

Judges Chapters 17-18- John Karmelich

1. I was going back and forth between two titles for this lesson: It's either "How much sin can I get away with and still be saved?" or "Since I believe Jesus is God and died for all my sins, why can't I just live however I want to and worry about the next life when I get there?" Both those concepts fit these two chapters well. Here's a good way to look at the choices we make in life: "As opposed to immediate gratification, what decisions should we make where the next day we are thinking if we did the right thing? Remember that being "saved" is just the start of living the Christian life. What matters after that whether or not we used our lives to make a difference for Jesus! When we're feeling tempted to push the boundaries of what we can possibly get away with, that's when we should ask what decision to make will I feel better about the next day?"
2. With that lofty introduction out of my system, let me back up to explain what's happening at this point in the book of Judges. We're done discussing "here's the next judge". We're done discussing the pattern of Israel turning from God, sinning, God letting the Israelites suffer from turning from Him and then once they pray for help, God bringing another judge on the scene to deal with who is the "enemy of the moment" for His people. Instead, the last five chapters are going to backtrack to earlier moments in the times of the judges as if to say, "Here's a few stories to illustrate how the Israelites acted during that time period". In other words the Israelites "did whatever they felt like doing" with no regard for God or simply figured, "We're saved because we're Israelites so let's go do whatever we feel like doing!"
 - a) It's the same message God has for us Christians: If we think we're saved so we can go live however we want, we're missing the point of what salvation is to begin with. Yes we can go live however we want as Christians and still be saved, but the real question to ponder is why would we want to live that way? Realize the reason we're saved in first place, is so we can use our lives to make a difference for Jesus. The biggest waste of a life is one that's saved, but never did anything with it! The greatest purpose for living is to use one's life as a living witness for Jesus, as that act makes a difference with eternal benefits!
 - b) OK John, you're preaching to the choir here. Most people reading this already believe that Jesus is God and are using our lives in some capacity to make a difference for Him. That's great and I'm not knocking that effort or saying we're not doing enough! The underlying issue of the book of Judges is the reminder that sin is tempting! It's hard to always focus on a God we can't see or sense, and the temptation to turn to other things is a danger even to the most veteran Christian. That's why I like the simple test when temptation comes, is to ask, "In the morning will I be grateful I did this or regret it?" Yes, each of us have some sins we struggle with more than others. Of course we need God's help in our "weak suite" just as we do in our "strong suit". Praying for His guidance is the best way to start a day! I also encourage accountability, as we're less likely to turn the wrong way if we know that we're accountable to some other people! Christians that isolate themselves are usually the one's who are most likely to "go off the deep end".
3. That's good common sense advice. What does any of it have to do with Judges Chapters 17-18? I thought you'd never ask. These chapters tell the story of a man named Micah and also focuses on one of the 12 tribes of Israel called the tribe of "Dan". In short, it's all bad news. We'll read of most of the 10 Commandments violated. We'll read of many of the commands God gave the Israelites violated in these two chapters. Yes the results are horrid. In effect these two chapters start off as a person not living as God desired and it gets worse and worse as we read of many suffering due to the acts of the Israelites not living by God's rules.
 - a) My goal is not to have you memorize a few horrid stories from a few thousand years ago. It's for us to understand there are consequences when we fail to live as God desires. That's why I have the double lesson title about the consequences of what happens when we turn from what God desires of us. In effect it's "Don't do this or suffer the same consequences!"

- b) So does this mean God's going to strike me dead if I don't live exactly as He desires? I've never met a perfect Christian and I know that none exists. The issue isn't being perfect. It is about not wasting the most valuable thing God gives us, our time! When we mess up, it is a matter of saying, "I realize God's way of doing this is right and what I did was wrong, and I desire to turn from it." Even if we've prayed about the same sin issue many, many times what God desires more than anything else, is a personal relationship with us. He is willing to forgive us if we're willing to admit He's right and we're wrong! But then isn't it ok to go ahead and sin, knowing we can confess it later? It's a matter of remembering why we were saved in the first place, to glorify God with our lives. To think, "It's ok to do this one time, I know I'm saved and I can confess it later" is missing the attitude of what God's desiring of each of each, using our lives as a living witness for Him.
 - c) With that speech out of my system, time for a rundown on these two chapters as they point out to us what happens when we start living a life of "doing whatever we feel like" and realizing the consequences of those sins.
4. Chapter 17 opens by telling us about a man named Micah. It has nothing to do with Samson who was the central character at the end of Chapter 16. It's as if the book of Judges so far taught us how God helped the Israelites deal with external forces that caused them to sin, but now we have to get to the "heart of the matter" which is the internal desire to sin without outside influences.
