



Judges 17-18

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Tape #7076
By Chuck Smith

Let's turn to Judges chapters 17 and 18 tonight. This latter portion of the book of Judges beginning with chapter 17 is almost an appendix to the book. It is giving you insights into the general conditions that existed during this period of Israel's history. It was a time of religious confusion, political upheaval, and it is probably best described there in the 17th chapter as everyone was just doing what was right in his own eyes. And so it gives you a little insight into the confused condition of the nation during the period of Judges. You're not following now a chronological order. This probably happened back towards the early part of the book of Judges, this little incident that we get in chapter 17.

There was this man of mount Ephraim whose name was Micah. And he said to his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you about which you cursed and you spoke also in my ears— [Hey Mom, I've got it] I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son (17:1-2).

Now if that isn't confusing, I don't know what is. She had saved up this money, eleven hundred shekels of silver and someone had ripped it off. And so she said, "Curse that person who has done that, let his teeth rot in his mouth; and he said, "Wait a minute, Mom, that eleven hundred of shekels of silver that you're missing, I took it." And so she said, "Oh, blessed be thou of the Lord, my son." Confused, confused.

And so when he had restored eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, I had really set this aside before the Lord for you, my son (17:3).

In other words, this is money that I had really set aside for you to make a graven image and a molten image. Now I'm giving it back to you.

Now, graven images, molten images were strictly forbidden under the law. And you see how confused they are in their whole spiritual comprehension. "I had set these aside to make a graven image and a molten image" (17:3). Now a graven image was an image that was carved out--usually it was wood or stone. It was carved out, graven. The molten images were those that were molded. So you make the mold and you pour the gold or the silver or whatever into the mold and you make a molten image or a graven image was one that was carved out. So she planned to make a couple of images for her son, this eleven hundred dollars was to provide for these images; strictly forbidden by the law. "Thou shall not make any graven image, likeness of things in heaven or in earth, to bow down to them or worship them," and so forth (Deuteronomy 5:8).

Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of the silver and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah. And the man Micah had a house of gods (17:4,5a).

That is, he had these little gods or images in his house and he made an ephod and a teraphim and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest (17:5b).

There is something about idolatry that is always apparent or it does indicate, first of all, when a man makes an idol or begins to worship some kind of an object, it is a sign that that man has lost his consciousness of the nearness of God. A person who lives in the consciousness of God's presence does not need an idol. He doesn't need some object, some reminder, some worship object. He lives in the presence of God. So when a man makes an idol or when a man makes an object of worship, it indicates that he has lost that vital relationship with God, that sense of God's consciousness. The second thing that it indicates is that this man is inwardly desiring the presence of God, that which he has lost. He is trying to capture something. So often people take relics that were religious symbols of the past--symbols of God's work, and they'll begin to worship the relic.

I had a pulpit in one of the churches that I pastored years ago that a lady worshipped the pulpit because so many marvelous sermons were preached from behind that pulpit and the man that made it was such a godly man. And when I suggested that we get a new pulpit for the church he almost created a church split. You don't dare touch that pulpit, that's an anointed pulpit and all, and because so many marvelous sermons she

had been ministered to from the man standing behind the pulpit. But the object and people when they lose their consciousness of God they begin to attach themselves to some object that reminds them of some past relationship or experience with God.

We find in the time of Hezekiah, the people had taken the brass serpent that Moses had raised in the wilderness and they had made it an idol. They were worshipping it. And Hezekiah took that brass serpent and he broke it in pieces and he said, "Nehustan!", which means "A thing of brass!" It's not of God, but they had made an idol of it because they had lost their consciousness of God. They were desiring to see God's work as He once worked when that brass serpent was lifted up in the wilderness. It was a reminder of God's presence and power in their midst in a time past in their history and there was that longing for that. And so they begin to worship this object.

