name to their pagan practices they are breaking commandment 3 (taking the Lord's name in vain).

They also disobey the clear instructions about who could and who could not be a priest. It was a capital offence (Numbers 3.10) for anyone other than from the tribe of Aaron to be a priest.

[2] FAILURE IN MINISTRY

We know the name of the priest – Jonathan. That means 'God has given', but as with Micah, it is arguable that the name does not fit him.

As a Levite, he had been assigned (Joshua 21) a certain region in which to live. Yet he had not been living there. He must have been very happy to come across Micah, just as Micah was happy to come across him. But the arrangement they made was wrong, not right.

[3] FAILURE IN COMMUNITY

The tribe of Dan was one of the smaller of Israel's tribes, but they had been given a good allocation in the promised land (Joshua 19:40-48). But they had not taken it up. The tribes in general struggled to a greater or lesser degree to take the land which the Lord had allocated them, but it seems the Danites in

particular failed to acquire what would have been rightfully theirs – Joshua 1.34.

So when we meet them in Judges 18 they are seeking to acquire land which is not theirs to take.

The Danites eventually go to Laish, '*against a people at peace and secure*'. They massacre them, destroy their city and rebuild, calling the new city Dan. They establish Jonathan and his sons as their priests and they worship the idols that Micah had made.

Given how clear the word of God was (is) about how the people of God should live and worship, how could these people, a family, a Levite, a tribe, get things so wrong? And what does this mean for us?

LESSONS:

[1] WITHOUT TRUE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION YOU MAKE GOD IN YOUR OWN IMAGE

Look at 17.3.

Micah's mother had already committed idolatry in her mind, in her thinking, because the 'LORD' she was worshipping was not the LORD. It is so easy to construct your own idea of the Lord in your mind. We do it by distancing ourselves from his word. We allow our feelings alone to tell us what he is like and we then put a Christian framework around them. And in our culture, we are likely to make the Lord more accommodating, less holy, less concerned about behaviour because that is what our culture would like to hear, and it may be what we would like to hear.

[2] WITHOUT TRUE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION PROVIDENCE IS MISREAD

Just because something happens or comes your way, it does not make it right in the sight of God. Occurrence is not necessarily guidance. If the cash machine goes wrong and gives you £2000 instead of £20 how do you read providence?

The 'it must be right, otherwise God would not have allowed it happen' school of guidance is blown apart here.

[3] WITHOUT TRUE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION DISASTER IS COMPOUNDED AS ITS INFLUENCE SPREADS

But by the end of chapter 18, that idol is in the rebuilt city of Dan (having been stolen from Micah, what an irony!) and it is at the centre of pagan worship until the time of the exile.

Is there anything that I am doing individually, is there anything that we are doing in our families, is there anything that we are doing in our church community, which will lead the next generations astray because we have, here and now, made the Lord in our own image and we will pass the fault on to those who follow us?

CONCLUSION

But from the line of David would eventually be born the great king above all kings, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The true Israel – Jews and Gentiles who together believe in Christ – has a king now, and He has promised never to lose his people nor will he turn away anyone who comes to him.

Is He our King?