- a) Anyway, Micah was from one of the Israel tribes called Ephraim. Micah's story (by the way, no relation to the prophet Micah who came on the scene many centuries later) opens with Micah confessing he stole 1,100 silver coins from his mother. His mom put a curse on whoever stole them and then forgives her son after he confesses. Then the downhill slide is about to begin. She used part of that silver to make a household god! It's about making a representation of what they worship. It's a violation of one of the 10 Commandments! If that wasn't bad enough, this mother and son combination made a shrine in their house of a bunch of these idols.
 - b) The next bit of bad news was about a priest from the Bethlehem. (Yes, that Bethlehem.) It was a violation of the priests to live anywhere except for specified cities, but that's just one of many of God's laws violated here. The short version is this priest then searched for a place to live. He ended up living with Micah. I'm positive he worked in the "shrine room" that we just read about Micah building. It's a story that has so many violations of biblical laws it's hard to list them all. However, the story is just getting warmed up.
 - c) In Chapter 18 we get the story of some members of the tribe of Dan. They failed at their attempt to conquer the territory Joshua allotted to them, and now they're looking for some other place to conquer and call their home. They scouted out a place on the northern edge of Israel where they ended up living. The only problem was the people living there. The tribe of Dan made the decision to conquer and destroy them in order to live in that place.
 - d) During that whole time, some members of that tribe encounter Micah, his household gods as well as the priest who was staying there. I picture some gang members showing up at Micah's door saying in effect, "Give us the priest, your household idols and if you do that, we won't kill you! That's the short version of Chapter 18. The Danites did conquer and settle and what would be considered the northern edge of Israel.
 - e) The chapter doesn't have a horrid ending of all those Israelites dying. It's in effect a big list of sins committed by Israelites at that time! The consequences of what happened not only hurt Micah but had a negative effect upon the tribe of Dan that'll continue all the way to the time of Jesus returns (details given in this lesson). The underling point is sin will have consequences that we don't always see at first, but turning from God to live however we'd like to live has consequences. We can't think, "We're saved, let's go do whatever we want" as there are consequences not only to our lives, but the lives of people around us. Ok, time to scare us half the death with the details of these two chapters. Hopefully all these details will remind us to do the right thing when our own temptations come. Let's begin:

5. Chapter 17, Verse 1: Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim² said to his mother, "The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse--I have that silver with me; I took it." Then his mother said, "The LORD bless you, my son!"
- a) As I love to state there were no chapter breaks in the original text. With that understood, I would say this is a perfect place for a chapter break. That's because the text of Chapter 16 has nothing to do with Chapter 17. The author of the book in a sense finished telling us of all the judges who existed during that 350 year time span. However, instead of wrapping up the book after Samson, the author deemed it necessary to give us a few stories on how the Israelites were living during that time period. It's as if Chapters 1-16 focused on those outside influences that required God to "step in and do something", while Chapters 17 to the end of the book give a few examples of Israel's "internal problems" that had nothing to do with external threats. In effect Chapters 17-18 tell one of those stories while the final 3 chapters tell another story.
 - b) OK, that's the big picture of the last three chapters. With that said, let's come back to what is written here in the first two verses of Chapter 17.
 - i) The chapter tells us of a man (not a king, but just a random Israelite so to speak) in one of the 12 tribes (Ephraim). The story opens with a confession. Apparently the mother of this man named Micah lost 1,100 shekels of silver and placed a curse on whoever took it. Her son, Micah then confessed to the sin of taking the money.
 - ii) For what it's worth, I'm not positive how much 1,100 shekels of silver is in today's money figures, but I do know that later in the text it says that 10 shekels of silver is a typical year's wage. Therefore, this was a "life's savings" here.
 - iii) In the last chapter, the text said that the Lords of the Philistines each gave Delilah a total of 1,100 shekels. I don't know any negative significance of that specific cash amount, but it's mentioned in the last chapter and again here in this one!
 - c) By the way, most scholars are convinced whenever, this story took place, it was before the story of Samson. In Samson's time, the Philistines were dominating Israel. The ability for this man Micah to do whatever he wants along with the tribe of Dan going out to conquer a group, most likely wouldn't have happened in Samson's time. Could be wrong. All that I'm saying is don't get obsessed with the time line as if this happened right after Samson.