And so these people at this time of the book of Judges--the loss of the consciousness of God, making these little graven and molten images, this house of God, establishing this worship kind of a thing--the desire is there for God but going about it the wrong way. He consecrated one of his sons to be the priest, no doubt his oldest son because, in the beginning before the law, before the establishing of the tribe of Levi, the eldest son was to be the priest. He was to be consecrated to God and was to be the priest of the house. Once the tribe of Levi was chosen by God, then this practice was set aside and they would take their oldest son and actually redeem him before the Lord and the tribe of Levi took over the priestly duties. But Micah consecrated one of his sons; he made this little ephod and teraphim which were objects that were worn usually by the priest and they were used as divining to ascertain the will of God. It was a method of divining the will of God. But we read in verse six and it describes the condition at this time of history,

In those days there was no king in Israel but every man did that which was right in his own eyes (17:6).

Now this is the condition that existed prior to the flood. We read this in Genesis prior to the flood. The problem that existed in that age was that everyone was doing that which was right in his own eyes. And what does existential philosophy declare to you today? Do what's right in your own eyes. There's no universal base for good or evil, just do what's right in your own eyes.

And that's actually what the philosophy is encouraging people today and so you have a confusion because I say, This is right. You say, "Oh, no, that's not right. This is right." No, no, that's not right. And you get all this confusion when everybody is doing that which is right. We need to have a final word of authority, and that's why the Bible is such a valuable book. "He has told thee, O man, what is good and what God requires of you" (Micah 6:8).

There in the Word of God, God tells you what is good. It's foolish for these philosophers to say there is no universal base of good because there is. God has told you what is good and He's told you what He requires of you, and this brings order to a society. But when you get a society where everybody is doing that which is right in their own eyes, then you have anarchy and you soon have the end of that social order, a breakdown of the social order.

I get so sick of men who have the gall and idiocy to presume to tell us today which parts of the New Testament were truly spoken concerning Christ, which words were truly His, and which words weren't, which stories actually happened and which ones didn't. Here these guys are 2,000 years after the fact getting together and having this well-publicized symposium--meeting in various parts of the country in order to get more publicity--and is highly publicized group of eggheads who are trying to tell us what parts of the Bible we can believe and what parts we shouldn't believe. Anybody that would attempt to do that has to be a few bricks short of a load. If you can't believe it all, you can't really trust any of it. What man can tell you what to believe and what not to believe? The very premise is that there are parts of the Bible that are not true; but what happens? Well, these guys are having big discussions and big arguments among themselves. Who's going to be the final authority then? God's Word is no longer the final authority; we are the final authority, we will tell you what you can believe and what you can't believe. And so they are actually setting themselves up above the Word of God, a very dangerous place to put themselves for the scriptures declares, "Whosoever takes away from the words of the book, his name will be taken out of the book of life" (Revelation 22:19). Pretty heavy duty to mess around with this.

But religious confusion because everybody was doing that which was right in their own eyes--no king in

those days, no one to lead the people.

Now there was a man who had departed out of the city from Bethlehem-judah to sojourn wherever he could find a place. He came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah as he journeyed (17:7,8).

Bethlehem is about seven miles, five miles, seven miles from Jerusalem, sort of the southeast of Jerusalem. Mount Ephraim, the area of Ephraim, was north of Jerusalem, twenty-five miles or so. And so this fellow strikes out looking for a place to live and he came to the house of Micah.

And Micah said to him, Where do you come from? And he said, I'm a Levite of Bethlehem-judah and I'm going on a journey that I might find a place to live. Micah said to him, Dwell with me and be unto me a father and a priest. Be a spiritual guide to me, be the priest in my house and I will give you ten shekels of silver by the year, change of clothes, a suit of apparel, and your food (17: 9, 10).

So the Levite went in, room and board, new suit, and ten shekels of silver a year to be the personal priest for this man Micah. Now again it does indicate that there seems to be some spiritual yearning in this man Micah. He yearns for God and the relationship with God. Micah said unto him, "Go out with me," and so "the Levite was content to dwell with the man and he became as one of his sons" (17:11).

