

20220223 Judges 17 – The Danger of Syncretism



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On Wednesday night, we studied Judges chapter 17. We learned of the dangers of something called “**syncretism.**” Syncretism is blending. Syncretism is when orthodox belief gets mixed up with non-orthodox add-ons. That means orthodox truth gets mixed up with falsehood. All throughout Judges we find Israel maintaining some practices that looked like worship of Yahweh, the One True God, but that worship became mixed with the pagan practices of their neighbors. We must always be on our guard to keep our faith Biblical and unpolluted by the values and practices of the world or some other non-orthodox belief.

This still goes on today. Many different pieces of the Body of Christ (the Church) have mixed unbiblical practices with biblical truth. Often a church will try to look more and more like the world to fit in with the world. Pastors become conflicted as they desire more and more members to sustain the institutions they and others have created. They adopt worldly ways and worldly means. Instead of studying the Bible and how it applies to one’s life, they teach self-help courses, giving financial advice of how to “think and grow rich.”¹ Some churches have grown so apostate that they replace Christian service and obedience with leftism, socialism, or some form of political do-goodism.

Our former music minister characterized this trend to the world as “painting the ceiling sanctuary black and installing black lights and smoke machines.” He related how he, at one time, attended a church where the music minister desired to be more of a rock star than a worship leader. He wanted the spot light ON HIM during the service where he could rev up his fans (the congregation) to new levels of worship. The church wasn’t relieved of his desires for grandeur until he ran off with a woman in the congregation.

On Wednesday night, we found a similar situation in Judges chapter 17 where we read of a man named “Micah” (which ironically means “who is like God”) who stole money from his mother, but then gave it back for her to make carved images and molten images to Yahweh. Against God’s specific instructions for worship, he set up a shrine in his home and created an ephod (priestly cloak) for his son to serve as a priest. A Levite who was visiting the area happened to come to the home, and Micah made a business deal to hire the Levite. He did this to somehow maintain a semblance of true worship even though he was totally out of bounds in all that he was doing. The author of Judges presents this abomination going on in a particular Jewish home to show the reader just

¹ “Think and Grow Rich”, Napoleon Hill, ISBN-13 : 978-1585424337

how far individuals had fallen in their disobedience to God's commandments. In chapter 18, we will see how this affected the entirety of the Jewish nation. This brings Paul's words to mind as he speaks to the Galatian church, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." (*Galatians 5:9, KJV*). As believers, we should always be on guard from those more interested in the tickling of ears (2 Timothy 4:3). There is no substitute for the power that comes through the study and application of God's word (*Hebrews 4:12*).

The Danites Adopt Micah's Idolatry

*18 In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them. ² So the children of Dan sent five men of their family from their territory, men of valor from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and search it. They said to them, "Go, search the land." So they went to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there. ³ While they were at the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. They turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here?" ⁴ He said to them, "Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest." ⁵ So they said to him, "Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous." ⁶ And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The presence of the LORD be with you on your way." (*Judges 18:1-6, NKJV*).*

18:1-6 The story of Micah's house continues. The preface to the chapter is again, "In those days there was no king in Israel." There are so many parallels to western civilization at this point. In many ways we see the "king" (substitute "the rule of law") becoming non-existent and we see all doing what they believe is "right in their own eyes" (existentialism). As we continue with this passage, we see the Danites were "seeking an inheritance." They had been given an inheritance, but it was the smallest allotment of what had been apportioned to the tribes [*Joshua 19:40-48*]. So instead of going and taking their inheritance, they had sat back and waited for their inheritance to just come to them.

Anyway, their inheritance was proving too small for their needs so they made a journey through Ephraim to see what they could find, and they ended up in this same Micah's house that we met in chapter 17. While they were there, they heard the young Levite priest speaking and they recognized where he was from, so the Danites asked him to bless them. They were unconcerned about the unorthodox practices that were going on in the home. They figured they would just use the priest as some sort of a fortune-teller to bless them and ensure their outcome against their enemies.

⁷ So the five men departed and went to Laish. They saw the people who were there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. There were no rulers in the land who might put them to shame for anything. They were far from the

Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone. ⁸ Then the spies came back to their brethren at Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brethren said to them, "What is your report?" ⁹ So they said, "Arise, let us go up against them. For we have seen the land, and indeed it is very good. Would you do nothing? Do not hesitate to go, and enter to possess the land. ¹⁰ When you go, you will come to a secure people and a large land. For God has given it into your hands, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth." ¹¹ And six hundred men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshtaol, armed with weapons of war. ¹² Then they went up and encamped in Kirjath Jearim in Judah. (Therefore, they call that place Mahaneh Dan to this day. There it is, west of Kirjath Jearim.) ¹³ And they passed from there to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah. (Judges 18:7-13, NKJV).