 - d) Coming back to the verse. One has to admit, it's a bit funny. The first thing we learn is the mother of the main character had 1,100 shekels of silver, which may have been her fund to retire upon. No matter what, it was a large sum in those days. She cursed whoever stole it from her. When her son confessed it, she went from cursing to blessing her son. Maybe it was just a matter of being happy the money was found. As I stated in the introduction, we will read of lots of violations of the Old Testament law in this story. The first one I noticed is the "honor your mother and father" commandment being violated. Even if the son gave back the money, let's be honest, it's not really honoring one's mother if we steal their lives savings! However, all's well that ends well as least as far as these two verses go. As we'll see, things are about to get a lot more dysfunctional in this family!
6. Verse 3: When he returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, "I solemnly consecrate my silver to the LORD for my son to make a carved image and a cast idol. I will give it back to you."
- a) One of the first commandments of the "Big 10" is not to make an image of God. The issue's about not bowing down to a statue because God is too big to comprehend. Since this mom and son combination were Jewish, they may not have memorized the "bible to date, but I would argue they should at the least be familiar with the 10 Commandments. Anyway, it is the first of many signs that they're blowing it. They way they "blew it" was by the mom telling her son to take some of the silver and make a statue to God. She also wanted her son to get a separate statue made as well (not using the silver as part of the statue).

- b) The strange part of this story so far, is she said she wanted the statues to honor God. This is just another way of compromising one's worship of God with "other stuff". It's as if one is "making up their own religion" with a little bit of this and a little bit of that". While I am in the neighborhood, let me ask, what's wrong with getting a "foot in the door" with a bit of worship to God mixed with bad stuff? It may be a start for a nonbeliever, but we are held accountable for what we know. I'd be willing to bet Israelites in those days should at the least know the 10 commandments and making up their own mixture won't cut it!
- i) OK John, you're preaching to the choir again! If we meet someone who claims they are a Christian but are also doing "this or that", don't wag your finger at them! If it presents itself, ask do they believe the bible is the word of God? Then show them a passage that argues against "sin of the moment". Then remind them that Christians are going to be judged but based on what we did with what we knowledge we did have about Jesus. God by Himself is very capable of convicting people of sins!
- ii) As for us, make sure we examine our own lives before picking on others. This isn't a lecture on being perfect, but taking inventory of anything to confess!
- iii) OK enough guilt for this verse, let's get back to the story:
7. Verse 4: So he returned the silver to his mother, and she took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to a silversmith, who made them into the image and the idol. And they were put in Micah's house.⁵ Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some idols and installed one of his sons as his priest.⁶ In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.
- a) In Verse 2 Micah confessed to stealing the silver. In Verse 3 mom gave the order to have a statue made based on the silver. In Verse 4 the silver was actually returned and some of it was taken to make the image. I'll assume the silversmith as well as "Micah and mom" are all Jewish. Nobody said, "This is wrong!" The silversmith didn't say I'll do that for all my non-Jewish customers but it's a violation of God's laws for us to have them, so I'll pass!
- b) This mother and son couple is just getting warmed up in violating God's laws. If it wasn't bad enough to make the silver idol, Micah had one of his own sons be his priest. When the Israelites were in the wilderness, God commanded the tribe of Levi were to be priests for all the other tribes. We'll discover in a matter of verses that Micah knew that, or at least is aware that Levites were trained as priests to God. However, Micah was going "all out" to do religiously whatever he felt like doing and ignored how God wants us to live as being a living witness for Him. If you only get one thing out of this lesson, it is the fact that as a Christian God created us with a purpose, that purpose is to glorify Him with our lives. It is a matter of living as He desired which is living by biblical rules to guide our lives.
- c) Speaking of big picture ideas, Verse 6 gives what I consider the "motto" of the entire book of Judges, " In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." Keep in mind it is an insult to God to live this way. It's saying in effect, "Everyone's ignoring God as they are doing whatever they fell like doing!" It violates the basic principal that we're called to be a living witness for God by how we live our lives.
- i) So why list that motto here at this point? The two chapters are just getting warmed up, so to speak! That's because we already had a bunch of violations of those "Ten Commandments" and we've barely started this story! It's here as a reminder to us that God calls us to live differently and not seek Him in a half hearted, not any old way we feel like attitude! It's stated here and now to remind us "Don't do this, or we'll suffer a horrid fate for doing so."
- ii) So were these people saved? That's God's business. I just know that my business is to be a good witness for Him "24/7". It doesn't mean I have to be thinking about God around the clock. It means my entire life is a witness for Jesus. Whether we're aware of it, or not, people are watching our lives! If we've dedicated our lives to be a follower of Jesus, yes we have to act like it, all the time! (Confess when we fail!)

