

**A tale of corrupt religion**

• A feeble imitation of earlier times

• Laish – a vulnerable city - the dangers of complacency, sleepiness, prosperity and isolation

• The spies' report

• A second trip – to take the city

• Theft of idols and a new Levite recruit

• What is the use of a religion that encourages theft, idolatry and corruption?

• Religion – one of the most blinding and depraving forces in the story of mankind

• Christians need to repudiate 'religion'

Everything in these chapters is the tale of corrupt religion. The Danites failed to get their inheritance because of unbelief. They were never allocated land elsewhere than in the areas mentioned in Joshua 19:41–46. The priest of Judges 18 is operating a corrupt and idolatrous cult. Any 'message' from the Levite that supposedly comes from God will be entirely worthless. The Danites are as corrupt in their religious ideas as Micah and the Levite! Everyone is doing what is wrong – only it is 'what is right in their own eyes'.

Once again we have here a feeble misguided religion, a corrupt imitation of true faith. Many years before Moses had sent out people to explore the land of Israel <sup>1</sup>. Judges 18:2 records a feeble imitation.

After a corrupt religion comes a vulnerable city <sup>1</sup>. The Danites come to Laish. 'Then the five men departed and came to Laish...'. The people of Laish are a classic example of a people who are vulnerable to defeat and destruction. They are (i) comfortable and complacent. The five men 'came to Laish, and saw the people who were there, how they dwelt 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' <sup>2</sup>. Their people are (ii) careless in not being watchful, (iii) deluded by prosperity, (iv) isolated and confident in their own self-sufficiency. No doubt, the Book of Judges was thinking of military safety, but the Christian cannot but see in the story the dangers for anyone anywhere of complacency, sleepiness, prosperity and isolation.

The spies bring back their report <sup>1</sup>. Immediate invasion is recommended. The land is wide-open for attack; it is spacious and prosperous. Its people are almost inviting invasion!

A second trip to Laish is started, this time with hundreds of armed men. They camp in Judah <sup>1</sup>. They intend to destroy the city and its inhabitants and take it for themselves.

On the way north the Danites pass Micah's house <sup>1</sup>. The five spies who had been there earlier tell the rest of the men about the shrine with its valuable silver idols. 'We ought to exploit a place like that', they suggest. 'Now consider what you will do' <sup>2</sup>. They know what to do! They find the Levite and talk to him in a friendly manner <sup>3</sup>. The five spies remove the silver idol and the contents of the shrine while the Levite is occupied talking to the six hundred men <sup>4</sup>. When the priest sees what the five soldiers are doing he protests <sup>5</sup> but is told that he had best be quiet, stop complaining and come with the Danites for promotion to higher pay and a more prestigious job. The Levite is delighted with the idea, helps in the theft of the idols and joins the Danites <sup>6</sup>. They all depart together <sup>7</sup>.

At this point we might pause and reflect on the story. What is the use of a god who gets kidnapped and is carried around from one owner to another? And what is the use of a religion that allows and encourages theft, idolatry and irresponsibility? What is the use of a priest who becomes a religious professional simply for the money and the security, and who will abandon one job for another at the suggestion of better pay and advancement? But, we remind ourselves, all of this was considered 'right' in the eyes of those concerned. They did not consider they were doing anything wrong!

The fact is: religion is one of the most blinding, depraving, forces in the story of humankind. Christians need to repudiate 'religion' altogether. The Christian faith is not a matter of superstition and immoral gods. Christian faith is a matter of God's revealing Himself to us, and the first thing He reveals is that He is a holy God. Man's religiosity without guidance from God is a corrupt rotten business. This kind of 'religion' invents gods for its own purposes. It is selfish and self-centred. It has amazing power to bring blindness and deception. Can these people of Judges 18 not see what they are doing? No they cannot.