18:7–13 So these five men of Dan spied out the northern town of Laish, and found it to be quiet and secure. What is more, the town was isolated, and there were no neighbors that would come to their rescue if attacked. Feeling like the city of Laish was vulnerable, the men of Dan formulated an attack with 600 Danite soldiers.

¹⁴ Then the five men who had gone to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their brethren, "Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod, household idols, a carved image, and a molded image? Now therefore, consider what you should do." ¹⁵ So they turned aside there, and came to the house of the young Levite man—to the house of Micah—and greeted him. ¹⁶ The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. ¹⁷ Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land went up. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image. The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men who were armed with weapons of war. (Judges 18:14-17, NKJV).

So, the soldiers of Dan showed up at Micah's house and made their way into the shrine and stole the ephod, the household idols, and the graven molded images. Basically, they wanted the false gods that Micah had created and put into his home along with the illegitimate priest.

¹⁸ When these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" ¹⁹ And they said to him, "Be quiet, put your hand over your mouth, and come with us; be a father and a priest to us. Is it better for you to be a priest to the household of one man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?" ²⁰ So the priest's heart was glad; and he took the ephod, the household idols, and the carved image, and took his place among the people. (Judges 18:18-20, NKJV).

The Levite priest was delighted about what he saw as a promotion. He was excited about having a congregation of 600 people instead of one house, the house of Micah.

²¹ Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones, the livestock, and the goods in front of them. ²² When they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house gathered together and overtook the children of Dan. ²³ And they called out to the children of Dan. So they turned around and said to Micah, "What ails you, that you have gathered such a company?"

²⁴ So he said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have? How can you say to me, 'What ails you?' "

²⁵ And the children of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life, with the lives of your household!"

²⁶ Then the children of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house. (Judges 18:21-26, NKJV).

18:14–26 So the five men of Dan were marching north to capture Laish, and they entered the house of Micah and stole the idols. The Levite stood at the gate and was excited about a promotion. Again, the writer is showing just how perverted the whole land had become. Micah came out to challenge them but gave up when he saw that he was outnumbered.

Danites Settle in Laish

²⁷ So they took the things Micah had made, and the priest who had belonged to him, and went to Laish, to a people quiet and secure; and they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. ²⁸ There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon, and they had no ties with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth Rehob. So they rebuilt the city and dwelt there. ²⁹ And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel. However, the name of the city formerly was Laish. ³⁰ Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. ³¹ So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh. (Judges 18:27-31, NKJV).

18:27–31 I won't recount the story as it is easy to follow, but one thing of interest is that scholars generally believe the "Manasseh" mentioned here should read "Moses." Jewish scholars hold the position that his name was disguised to protect Moses from the disgrace of idolatry on the part of his grandson.

I want us to end by focusing on the last line of this passage. ³¹ *So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.* (Judges 18:31, NKJV).

I love to hear the name "Shiloh." We first heard that name when Jacob prophesied over Judah. *"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; (Genesis 49:10a, NKJV).* "Shiloh" means "him to whom it belongs." And who is He to whom it belongs? That is Jesus. How fitting it was that God prescribed the place of worship to be in a town called "Shiloh." Shiloh is STILL where we find our spiritual rest. Jesus is our Shiloh. The writer of Hebrews so eloquently says:

⁹ *There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.* ¹⁰ *For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.* ¹¹ *Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.* ¹² *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* ¹³ *And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.* (Hebrews 4:9-13, NKJV).

During the 7-year conquest Israel worshipped in Gilgal (Joshua 4:19-24). After that time, God prescribed a way for Israel to worship in Shiloh for the next 369 years. We read, *"Then the whole congregation of the people of Israel assembled at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there. The land lay subdued before them."* (Joshua 18:1, ESV).

In Judges chapters 17 and 18 we see Israel over and over trying to find that "shiloh" in the wrong place. They fell into idol worship, and we have read where Micah set up worship in his own house as did the Tribe of Dan. We, too, get into the spiritual weeds when we mix the true unadulterated truth of our rest with other things. There is one place to enter into His rest, and that is in Jesus. God also prescribes that we "not forsake the gathering together" with other believers (Hebrews 10:25). Why? Because that is what He tells us to do. That is how we encourage, strengthen, and exhort one another. You'll never get that "going to church online." That may be okay for a time period to avoid some plague or something, but that is not a long-term solution. That is not where we go. That is not what God prescribes. And as to what we study, there is no substitute for the Word of God. It is "alive and powerful"...."a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." We belong here, and should be engaged in the study and application of the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.