8. Verse 7: A young Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, who had been living within the clan of Judah, ⁸ left that town in search of some other place to stay. On his way he came to Micah's house in the hill country of Ephraim.
- a) Just when you think this story can't get any stranger, realize we're just getting warmed up here! Now we get introduced to another story character. A professionally trained priest, or at least we assume so, because he is a Levite. The text says he was living in Bethlehem. (Again that one!) When Joshua divided up Israel, 48 cities were set aside for the priests to live. (See Numbers 35:1-8 or Joshua 21.) My point is this priest shouldn't be in Bethlehem. It doesn't matter as the priest got bored there and decided to go out into the world to seek "his fame and fortune". He came to the northern part of Israel where the tribe of Ephraim lived and just happened to come to where Micah lived. With that said, let's continue the story.
9. Verse 9: Micah asked him, "Where are you from?" "I'm a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah," he said, "and I'm looking for a place to stay." ¹⁰ Then Micah said to him, "Live with me and be my father and priest, and I'll give you ten shekels of silver a year, your clothes and your food." ¹¹ So the Levite agreed to live with him, and the young man was to him like one of his sons. ¹² Then Micah installed the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in his house. ¹³ And Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since this Levite has become my priest."
- a) When this priest made it to Micah's house, he said in effect, "Look, I've got one of my kids working as the family priest, but you're the "real deal". I'm giving you a job offer. Be the family priest and I'll pay you 10 shekels of silver a year and I'll also give you a new set of clothes every year. Notice that Micah knew the Levites were priests and immediately did fire his son from that job. The new guy walked in the house and took the job to work with the idols. He thought he's honoring God by violating those commandments! It leads back to one of my lesson titles, "How much can I sin and get away with it?" We're about to find out, not very long when God calls us to be a witness for Him.
 - b) Micah also wrongly thought that "God must bless him now" because he built God a shrine (despite the fact it was idols) and despite the fact he had his son "work it". He "Hey I got a real priest here now, everything is going to be ok now". It's the false idea we think God is going to bless us just because we do this or that "good deed" or religious thing!
 - c) The consequences of this action are going to play out in the next chapter. Let's just say to mess with how God wants us to live can be painful in this life as well as the next one! All I'm saying is "Don't mess with God our arms are too short to box with Him" as stated in a song that was popular some time back!
 - d) Anyway, the background to the story is set. Now it's going to get even stranger as we take on the next chapter, which is also part of this story!
10. Chapter 18, Verse 1: In those days Israel had no king.
- a) Question: Why start with that reminder? In the ancient world "Kings were everything" in the sense that people obeyed whatever the king said. It's meant as an insult here. The fact that God's people weren't looking to God as "their king", is the underlying point here. It is a matter of probably a century or two when after this was written that the first king that is said to be pleasing to God (David), so therefore, people did whatever they felt like doing, which includes worshipping God "any old way they felt like it". The short version is that's wrong as far as God's concerned and as far as living the Christian life.
11. Verse 2: And in those days 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. ² So the Danites sent five warriors from Zorah and Eshtaol to spy out the land and explore it. These men represented all their clans. They told them, "Go, explore the land."
- a) Speaking of "not living as God desired", I present to you one of the 12 tribes of Israel, this is the tribe (or part of the tribe) of Dan. Know that this story is not good. I'll continue:

- b) When Joshua first led the Israelites to conquer the land of Israel, the tribe of Dan was told that their territory was in the south (essentially where the Philistines lived). They weren't able to conquer it, so they decided to take matters into their own hands and sent out to go find somewhere else to live. That's the short version of Chapter 17. The longer version is full of details, which ended up harmful to both this tribe as well as Micah and his family.
 - i) While I'm in the neighborhood, let's talk about long-term consequences of sin. We know that sin not only harms us, but those around us. Anyone who's ever lived in the same house as an alcoholic or a drug user will tell you it does damage to others around them as well as themselves. The greatest lie that addicts tell is that they're only harming themselves.
 - ii) The great sin we're reading here is the tribe of Dan is going to introduce idolatry in the land of Israel far more than any other tribe. When Israel separated into a North and South nation a few hundred years later, it's in Dan's territory where idolatry is a problem that spread to the whole nation. In fact the tribe of Dan gets the "Back of God's hand" all through the bible. When the descendants of Dan are listed, it's like saying, "and those guys" as opposed to names. In the book of Revelation, we read of 12,000 being redeemed from every tribe except the tribe of Dan. (Chapter 7). Yet when we read of God setting up a new kingdom and Israel once again divided up by tribe, Dan is one of the tribes listed. My point is they are singled out for sinning all through the bible and the long term consequences are evident.