<sup>1</sup> Numb. 13:1-2

<sup>1</sup> 18:7-10

<sup>2</sup> 18:7

<sup>1</sup> 18:8-10

<sup>1</sup> 18:11-12

<sup>1</sup> 18:13

<sup>2</sup> 18:14

<sup>3</sup> 18:15

<sup>4</sup> 18:16-17

<sup>5</sup> 18:18

<sup>6</sup> 18:19-20

<sup>7</sup> 18:21

• *Micah*

After the Danites had gone some distance, Micah called together some of his neighbours and he and his friends caught up with the Danites <sup>¶1</sup>. But the Danites were not bothered. They coolly said ‘What’s your problem?’ <sup>¶2</sup> and Micah – the thief of 17:1–2 – furiously complains at their theft of his home-made gods <sup>¶3</sup>. ‘You’d better quit complaining or you will get hurt’, was their reply <sup>¶4</sup>. Micah had no choice but to swallow his pride and abandon hope of seeing his god or his priest again <sup>¶5</sup>.

¶1 18:22  
 ¶2 see 18:23  
 ¶3 18:24  
 ¶4 18:25  
 ¶5 18:26

• *Laish destroyed and rebuilt as a centre of idolatry*

The Danites continued on their way. Laish was destroyed <sup>¶1</sup>. The vulnerability of the town now reveals itself <sup>¶2</sup>. The Danites destroyed the city, then rebuilt it and named it after themselves <sup>¶3</sup>. Their idolatry continued. Micah’s god and Micah’s one-time priest and his descendants continued to keep the idolatrous cult going. It survived until ‘the captivity of the land’ – probably a reference to an otherwise unknown invasion, perhaps by Philistines. It continued to function despite the fact that God had a shrine at Shiloh <sup>¶4</sup>.

¶1 18:27  
 ¶2 18:28  
 ¶3 18:28b-29  
 ¶4 18:31

**For us?**

1. *The uselessness of ‘natural’ religion*

Why are we told all of this?

1. It highlights the utter blindness and uselessness of religion that is ‘natural’ rather than revealed. Men and women are ‘naturally’ religious but such religion is of no value whatsoever.

2. *True faith can get corrupted by tradition*

2. It demonstrates how true faith gets corrupted by tradition. It was ‘traditional’ for Israelites to have priests. But in Micah’s day their formal religion had lost touch with the Scriptural demands of the law of Moses.

3. *Sin may be found in religious people*

3. It highlights the sin that may be found in religious people. Both the Danites and Micah were religious people. Micah was never troubled about stealing 1100 pieces of silver from his mother but is furious when something of lesser value is taken from him. The Danites want to worship the same gods; they are Micah’s ‘fellow-believers’ in the same idolatrous adulation of the same silver god. But there is no fellowship of any kind between these men in their identical veneration of the same god. The Danites rob Micah; and Micah hates them. But they are concerned to worship the same idols!

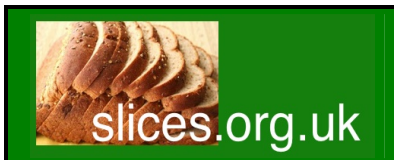
• *Micah’s loss – all in one day*

Poor Micah! He lost his god, his priest, his riches, his reputation among his neighbours – all in one day.

• *God was so near to them – in the tabernacle at Shiloh*

Yet while all of this was going on, there was a house of God at Shiloh! The tabernacle was there. It spoke of the holy glory of God which no person could approach without the blood of atonement. Deep within the tent was the law of God which spoke of His demands upon His people. The Danites, Micah and his disloyal priest were all ignorant of the true God of Israel. This is the way it is. People reject the God of the Bible but then their replacement does them no good. It would be better for them to turn to the God who reveals Himself in His tabernacle as the Holy God – the God who saved Israel by the blood of a lamb. God was so near to them – in the tabernacle. Shiloh was not far away. But they were so far from knowing Him, because they followed their own religious ideas.

• *But they were far from Him, because they followed their own religious ideas*



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible* (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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