Notice he asked him to be a father and a priest. That is sort of a spiritual father. It is interesting to me that Jesus in the New Testament sort of discouraged that concept of a spiritual father, "Call no man father on earth. You have one father, even your father which is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9), talking in a spiritual sense. It seems rather strange to me that when Jesus made that very direct command that there are those churches who set up sort of a fatherhood of priests --the Papa or the Pope, the Abbot or the Abba, which comes from the word 'Abba' which is father, the abbot, and even the title 'father' given to the priest. I have a hard time with that, really. Because of the statement of Jesus, I would not want any of you calling me father. I have enough kids of my own and I thank the Lord for the opportunity of teaching you the Word of God, but it's a title that, I really shun titles, period. I shun the title of Reverend; I can't handle that one, either. The Bible says concerning God, "Holy and reverend is His name" (Psalm 111:9).

And His name is either Yahweh or Jehovah and that's a holy and reverend name. But I'll tell you something; there's nothing reverend at all about the name 'Chuck.' In fact, in England they say "Chock, isn't that something, you eat?" And they thought it was a rather peculiar name over there. And they were thinking of the old chuck wagons.

Micah consecrated the Levite, the young man became his priest, he was in the house of Micah. Then Micah said, Now I know that the Lord will do me good because I have a Levite for my priest (17:12, 13).

So the fellow's motives must be probably questioned, challenged at least; the reason why I wanted a priest is to get God's benefits or blessings upon his life.

Chapter 18

Again, we read,

In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought for a inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day, all of their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel (18:1).

The Danites were actually given the area from the bottom of the Jerusalem mountains, which is Eshtaol and Zorah unto the coast over to Joppa and that beautiful coastal plain. That was the area that was given to Dan but the Philistines lived on the coastal cities of Gaza and Ashdod, and the Philistines were a powerful people. And whenever the tribe of Dan would try to extend coastward, they would meet the Philistines and be driven back and thus they were sort of cramped. The Philistines would not allow them to move out into the valleys towards the coast to live in that area; and thus, they did not inherit the territory that was given to them and they felt cramped in that narrow little area in the upper valleys just before you get into the Jerusalem hill. And so they decided to look around and see if they could find another place for the tribe to dwell.

So they sent of their family, the family of Dan, five men from the coasts, men who were men of valour who were from Zorah and Eshtaol [that's the area where Samson originated] to spy out the land and to search it; and they said unto them, Go and search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, they lodged there (18:2).

So they're heading out looking, they're on an expedition. Sort of like those who came west looking for a place to bring their families and to raise their kids and to expand, sort of the Oregon trail kind of an adventure. On the way they stopped here at this house of Micah, the man who would hire this young Levite for a priest who had the gods and so forth.

And when they were by the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young man the Levite: and they turned in (18:3).

He was probably saying his prayers. They go through the prayer book and they sing their prayers and so forth and they probably heard, Hey, that's the Levite, what's he doing here?

And they went in and they said unto him, How did you get here? And what are you doing in this place? How much is he paying you? What do you have here? And so he said unto them, This is how the man Micah dealt with me. He's hired me, I'm his priest. And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God that we may know whether our way in which we go will be prosperous (18:3-5).

Seek the Lord first. Find out from the Lord. He had the teraphim and the ephod there so seek God, are we going to be prosperous in this journey of ours?

And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the Lord your way wherein you go (18:6).

That is, the Lord is with you actually in the way that you're going, go in peace.

So the five men departed and they came to Laish, and they saw the people that were there, how they dwelt carelessly after the manner of the Zidonians [or those from Zidon], they were secure, they were quiet, they didn't have any judges in the land that might put them to shame for anything (18:7).