 - iii) While we are thinking about our own sins and the consequences, I'll sneak back to the text of this chapter.
 - c) In these verses, members of the tribe of Dan decided to send out five spies to go look for a place for them to settle down. Keep in mind all of Israel is about the size of New Jersey. It is not huge and five guys can look around, especially when they know what territory that the other tribes have. They end up going up to the northern tip of Israel as that's the only place left that's "conquerable". (In other words, they didn't want to mess with Philistines as they had better technology, so they were looking for an easier place to conquer). With that said, here's where the story of the tribe of Dan intersects with Micah.
12. Verse 2 (cont.): The men entered the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah, where they spent the night. ³ When they were near Micah's house, they recognized the voice of the young Levite; so they turned in there and asked him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? Why are you here?"
- a) Some basic Israel geography might help. The tribe of Dan was in the southern section of Israel and the tribe of Ephraim was in the north. Earlier in Verse 2 it said there were five men who traveled to territory where the tribe of Ephraim lived. Again, remember Joshua divided into Israel into twelve separate tribal areas. Eventually Israelites moved to where they wanted to live, but those territories are still known to this day.
 - b) Anyway, these five guys happened to stumble upon where Micah lived. They recognized the accent of the Levite. (Maybe it was a "north versus south" accent. Don't know.) They were wondering, "what's a young priest like you doing living with this one family"? What is the deal anyway? That leads to Verse 4.
13. Verse 4: He told them what Micah had done for him, and said, "He has hired me and I am his priest." ⁵ Then they said to him, "Please inquire of God to learn whether our journey will be successful." ⁶ The priest answered them, "Go in peace. Your journey has the LORD's approval."
- a) Micah said in effect, "Here's the deal. I was bored being a priest when I used to live in the town of Bethlehem. So I wandered north, and got this gig here working for this one man as his priest." Then the five men asked the priest, "Since you happened to be a priest, will our journey to find a new piece of land for the tribe of Dan to live, be successful? Will God bless this trip and this effort?" Keep in mind the priest was working at a shrine of idols. It is also a journey where the tribe of Dan wandered from where God wanted them.

- b) With that background stated, realize that this priest wasn't exactly doing God's will when he told the five men, "God will bless your trip". Did the priest pray first, or just blurt out a response? Don't know. I just know Chapter 17 had the famous line of "Everyone did only what they felt like doing" (my paraphrase) of the idea that people ignored living how God wanted them to live and everyone just "did their own thing". Therefore, I won't give a lot of credence to the fact that this priest blessed this trip, period.
 - c) Before I move on, time for a quick "why should we care" lecture. The important point for us to remember is God does not tell us, "Believe Jesus is God, now you're free to go ignore Me for the rest of your life!" The bible is much thicker than just saying, "Jesus is God, then He became a man and died for our sins, now believe that, you're saved and He says we're free to go do whatever we want for the rest of our lives!" Instead the bible is a thick book that mainly teaches us how God wants us to live AFTER we accept that! Yes many of the Old Testament laws are interpreted by the church and the New Testament. My point we are saved to use our lives to make a difference for Him, not just to be saved and then live however we feel like it. That's the great mistake of these chapters and the lesson for us! If we get that, we get the purpose of this lesson.
 - d) The rest of the lesson will focus on the consequences of ignoring how He expects us to be a witness for Him. The short version is it's not good. With that warning in our mind, let's continue with the story.
14. Verse 7: So the five men left and came to Laish, where they saw that the people were living in safety, like the Sidonians, unsuspecting and secure. And since their land lacked nothing, they were prosperous. Also, they lived a long way from the Sidonians and had no relationship with anyone else.
- a) OK, who are the Sidonians and why should I care? Based on what the text tells us, they're some sort of "self-sufficient" group that didn't trade with anyone. I didn't google any sort of the history of them as for all intents and purposes the tribe of Dan's going to wipe them out in a matter of verses. We do know that this location was the northern most tip of what we consider the land of Israel today.
 - b) The big question is, "was this God's will"? This was not one of the nations God called the Israelites to wipe out as a form of judgment. It wasn't the territory that Joshua gave to the tribe of Dan to conquer. For all intents and purposes, this is bad news not only for Dan's present situation but also for future generations. When idolatry first entered the nation of Israel in a major way (after it split into two nations roughly two hundred years from now) it was in this town of Laish where the Israelites set up a major false idol when God called a man named Jeroboam to be the first king of "North Israel". Bottom line, all that we read in the rest of the chapter is Israelites going against God's desire to be a witness for Him to the world around them. On that sad, note, let's continue:
15. Verse 8: When they returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers asked them, "How did you find things?"
