

The Migration of Dan to Northern Israel

Judges 18

Judges 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.” 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 went from there to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah. 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. 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. 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.

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.”

Background Notes

In the Bible, the phrase “from Dan to Beersheba” sometimes refers to the entire land of Israel – from Dan in the north to Beer Sheba in the south of the Land. Judges 18 gives us the background as to why the name “Dan” refers to the far north of Israel. During the time of the Judges, part of the tribe of Dan migrated to the unconquered Canaanite territory in the north and settled there. The Lord had given Dan enough territory in the central part of the land, but the Amorites continued to exist in that area and Dan didn’t conquer all of their allotted territory. (See Judges 1:34.) So part of the tribe of Dan went north and conquered the Canaanites living in the city of Laish, and then rebuilt the city for themselves.

Archaeology confirms the accuracy of this Scripture account of the defeat of the Canaanite city by Israelite forces. When you visit the Tel Dan today, you can view the excavated ancient gate of the Canaanite town of Laish. Furthermore, archaeology confirms the burning of the city at this time. The impressive walls and gate area of the Israelite city have also been uncovered.

What about all the slaughter? Why did God allow the killing described here? Was all this slaughter justified? The slaughter in the civil wars under Jephthah (Judges 12) and the near annihilation of the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 21) were certainly **not** justified. But clearing the land of the pagan Canaanites **was** justified. Many years before this time, God had given all this land to Abraham under the Abrahamic Covenant, and God had patiently waited for many years for the Canaanites to repent of their gross sins of idolatry and immorality. (See Genesis 15:13-16.)

Now, however, Israel had entered the Promised Land, and the time had come for God’s judgment on the pagan peoples dwelling in the land. God didn’t want His own people polluted by the idolatry and immorality of the Canaanites, and that’s why He wanted them to make a clean sweep. Unfortunately Israel failed to follow the Lord whole-heartedly. They didn’t drive out the Canaanites, and as a result many of them adopted the false gods and idolatrous practices of the Canaanites.

By the way, don't get the idea that everything and everywhere was totally up for grabs during the dark days of the Judges. Ruth and Boaz, for example, lived during the time of the Judges. What a wonderful story of love and devotion! Furthermore, when the people would periodically return to the Lord under the leadership of a godly judge, a time of blessing and following the Lord would follow. So along with all the bad news, some good things took place during the time of the Judges.

Doctrinal Points

1. Eclectic religion is pleasing to man.

"Eclectic religion" is picking and choosing what **you** think is best from several religions, and picking and choosing what doctrines and methods **you** like best. The tribe of Dan had an eclectic religion. They said they wanted to worship the Lord, but they wanted to do worship Him **their** way. God's way prescribed that there would be no graven images, no priests other than the line of Aaron, and no shrines except for the central sanctuary of the Tabernacle, and later the Temple. But the people of Dan wanted to worship in their own way. They wanted images or idols like their pagan neighbors. They wanted to have their own priests, just like the gods of other nations. They wanted to have local shrines, because local shrines were easier and more convenient - and more like the other nations.

Eclectic religion is pleasing to man. This is just as true today as it was in the time of the Judges. People don't like to hear about the doctrine of hell today, so they drop that doctrine. People do like the idea that there's no role distinction between men and women in the Church, and so that unbiblical "doctrine" is adopted. People pick and choose the doctrines that are pleasing to them. Eclectic religion is pleasing to man.

2. Eclectic religion is not pleasing to God.

"So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh" (v31). The tribe of Dan set up their shrine and placed Micah's carved image and other idolatrous images in it. They set up their own priest, in direct violation of the Word of God: *"So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death" (Numbers 3:10).* In addition, they "bought off" the false priest with promises of gain. The false priest even falsely assured them that what they were doing was pleasing to the Lord, so they actually imagined that they had the stamp with God's blessing on all this (v6). Talk about eclectic religion! Shiloh was the location of the true house of the Lord and the true priesthood (v31).

Eclectic religion is not pleasing to God. Proverbs 14:12 says, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."* "A way that seems right to a man" describes eclectic religion perfectly! It's a way that seems right, and it's pleasing to man - but it's **not** pleasing to God!

The false worship of God by the tribe of Dan paved the way for the further idolatry of Jeroboam I, the first king of the northern kingdom. After the death of King Solomon the kingdom split into two, Israel and Judah. And Jeroboam set up two

golden calf idols in the northern kingdom of Israel. One was at Bethel and the other was located right here at Dan. It started with the eclectic false religion of the tribe of Dan.

How does all this apply to us today? Are you practicing your own eclectic religion? Have you adopted some belief ideas that are pleasing to you, but they don't come from the Word of God? Do you think, for example, that the way to Heaven is by "staying out of trouble" and "doing the best you can"? Well, that way may **seem** right - but in the end it's the way of death. Why? Because it's not pleasing to God! In fact, it's like telling God He's a liar! God says there is only one way to Heaven, and that one way is through Jesus Christ. If you have the audacity to believe that you can save yourself, that's eclectic religious thinking. It's not from the Bible, and it's not from God. Eclectic religion is not pleasing to God.

Practical Application

Have you experienced the futility and emptiness of idolatry?

"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?'" This is what Micah said when the tribe of Dan took away his priest and his idols.

Think of what Micah is saying here. "The gods that I made." How ridiculous - and how futile!

Oh, the futility and the emptiness of idolatry! Yet even today, think of how people worship what they have made. Have your beautiful home or the successful business that you started become your gods? Are they **idols that you have made**? That's idolatry - and that's futile!

Micah also said here, *"Now what more do I have?"* When they come to the end of their lives, that's exactly what some people will say. The "gods" that they created with their own hands during their lives were all-important to them - and at the end of their lives those empty "gods" will be all they'll have. When it's too late, they will realize the emptiness of idolatry.

Don't wait! Realize now that worshiping the earthly things that we have created is empty idolatry. Have you experienced the emptiness of idolatry?