**Micah’s Idols and the Danites Settle in Laish**

The last 5 chapters of Judges do not chronologically follow after the period of Samson, rather they are a return to the time after Joshua’s death when there was no judge or king in Israel. Chapter 17 begins a story about a man living in Ephraim and continues into chapter 18. Micah was the man and he lived with his mother who is not named. She had been able to amass quite a fortune in silver amounting to 1100 shekels, coincidentally the same amount paid by several Philistines to Delilah. Her silver had been taken from her and she had been cursing the man who stole it. Her son confessed that he had taken it and she not only forgave him but asked God’s blessings on him. She seemed to have been obsessed with her silver, cursing the loss of it and probably giving up on ever recovering it. She was so overjoyed to learn that it was still in the family’s possession that she did not chastise her son. She then made what I would call a ex post facto vow. She claimed that the silver had been previously dedicated to God and now she would make good on the vow.

Thus began a series of steps that would lead an entire tribe of Israel to abandon worship of God in favor of idol worship. First Micah’s mother only contributed 200 shekels, holding back the rest (see Acts. 5:1-10). Then, instead of giving the money to the tabernacle, she had molten and graven images fashioned by a silversmith. While it is not known whether these images were meant as symbols of God or an idol such as the golden calf, either would have been a violation of the second commandment. Matthew Henry speculated that she was one of the original Israelites who came out of Egypt and having the images recalled the follies of her youth and that she told her son that it represented the old religion. It seemed that Micah was initially reluctant to participate in having the images made (see v. 4) but he soon not only approved but added to the sin by making an ephod and idols (teraphim KJV, likely a replacement for urim and thummin). He also installed one of his sons as a priest in his attempt to set up a parallel religion.

He and his mother were soon joined by a kindred spirit, a young Levite who was living among the people of Judah in Bethlehem. He had been wandering about, looking for a place to stay. As a Levite, he should have been looking for a Levite town to dwell and serve in. When Micah found out that he was a Levite, he invited him to stay, offering him room, board and a salary. He installed the young man as a priest, thinking his Levite heritage would lend legitimacy to his church, saying “I know the Lord will be good to me since this Levite has become my priest”.

In chapter 18, a group of Danites were seeking a place to settle since that tribe had not established an area as their inheritance. Their tribe was the last given an inheritance of land in Canaan (see Joshua 19:40-48). The land reserved for them was between Ephraim and the Mediterranean Sea but they were unable to dislodge the Canaanites living in that area. They decided to venture north looking for a land more easily conquered. They sent 5 men to spy out the land and the men happened to arrive in the hill country of Ephraim where they encountered Micah. They apparently recognized the young Levite and asked him to inquire of God if their mission would be successful and he assured them that they had God’s approval.

They scouted out the town of Laish and returned to Zorah to tell their brothers that the land was good and the people there could be easily defeated. The Danites sent an army of 600 men along with the 5 spies and they arrived again at the house of Micah. The spies told the men about the Levite priest, images and idols saying “You know what to do”. To the reader, the expected response would be that they destroyed the idols and stoned the false priest. Instead, they took all the “sacred” items and invited the priest to go with them. He saw it as an opportunity for a larger congregation so he left with them. Micah tried to stop them but they threatened him and he returned home.

When the army arrived at Laish, they put everyone to the sword and took over the town, renaming it Dan. The set up their idols and in verse 30 we learn the young Levite was named Jonathan. He and his descendants served as priests for the tribe of Dan until Israel was taken captive generations later.

While reading this chapter I am reminded of the phrase “judge shopping”. As a Jew, Micah could have gone to the legitimate priests of Israel but he chose to establish his own denomination perhaps because the true priests would not tolerate his behavior. The Danites were guilty of the same thing. As they prepared to Laish, they could have consulted priests at Shiloh but they chose to have the young Levite inquire of God on their behalf. He saw their request as an opportunity to sell a blessing from God although he was neither a priest nor prophet. Most tragically, Jonathan was the first in a long line of false priests that served the Danites for generations, probably providing them with a less demanding religion than the true Jewish religion based on the law.