- a) Remember that this point, no attack had begun yet. The five spies checked out what we'd refer to as the northern tip of Israel. It was occupied by a "kept to themselves" group that is called the Sidonians. The spy report was essentially, "They're isn't a lot of them, if we've got about 500 men, that should be enough to wipe them out. As we'll see, that's the plan!"
16. Verse 9: They answered, "Come on, let's attack them! We have seen that the land is very good. Aren't you going to do something? Don't hesitate to go there and take it over. 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."
- a) Here's the verses where the Danite spies were encouraging the others. No God never gave any order to wipe these guys out. This is a case where this tribe couldn't conquer the land they were supposed to conquer and they found a valley that was occupied by some group that kept to themselves. The spies said, "Come on guys, we did our job, let's go kill them!"

- b) OK that's interesting. Why should we care? Let's be honest, this is sin. This group will go attack some unsuspecting group just because they want their land. This wasn't one of the nations God called the Israelites to wipe out! It wasn't even like they were going to say to them, "We outnumber you, you can leave now, or we'll kill you". This is murder pure and simple. The point for you and me is when we start down the path where we don't care of what God thinks of our actions, I promise the sins get worse and worse. You may think, I never murder anyone". Maybe not. But I guarantee if we're going down a path God does not desire of us, we'll too be encouraging others to do things they shouldn't or vice versa. That's the type of danger we're seeing here.
- c) Speaking of messing up big time, let's return to the tribe of Dan.
17. Verse 11: Then six hundred men from the clan of the Danites, armed for battle, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol. ¹² On their way they set up camp near Kiriath Jearim in Judah. This is why the place west of Kiriath Jearim is called Mahaneh Dan to this day. ¹³ From there they went on to the hill country of Ephraim and came to Micah's house.
- a) If I had to guess, the number of Sidonians was a few hundred at the most. By sending 600 men, my guess is this was an overwhelming force. OK, it's not "D-Day at Normandy", but it's still a big bunch of Israelites overwhelming a smaller unsuspecting people in the north edge of Israel. Anyway, the key point here is the 600 men were now camped out near the area where Micah lived. Even if you never read this story, you can sense this won't end in a good way for Micah. Remember that he had an "idol altar" in his house and a priest who worked that room for him. The way Micah's about to suffer is God's reminder that there's suffering in this lifetime for not living as He desires. If you get that, you understand what is the consequences of not living as God desires. With that horrid warning out there, let's see what actually happens!
18. Verse 14: Then the five men who had spied out the land of Laish said to their brothers, "Do you know that one of these houses has an ephod, other household gods, a carved image and a cast idol? Now you know what to do." ¹⁵ So they turned in there and went to the house of the young Levite at Micah's place and greeted him. ¹⁶ The six hundred Danites, armed for battle, stood at the entrance to the gate. ¹⁷ The five men who had spied out the land went inside and took the carved image, the ephod, the other household gods and the cast idol while the priest and the six hundred armed men stood at the entrance to the gate.
- a) We now have 600 Israelites all from the tribe of Dan gathered in the northern part of Israel near where Micah lived. The five guys who visited Micah on the first visit told the group that Micah had a bunch of household gods and a priest living there. I don't know if Micah was rich, but he had enough means to have multiple children and this priest all living in a house or estate with him.
- b) You would think the Danites would be saying, "Hey Micah, you're Jewish, no idols can be in a house even if they represent God to you! You need to tear it down! Without listing a verse or two on the topic, let's just say God frowns on sin, to put it mildly! I hold the view that God is perfect. That means He's perfectly loving all the time. He's also perfectly mad at sin and wants it eliminated especially among those who claim to call on His name!
- c) Anyway, instead of chewing Micah out or "something worse", the Danites took all of the household idols thinking, "We'll use them for good luck in our battle". It's proof that the idolatry of all Israelites (or at least a majority of them) were "doing whatever they felt like doing" which is the underlying and insulting theme of the book of Judges. It's the idea of "If we're going to be a Christian we need to act like it", not to impress our neighbors or the fellow church goers, but because that's how God wants us to live! Personally, I don't want to push God that way, so I let the world do what it wants and I realize that my duty is for me to honor the God who I've dedicated my life to serve. The hard part is not conforming to the world or letting the pressure of "being like everyone else" get to us. That's why it is so necessary to pray for the boldness to make that difference for Him!