They were just people living carelessly--no law, no order, and they were far from the Zidonians, actually several miles from Dan to Zidon. However, it's directly, Zidon is directly west from there towards... Zidon is over on the coast of the Mediterranean and Dan is probably thirty-five, forty miles inland. And they had no commerce with any men, they were just an isolated group up in this beautiful city, Laish. The sight of Laish is to me one of the most beautiful places that I have seen. I mean that takes Hawaii and New Zealand and a lot of places. The largest spring in the world, probably one of the largest springs in the world is right there. The water just comes gushing out of the ground, it's one of the headwaters of the Jordan river. The other one being over at Banos and Dan is probably seven miles from Banos. Banos is right at the base of mount Herman and there is, the water just comes gushing out from the base of the mountain, one of the main headwaters of the Jordan river. The other one is over here at Dan, and of course, that's where you get Jordan which is down from Dan, is the name the little name, so the city of Laish which later became known as Dan. Because of this tremendous volume of water that just comes gushing right out of the ground, it's just a beautiful place. You hike through the nature preserve there and there are all these little springs, all of these little waterfalls and rivulets just gloriously beautiful. Just beautiful. And these fellows came across this place. Absolutely gorgeous with all this water and this good weather up there. You're just in a beautiful valley and it's just one beautiful place. So they came up there and they saw, hey, these people are, they don't have commerce with anybody else, they're living very isolated, they... living very carefree lives and, really what they thought is these guys are a pushover. And so,

They came back to their brothers to Zorah and Eshtaol and their brothers said to them, Well, what did you find? And they said, Arise that we may go up against them for we have seen the land and behold it's very good. Why are you waiting? Don't be slothful to go and to enter in and possess the land. Let's go, man, it's ready, it's ripe for picking. And when you go, you're gonna come unto a people who are dwelling securely, a lot of territory, for God has given it into your hands a place where there is no want of anything that is in the earth (18:8-10).

I mean it is just a very fertile, fruitful, beautiful place.

And so there went up from there of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and from Eshtaol six hundred men appointed with weapons of war. And they went up and pitched in Kirjathjearim in Judah and they called the name of the place Mahanehdan which is the camp of Dan unto this day, behold it is behind Kirjathjearim (18:11, 12).

So these families, six hundred men, so you probably figure there is 2,000 - 2,400 people or so that are in this movement going up to take, just a settlement moving along to take the land... moving slowly because of

the wives and children and all.

And they passed from there unto mount Ephraim and they came to the house of Micah. Then the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, they said to their brothers, Did you know that in this house there is an ephod and a teraphim and a graven image and a molten image? Now consider what we have to do. And so they turned into the house and they came to the young man the Levite, even to the house of Micah and they greeted him and the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war which were the children of Dan, they stood by the entering of the gate. And the five men that went out to spy the land went up and they came in and they took the graven image and the ephod [*they ripped them off*], the teraphim, the molten image, and the priest stood at the entering of the gate where the six hundred men were waiting who were all armed for war. And these went into Micah's house and they fetched the carved image, the ephod, the teraphim, the molten image [*fetches is another word for ripped off*], and then the priest said to them, [*Hey*], what are you doing? And they said unto him, Hold your peace, put your hand on your mouth and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest. Isn't it better to be a priest to a whole family in Israel, a whole... the tribe of Dan, rather than to just one man? (18:13-19)

So they're hiring him away.

And the priest's heart was glad (18:20).

Hey, he liked this--a good opportunity, advancement.

He took the ephod and the teraphim, the graven image and he went in the midst of the people, he joined with them. So they turned and departed and they put their little ones and the cattle and the luggage in front of them (18:20, 21).

Because they were expecting this guy's not gonna sit still for this, he's gonna attack us and he'll attack from the rear, so the men stayed back and put the women and all the luggage, up in front of them.

And when they were a good way on the road from the house of Micah, the men that were his neighbors, lived in the houses near to him, they gathered together and they overtook the children of Dan. And they cried unto the children of Dan and they turned their faces and said to Micah, the men of Dan and said, Hey, what's your problem, man, what ails you that you come after us with these men with you? And he said, you have taken away my gods which I made and the priest and you are gone away and what have I more? (18:22-24).

What is this that you say unto me? You ripped off my gods and then you say, What's wrong with you, man?

