

Judges 17-18

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Our God and our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your goodness to us. We thank you for bringing us together again this morning, your people in your presence, gathered with this great purpose to worship you, the living and true God. We come and we acknowledge that you are the God who has demonstrated your steadfast love and faithfulness to your people from generation to generation and right through to our present and into our future. We can be assured that you are the God who will remain as you have ever been, a God of steadfast love and faithfulness, a God who keeps his promises, a God who fulfills his purposes with his own. And we thank you for that. And we thank you that we come in that assurance and in that confidence that our God is the one who brings deliverance to us. And it is by your hand alone we contribute nothing. But if we had to contribute something, we would fall short even in what would be required of us. But we thank you that you are the one who is the beginning and end of our salvation. And we thank you for that. And so we come in grateful praise this morning to thank you for your goodness, to thank you for your generosity and mercy towards us expressed and shown in so many ways. We thank you that even in this week that has ended, we can look back and we can acknowledge your gracious hand upon us in good times and in bad times, in times of celebration and in times of sadness. In all of these times, you are the God who accompanies your people and you're the one who leads us in the direction that you would have us go. We pray that we would be a people who, as we gather to worship you, so we would be a people who would gather sensitive to hear your voice. We confess that often we are distracted by many voices, including our own, and your voice is drowned out to our ears. And we pray that that would not be so this morning, but rather that we would hear you as you speak to us in and through your Word. We come acknowledging that we are sinners, that we sin against you, that we have sinned against you in so many ways in these days that have gone by. And so we come and we confess our sin, and we ask that you would grant us the forgiveness that you are able and ever willing to grant to those who would but come, confessing as we do our sin before you. Be with us and bless us. Bless all those whom we love, the families we form part of. Be with those of our number who aren't with us this morning, wherever they are. Be close to your people. And all of these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, can I invite the children to come to the first couple of peers?

Good morning. I want to tell you about a man in the Bible called Micah. Now, some of you who maybe have learned the books of the Bible, maybe in the Old Testament and the New Testament, you might think, oh, I know, I know about Micah because you've heard that name, because that's the name of one of the books of the Bible. And that's true. There was a prophet called Micah, and he wrote one of the books in the Bible. But the Micah that I want to tell you about is a different Micah. He's not so well known.

And he's a man that we meet in the book of Judges. Now, we don't really know much about Micah, but the Bible does tell us one very interesting thing about Micah. It tells us that Micah did what was right in his own eyes. And it wasn't just Micah. Lots of the people who lived at the time of Micah, they were doing the same thing. They did what was right in their own eyes. Now, what does that mean? They did what was right in their own eyes. Well, it meant that Micah made up his own rules. He thought, I'll decide what's good and what's bad. I'll make up my own rules. And that's what he did. He made up his own rules. Now, before thinking about what rules he made up, I wonder how that sounds.

Does that not sound quite fun, making up your own rules? I wonder if you could make up your own rules, what rules they would be. I'm thinking maybe some people would say, well, rule number one, children can go to bed whenever they want. Would that be a good rule to make up? Or, yeah, some people think that's a great rule. Or maybe rule number two could be children don't have to eat

vegetables, except the ones they like. Would that be a good rule to make up? We could make up our own rules.

[5 : 33] Wouldn't that be fun? We could just, what other rules could we have? Well, maybe, any ideas? Rules that you want to make up? Yeah, what rule would you make up? Playtime every day, no homework.

Playtime every day, no homework. That's a two-in-one. Yeah, a two-in-one rule. Yoshi, do you have a rule that you'd make up? Oh, that's a good one. Children's rooms, for those of you who didn't hear it, children's rooms are heavily guarded and no adults are allowed to enter.

We've almost got the Ten Commandments here, making up our own rules. Making up our own rules, that sounds like fun. But, you know, actually, when we think about it a little, if we were to all make up our own rules, it would be a bit of a disaster. Imagine at school. Imagine if at school, every could make up their own rules. And maybe somebody who's big and strong said, well, my rule is that it's okay to bully. Now, what would that be like? The big strong boy said, no, that's my rule. If I want to bully, I'll bully if I want. Or maybe somebody else said, well, my rule is that you can interrupt people when they're speaking. Yeah, and that's my rule, and that's what I'm going to do. It seems right to me, and it's my rule, and that's what we're going to do. And we could think of other ones. It would be a disaster. It would be chaos. Nobody would learn anything. People would get hurt. It would be a disaster if we all just made up our own rules. Well, let's get back to Micah. That's what he did.