19. Verse 18: When these men went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the other household gods and the cast idol, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?"
- a) While all of this was going on, the priest Micah hired was standing there thinking, "What am I going to do now?" His job was to work that altar and pray for Micah and his family. Grant it, that priest isn't living as God desired and I suspect he's on God's "hot list" at the moment, because as a priest he should be an example for God and not just wondering of the question of "what do I do now?"
 - b) The "good news" is this priest is about to get a job offer from the Danites. No that doesn't mean he is doing what's right. It's another example of when we choose to sin, the offer of more sin is always right in front of us, as we're about to read!
20. Verse 19: They answered him, "Be quiet! Don't say a word. Come with us, and be our father and priest. Isn't it better that you serve a tribe and clan in Israel as priest rather than just one man's household?" ²⁰ Then the priest was glad. He took the ephod, the other household gods and the carved image and went along with the people. ²¹ Putting their little children, their livestock and their possessions in front of them, they turned away and left.
- a) This priest just got offered a big raise. This is "Instead of working for one man, why don't you work for all 600 of us?" We'll get you a big "TV Contract on Trinity Broadcasting!" © It's an offer to work as a priest on a much grander scale! The problem of course is that he's still not being a witness for God. While we don't read of any punishment for the priest in this book. Let's just say that what the Danites did was mentioned all throughout the bible as the start of "Major Israelite idolatry" in the bible". I can show you multiple examples of this tribe getting "slapped in the face" (so to speak) of not getting the same sort of lists that other tribes get of names of descendants. It's as if God's saying through the bible, what the tribe of Dan did in not living as God desired them to live is an example for us of what not to do! Realize the bible is full of blunt as well as hidden messages of how he expects us to be a witness for Him. The bible has a lot of passages on what Jesus did for us, but it's a lot more than that: It's also a guide on how God expects us to live as a witness for Him. That is why we study this book as believers! OK, enough guilt. Back to the story.
 - b) Picture of bunch of men at Micah's doorstep. They went in the house and loaded up their wagons with the idol statues in that house! They told the priest, "come hitch your wagon to our horses" (so to speak) and off they all went! If 600 men were enough to overwhelm the nearby group called the Sidonians, I'm sure it was more overwhelming when they're at Micah's house. As one pastor I heard put it, "A bunch of gang bangers went right into Micah's house and by sheer force of size and number, they did whatever they want".
 - c) OK John, it's a sad story. Why is it here? To remind us what's the price of disobedience to God! It is part of the bible to remind us that there is a price to be paid to ignore living in a way that God desires. I'm positive God's "tougher" on believers than nonbelievers! That's because He's called us to be a witness for Him just as He called the Israelites. Personally I don't want to push my luck, so I do my best to live as He desires, period. Do I mess up? I would say "all the time". As I said in the introduction, it's not about being perfect. It's the desire to want to please God with our lives and that should be a dominant thought as we go through our lives!
 - d) With that said, the "heist" of Micah's house was done. Let's read what's next:
21. Verse 22: When they had gone some distance from Micah's house, the men who lived near Micah were called together and overtook the Danites. ²³ As they shouted after them, the Danites turned and said to Micah, "What's the matter with you that you called out your men to fight?"
- a) Apparently word got around the neighborhood what the Danites stole. Notice they didn't say, "he had household idols, throw them away". Maybe they got scared that the robbery was going to start a rash of break-ins in the neighborhood. The Danities who I'm sure had overwhelming numbers at that moment said in effect, "Go back home. We got all that we want and our battle isn't with those who live around here anyway!"

22. Verse 24: He replied, "You took the gods I made, and my priest, and went away. What else do I have? How can you ask, 'What's the matter with you?' "
- a) Here we get Micah himself. Apparently he was part of the party that asked, "What's the deal here with you stealing what's rightfully mine?"
 - b) By the way, notice God didn't strike Micah dead for having household idols. Instead we're reading that the way God "handled" the situation was to have them stolen from Micah. It will get worse in the sense that now a whole tribe is sinning, but in the meantime, we are reading how Micah was "rewarded" for not living as God desires. He got robbed! So does that mean if I get robbed or something worse, I did something to offend God? If that were true, none of us would live very long! It is a good thing to look at a situation and ask what can I learn from it? What Micah hopefully could learn is that we're not to mess with God's laws as there will be consequences down the road. Speaking of consequences it's time for us to finish the story of what happened to the Danites.