I always think that it's a rather tragic and pathetic thing when a man has a god that can be ripped off. I have a man that lives near me in the neighborhood that has a little god in his garage. I don't want to describe it too much, you never know but what he might be listening, but I see him polishing that little god of his. I mean, it's sharp looking, it's a classic; but the problem is, his god can get smashed pretty easily or his god can get ripped off. I mean he devoted himself to that god, he spends hours in worship, extremely devoted. I see him just walking around adoring his god, just stand there in wrapped admiration. But he's got a god that can get ripped off. That's sad. I think it's always a tragedy when a man says, Hey, you ripped off my gods.

The men of Dan said to him, Don't let your voice be heard among us. [You better shut up, man]. Lest angry fellows run upon you and you lose your life and the lives of your household (18:25).

Hey, cool it or we'll wipe you out. Why should you lose your own life? Just go home and forget it. Honest? No, not at all. Confused? Yes, totally. This was the condition of the people in those days, and it's important to understand what was going on during this period of history.

So the children of Dan went their way and Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his own house (18:18:26).

This is just sort of, rule by force. It's the stronger man is right. Might is right.

And they took the things which Micah had made and the priest which he had and they came to Laish, unto this people who were quiet and secure: they smote them with the edge of the sword, they burnt the city with fire. And there was no deliverer because it was far from Zidon and they didn't have any commerce with any other people; and it was in the valley that lies by Bethrehab and they built a city and dwelt therein. And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father who was born unto Israel, howbeit the name of the city was Laish at the first (18:27-29).

There is today what is called Tel Dan; that is, the tel that was created by the many civilizations that existed and were wiped out and building a new city on top. They have done quite a few extensive excavations at Tel Dan. It is one of the oldest cities in the world, they have excavated a gate to the ancient city of Laish which actually went back as far as the time of Abraham. And as you stand there looking at that gate, there's a scripture that refers to Abraham being there and he probably walked through that very gate that you can see having.. that's been excavated at the present time. It is interesting that when the tribe of Dan settled there, they had settled in an idolatrous state--that is, they have ripped off Micah's idols and they took them with them and so idolatry was sort of woven into the very nature of the area of Dan. The tribe of Dan moving to the city they called Dan and they move in with these idols, these images that had been created.

When Jeroboam split from the southern kingdom and the nation of Israel was divided into the northern and the southern kingdoms, when Jeroboam established the northern kingdom, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom, he was fearful that the people might be drawn back to Jerusalem when they would go back to worship God at the temple. Three times a year they were to come to the temple at the feast and worship God. He figured if they go back to Jerusalem--they see the temple, they see the king, they see the glory and all--their hearts will be drawn back. So he made a golden calf and he set it up in Dan and he said, these are the gods that delivered you out of Egypt and they began the worship of the calf in the northern kingdom under Jeroboam and this was a problem to the northern kingdom until the day that they were conquered by the Assyrians. It was a constant problem.

And we get into Samuel and Kings and Chronicles, you'll realize what a problem this was there in the northern kingdom, a center of idolatry, this city of Dan. It's interesting that today when you go to the city of Dan, we go to a kibbutz nearby but it's totally uninhabited as far, there's a fishery there now. But then this beautiful nature preserve that you walk through, but they have also uncovered the altar that is in the city of Dan--the very altars that are referred to in the Bible have been uncovered and you can go and stand on them where they used to offer to the pagan deities. The children of Israel, where the golden calf was placed. And it's just quite a vivid confirmation of what the scriptures tell us and also you see the reason why Israel was destroyed, turning away from God.

So the children of Dan set up the graven image; Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. And they set them up, Micah's graven image which he had made all the time... all of the time that the house of God was in Shiloh (18:30, 31).

At that time, the tabernacle was in Shiloh which was in Ephraim and during this period of time they were worshipping up there in Dan, this confused religious state.

As we finish the book of Judges next week, we will see further confusion that existed. Now, it is interesting as we read of this confusion the horrible things that were happening among the children of Israel, in that same setting, when we finish the book of Judges, we'll come to the book of Ruth. And we'll see that in the midst of all of this confusion, God was still working among a selected few. And that seems to be the case, God always has His remnant. As Elijah said, "Lord, I, only I am left" (1 Kings 18:22). And God says, "Come on now, I've got 7,000 men in Israel who have not bowed their knee to Baal. I reserved them" (1 Kings 19:18). God always has those He's reserved for Himself.