He made up his own rules, and very especially in the matter of worshiping God. God, because He loves us, and because He wants us to worship Him, He's given us rules about how to worship Him. And that's really helpful, because that way we know how we can worship God. And one of His rules is that we're not to make idols that are meant to look like God. God says, no, you're not allowed to do that. I don't want you to do that. But Micah, remember Micah, he did what was right in his own eyes. He made up his own rules, and he said, well, I quite fancy a few idols. So, he made lots of idols, and he had them in his house, and he worshiped God using the idols. So, he thought. He made up his own rules. He did what was right in his own eyes, and he thought everything was going great. And then one day, somebody came to his house house, and robbed all his idols. They were made of silver, maybe some of gold. I don't know.

They were all robbed, and he was left without any idols. And Micah, very sad, really, when he realized that he'd lost all his idols, said, I have nothing left. That's what he said. I have nothing left. [8 : 24] It's a very sad story. I have nothing left. And why? Why did it all go wrong? Well, it all went wrong because Micah thought he was very clever, and he could make up his own rules, and just ignore God's rules. And it all ended in tears. So, we need to be careful. God loves us, and because he loves us, he's given us instruction. He's given us laws. He's given us rules for us to live by, and that's because he loves us, and he wants us to be happy. He wants us to be safe, and he wants us to worship him as we ought. And the most intelligent thing we can do, the wisest thing we can do, is to learn and to follow God's rules, and not be silly like Micah, and make up our own. Because when we do, it all just ends in tears.

I'll tell you about today, about this fellow called Micah. We'll be meeting Micah again later on in the sermon. Well, we're going to sing again. Before we do, can I just welcome you all to our service today. Any of you who are visiting with us, we're very pleased that you've joined with us, that together we might worship God. Can I also extend an invitation to you to a congregational lunch that is going to take place immediately after this service. Normally, we would have tea and coffee straight after the service, but because of the lunch, we'll just head downstairs, and tables will be set out. And so, please do stay for that if you're able. Even if you're just visiting with us, there will be plenty for everybody. So, that's immediately after the service this morning. So, that's the main thing I think I wanted to just highlight today. Well, let's sing now. We're going to sing from Psalm 119, page 157 in our Psalm books, Psalm 119, verses 1 to 8. And the whole of the first section of Psalm 119, we're going to sing to the tune

Cresselius. Blessed are those of blameless ways who live according to God's Word. Blessed are those who keep His laws, who with their whole heart seek the Lord. Psalm 119, verses 1 to 8, and we'll stand to sing.

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Blessed are those of blameless ways who live according to God's Word. Blessed are those of blameless ways who live according to God's Word. And the whole of the first section of Psalm 119, verses 1 to 8, and we'll stand to sing. Cresselius. Cresselius.

[11:26] All us that are to be opened away. O that thy grace first set past for in vain in good decrease my day.

So when I think of your hope that I would not fear this grace of shame.

I would wish you with that of my heart and to just hope I'm left by me.

O your decrease I fell away. Do not force it be utterly.

Amen. We're going to read the Bible in the Old Testament in the book of Judges.

[12:51] The book of Judges and chapter 17. We're going to read chapter 17 and 18. Two chapters, but really they recount one story.

And what we're going to do is we'll read the whole of these two chapters. And as has been the case for the last couple of times when we've had fairly long readings, I would encourage you to just try and get as good a picture of this story as it's read.

Because then as we return and as we're really going to be treating it in a kind of overview way, just having the background of the story in your mind will be helpful.

So I'd encourage you to just listen carefully as we read these two chapters in Judges. So the first chapter, chapter 17, and then just reading straight through to chapter 18.

It's on page 261 in our Bibles. Micah chapter 17. Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim said to his mother, When he returned the 1100 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.

[14:26] I will give it back to you. So he returned the silver to his mother and she took 200 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.

Now this man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and some idols and installed one of his sons as his priest. In those days Israel had no king.

Everyone did as he saw fit. A young Levite from Bethlehem in Judah who had been living within the clan of Judah left that town in search of some other place to stay.

On the way he came to Micah's house in the hill country of Ephraim. 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.

Then Micah said to him, Live with me and be my father and priest and I'll give you 10 shekels of silver a year, your clothes and your food. So the Levite agreed to live with him and the young man was to him like one of his sons.

[15:36] Then Micah installed the Levite and the young man became his priest and lived in his house. And Micah said, Now I know that the Lord will be good to me since this Levite has become my priest.

In those days Israel had no king. 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.

So the Danites sent five warriors from Zorah and Eshtol to spy out the land and explore it. These men represented all their clans.

They told them, Go explore the land. The men entered the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah where they spent the night. 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? He told them what Micah had done for him and said, He has hired me and I am his priest. Then they said to him, Please inquire of God to learn whether our journey will be successful.

[16:50] The priest answered them, Go in peace. Your journey has the Lord's approval. 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. When they returned to Zorah and Eshtol their brothers asked them, How did you find things?

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.