23. Verse 25: The Danites answered, "Don't argue with us, or some hot-tempered men will attack you, and you and your family will lose your lives." ²⁶ So the Danites went their way, and Micah, seeing that they were too strong for him, turned around and went back home.
- a) Meanwhile, we still have an argument going on between some of the Dan tribe and Micah and those of his town. The Danites who greatly outnumbered them said in effect, "You've got to be grateful you're still breathing right now! Now go away as we took what we want and there's nothing you can do to stop it".
 - b) Grant it, what this tribe was doing wasn't right, nor was what Micah did. Remember why this story is in the bible, not to justify any of the actions of the characters, but to show the consequences when we don't live as He desires. But don't nonbelievers get away with sin all the time? Of course, but the issue isn't them, but us! We're the one's God's called to be a witness for Him. That's why He's tougher on believers than nonbelievers when it comes to issues of sin and being a witness for Him.
 - c) Meanwhile, back to the story:
24. Verse 27: Then they took what Micah had made, and his priest, and went on to Laish, against a peaceful and unsuspecting people. They attacked them with the sword and burned down their city. ²⁸ There was no one to rescue them because they lived a long way from Sidon and had no relationship with anyone else. The city was in a valley near Beth Rehob.
- a) Here was a group that God never called the Israelites to wipe out. They burned every last person of this group alive or killed them with a sword! This is murder, plain and simple.
 - b) So are the Sidonites in heaven? No idea. I just know that God I worship judges all people fairly and these people will be judged as well as the attackers?
 - c) Let me ask the question about salvation another way: Is it fair for someone to spend all of eternity in hell for say a murder they did here? Why isn't 100,000 years enough to pick out a number at random? The issue isn't the sin itself, it's our attitude about sin! If we desire to live a life "however we feel like it", in effect God gives us that decision for all eternity. It is giving people what they want, eternity without God? What about babies who died? I'll leave that to a fair God to judge such things.
25. Verse 28 (cont.): The Danites rebuilt the city and settled there. ²⁹ They named it Dan after their forefather Dan, who was born to Israel--though the city used to be called Laish. ³⁰ There the Danites set up for themselves the idols, and Jonathan son of Gershom, the son of Moses, and his sons were priests for the tribe of Dan until the time of the captivity of the land. ³¹ They continued to use the idols Micah had made, all the time the house of God was in Shiloh.
- a) The epilogue of the story (a new story begins in the next chapter) is the conquering is now done and the Danities rename the city after their common ancestor. The rest of this text is about the fact that idols continued to be used in that area. The text even mentions that the grandson of Moses was a part of this. (Some commentators say the text refers to someone else, but I'll argue that even Moses grandson can be as corrupt as anyone else here!)

- b) Anyway, this story teaches us how idolatry on a "big scale" (i.e., one whole group of those Israelites became common in the area. I've already beaten to death in this lesson that what started here in Dan became a significant problem for many generations to come!
 - c) Let me end with two more questions to ponder: Why did God decide to divide Israel into 12 separate tribes? After all, one of those tribes messes up big time here. Another one will mess up even worse in the next and final story of Judges (next lesson). One reason is it did make it easier to count them and keep track of "who's who" if it was divided in some way. It is also a reminder that we're to get along with fellow believers even if they're not part of our group! That's the basics of a long lesson on tribal separation.
 - d) Final question to ponder: Why did God give the tribe of Dan the victory? After all they're guilty of starting idolatry on a big scale there. They stole idols and killed many innocent people. My question is if God punishes believers for their sins, why did He allow them to have this victory here? Did sin "pay" for them? First, the long term consequences did play out. That tribe got wiped out when the Assyrian Empire came a "knocking" a century or two later. The point is sometimes God allows us to "get away with stuff" so we can see the consequences play out over the long term. A God that judges fairly will judge them based on whether or not they acted properly on what they knew or should have known on how it is God wants us to act.
 - i) That leads to us. The bad news of knowing one's bible is God holds us accountable for what we know. Don't get me wrong. Knowing God's word well blesses our life far greater than the risks that come with it! Still, it's a matter of realizing that God does hold us accountable for how we live as a witness for Him!
 - ii) With that said, let's bring that topic up to Him in my closing prayer!
26. Heavenly Father, First, we thank You that You have separated us as a living witness for You. We don't know why You picked us, but we're grateful that You did. Yes it pains us to see our loved ones not "get it". What pains You just as much as when those You've called waste the greatest gift you've given us, our time. Give us the boldness by Your Spirit to make a difference for You. Make it obvious to us what it is You desire of us and how we can use our lives for Your glory. Be with us and guide as we dedicate our lives to glorifying You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.