Today, of course, the religious scene is confused as is the world. Existential philosophy has really pervaded our entire society. It has affected every area of our society, the arts are affected by existentialism. You look at a picture and you wonder what is that? Now if you have a picture of a barn and a cow and all, I can say, Hey that's a barn and there's a cow and there's a tree. But the impressionistic art which is a reflection of existentialism, where it looks like a person just stood back and took the paint and threw it at the wall, and then carved out that portion and says, puts a title to the painting. Now, it's a good illustration of existential philosophy because you look at that and you may see something in that that I don't see. Oh, look at that, there's a cow over there.

When we were kids they used to have sort of textured plaster on the walls. You lie there at bed and look up at the ceiling at night and you can see in the textured plaster all kinds of things. But it's sort of like modern art. You had to use your imagination a lot and you're not always sure that the next fellow can see the

same thing you see. Try and point it out and show them what you're seeing. But, you see, what it does is it isolates us. I have to experience for myself and that is what existentialism is. Truth is what you experience it to be. So that picture is what you experience it to be, what you see in it is what is there to you. It's truth to you what you see in that picture.

But because there isn't a distinction of form, as I look at it I see really nothing but I can let my mind play and I can see, well, yeah, that can be a cloud over there and that could be a hand down, it looks like a finger, but the finger isn't attached to anything and then there is, a nose over here and I'm confused. And I'm alienated from you because I'm not sure that we're together in this. I'm not sure that you're seeing what I see. And I feel all alone. And that's what existential philosophy does, it alienates you, makes you feel isolated. Whereas, when there is a picture that has distinct form and all, you and I can stand there and we can admire it and say, Oh, look at that beautiful horse. Look at that metal. Look at those beautiful flowers there. And we're unified because we know we're seeing the same thing.

Now in the theater, there are a lot of movies that are also expressions of existentialism. As the movie comes to an end, the guy is walking down the road and you don't know where he's going. He may be going to get a forty-eight and finish it all, or he may be... you got, they don't put the end to the story. It's not everybody lived happily ever after. But it leaves you, you have to finish the story yourself. What's the guy doing? Is he going to go back home to his wife? Or is he going to end it all? And you've got to put the end on. They don't put the ends on the stories. They leave you hanging. And that again is just the expression of existential philosophy whereas you've got to experience it yourself. How do you relate to it, how do you experience it? And because I'm sort of an idealist I always put a happy ending on it. Well, he's gonna repent and he's gonna get right and he's gonna... But it isolates us again because I don't know that you put the same end to the story that I have.

Everybody doing that which is right in his own eyes is always a state of confusion. We need a guide; we need an authority, we need a king. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). We need Him--we need His authority over our lives lest we be confused and caught up in the confusion of our age.

Let's pray: Father, we thank you for the opportunity of studying your Word and sharing this time together. Lord, we do see a lot of confusion in the world around us. People don't know what's right anymore. It seems, Lord, that there's very little black and white, the gray has just sort of moved into both areas. And it seems to expand so it's hard to know which is the right. Lord, You said You were the truth. Help us to believe in You and to believe Your Word, that we may have a guide for life. In Jesus' name, we pray...

And now may the Lord be with you and watch over you in His love as you enter into the countdown. May you just experience the peace of Christ which passes human understanding and may we not allow our celebration of the day to block out from our minds and hearts the real purpose of celebrating Christmas. And may we keep Christ in the forefront of our lives, our minds, our hearts, and of our families as we gather together and experience the love in the exchanging of our gifts and expressions of our love to each other. So God give you a very beautiful week, not one in which you're sort of pressed away from Him, but one in which you draw so much closer to Him as we rejoice in the fact that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And may you behold His glory this week. In Jesus' name.