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. Then six hundred men from the clan of the Danites armed for battle set out from Zorah and Eshtol.

On their way they set up camp near Kiriath, Harim in Judah. This is why the place west of Kiriath, Harim is called Mahanedan to this day.

[18 : 02] From there they went on to the hill country of Ephraim and came to Micah's house. 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. So they turned in there and went to the house of the young Levite at Micah's place and greeted him. The six hundred Danites armed for battle stood at the entrance to the gate.

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.

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? 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?

[19 : 11] Then the priest was glad. He took the ephod, the other household gods, and the carved image and went along with the people. Putting their little children, their livestock, and their possessions in front of them, they turned away and left.

When they had gone some distance from Micah's house, the men who lived near Micah were called together and overtook the Danites. 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?

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?

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. So the Danites went their way and Micah, seeing that they were too strong for him, turned round and went back home.

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.

[20 : 21] 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. The Danites rebuilt the city and settled there.

They named it Dan after their forefather Dan who was born to Israel. Though the city used to be called Laish. There the Danites set up for themselves the idols and Jonathan, son of Gershon, the son of Moses and his sons were priests for the tribe of Dan until the time of the captivity of the land. They continued to use the idols Micah had made. All the time the house of God was in Shiloh. The word of God.

Let's bow our heads and pray. Our God and our Heavenly Father we thank you for your word. But as we thank you for your word so also we acknowledge the great need that we have a continuing and permanent need of your help that we would understand your word.

And we thank you that you have not left us without help. We thank you for your Holy Spirit who is with us this morning who is gathered here and who is here to help us understand your word.

[21 : 41] And we pray that we would be very conscious of his help as we read and as we consider your word this morning. We know that we ever stand in need of his help.

But we thank you that there are times when we turn to your word and we're more conscious of our need. Not that it is greater or lesser for it is always a great need. But there are times when we are more conscious of how without your help we stand with no hope of understanding what it is you are saying to us.

What truth it is that we are to draw and to learn from. We pray that you would help us then this morning as we turn to your word. We recognize even as we ponder on some of what we have read that we are not so unlike Micah and the men of his day.

How often we are guilty of doing what is right in our own eyes. How often we are guilty of living our lives according to our own agendas. How guilty we are so often of putting to one side your word and those parts of it that we find uncomfortable and inconvenient and overly demanding.

We replace them with our own more amenable more comfortable rules. and we do things as seems right in our own eyes. We pray that as we are conscious of that failing in us and as we turn to your word and we see the consequences of such foolishness that we would be warned and taught and encouraged rather to seek to see the world and to see our lives and to see the purpose of our lives through your eyes.

[23 : 20] We thank you that this is not something that is impossible for we are able to see as you see through your word. For this is your word and in your word we discover your will.

We discover how you see the world and how you see us. And so we ask that you would help us to increasingly live our lives and take our decisions concerned not with our agendas and what we think is best but rather what you think is best and what you have revealed is best in your word and the Bible.

Help us then we pray. Lord we pray then that as we do hear you speaking to us this morning that we would take what we hear and take it with us into the week that has begun.

That this would be an opportunity to serve you more intelligently, more committedly, more gratefully as we have been fed and challenged by you this morning.

Be with us then and be with all of your people as they gather as we do across the city, across the world, whatever your people gather and very especially we pray for those who gather in circumstances of danger and persecution.

[24 : 36] Be with them to keep them and to protect them. And all of these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing again before we turn to think about the part of the Bible that we read a few moments ago.

We're going to continue singing in Psalm 119. We're going to sing verses 9 to 16, the second section of this psalm and we'll sing to the tune Walton.

You'll find that on page 157. How can the young keep their life pure by doing what your word demands? I seek you with my heart and soul.

Let me not stray from your commands. Psalm 119 verses 9 to 16. We'll stand to sing. Amen. Amen. Amen. sing with me Widow's blood show to the poor byvert and rings day with me■ons.

To keep it from the heavenly youth May he to you, O Lord, My God, his chief and sows Never back through Each of those chiefs of the land I gladly pay my lips and hope I have to come, O Lord, The lands that suffer so

[27 : 15] To count their gold I meditate upon your grace And on your grace I reflect I take delight in your decrease Your word I never will be dead Well, it's story time again.

Those of you who were here last Sunday morning will perhaps remember the three love stories that we told from chapter 16 of the book of Judges, A story of twisted love between Samson and Delilah, A story of surprising love between Samson and the Lord, And a story of epic love between the Lord and his people.

Well, this morning we have another three stories to tell, Surely one story with three characters. And the three characters in our story are Micah, Who we've met already as we spoke with the children And in our reading, A Levite called Jonathan, And the tribe of Dan.

So the third character is a whole tribe. Micah, Jonathan the Levite, And the tribe of Dan. That's a tribe that Samson was a part of.

And what we're going to do is we're going to tell the story of the three characters from two quite distinct perspectives. First of all, tell the story through their own eyes.

[29 : 27] But then return to the story and tell the story through God's eyes inasmuch as we are able to do that. And in a measure we are able to do that.

So the same story, but from two quite different perspectives. Through the eyes of the characters that we'll be considering, But then also through God's eyes. And then having done so, Having told the story in these two ways, See what lessons we can draw from this rather peculiar tale That we find towards the end of the book of Judges.

Now before we start, We need to notice something a little different About these closing chapters of the book. In these final chapters, The author makes almost no judgment Or even comment about the events that he describes.

He leaves that to the reader. That would be to you and me. Now I say almost no judgment or comment because he does say one crucial thing in chapter 17 and in verse 6. One crucial editorial comment. And of course we're familiar with it. It almost marks the whole book of Judges. In those days, Israel had no king.

[30 : 50] Everyone did as he saw fit. Now we'll come back to the matter of the king towards the end. But for the moment, it's very important for us to just realize or to consider what is also said there in the second part.

Everyone did as they saw fit. Now what's actually said, what is literally said, and what is translated in this way, is that everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. And you might say, well, that's exactly the same as saying everyone did as he saw fit. But the crucial thing for us to be aware of, is that when it says that everyone did what was right in their own eyes, it's not just saying that everyone did their own thing.

It's saying that they thought it was right what they were doing. They did what was right in their own eyes. Now whether it was or whether it wasn't is another matter.

But from their perspective, the perspective of the actors that we'll be looking at, they did what was right in their own eyes. Not just their own thing, but what they considered to be right.

[32 : 07] That's what they did. What was right in their own eyes. And that's important to bear in mind as we proceed. Well, let's tell the story from the perspective of the actors that we've identified.

We'll start with Micah. How did Micah judge what he was doing in his own eyes? Well, we'll focus on three things that we're told that Micah did. The very first thing that we're told of in chapter 17 at the very beginning is not very promising.

We're told that Micah stole from his own mother. There in verses 1 and 2, we have that related to us. Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim 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. Now Micah, let's be clear, certainly didn't imagine that stealing from his mother was the right thing to do.

But what I'm sure he did think was the right thing to do was to confess that he had done so, and to return the money, which is what he does. And I'm sure Micah, as he decided to do that, as he utters his confession, as he returned the money to his mother, in his own mind, he is very clear, I'm doing the right thing.

[33 : 32] I'm doing what is right in my own eyes. Well, next we find Micah, together with his mother, getting the matter of worship on the family agenda.

I wonder if the crisis surrounding the stolen money got everybody thinking that it would be good to bring God back into the picture. It must have been a real crisis for the family, this incident of the lost money, and to discover that it was the son who had stolen it, and yes, he returns it, but it's a family crisis.

And everybody's agreed, you know, we really need to get God back into this family. And Micah certainly saw this as important. His mother seems of any religious sort, and she consecrates the returned silver to the Lord.

You'll have noticed that though she seemingly had offered all of it, in the event, it's part of it that is dedicated to the image that is fashioned. But nonetheless, this is her intention, this is her declared intention, in gratitude for the money being returned, in gratitude for her son having the courage to confess his guilt, she dedicates the return money to the Lord.

She was a religious woman, she was a believer, she believed in God, and she wished to recognize God's hand in this particular way.

[35 : 01] Religious, but confused, very confused. For in one sentence, she speaks of consecrating to the Lord, and in the very same breath, she speaks of breaking the second commandment, by fashioning an image to represent the Lord she claims she is dedicated to.

And of course, in all of this, Micah, who is the character we're principally concerned with, is not guiltless. He receives the image that has been fashioned, he gives it pride of place in his home. We read at the end of verse 4, and they were put in Micah's house. But Micah does much more in this matter of family worship. He has a shrine in his house, together with an ephod, some idols, and to cap it all, a priest.

His very own son is appointed priest over the family chapel. Now what do you think Micah thought of all that he was doing in this matter of family worship?

Well, I'm sure he was very much of the opinion that it was all good. It was all right in his own eyes. Micah was moving on from his wayward ways of youth, And getting serious about God and faith and all that good stuff.

[36 : 29] I wouldn't be surprised if Micah perhaps looked around at his contemporaries, And concluded that, well, he was a cut above most of them. The final deed of Micah that we want to comment on is his appointment of the Levite.

We later discover his name as Jonathan, As the new priest over his household chapel. In verses 7 to 10, we're told of how that occurs, how this Levite from Bethlehem appears, And the outcome of it all, we've read the story, is that he is appointed as priest over Micah's household.

Nothing is said of Micah's poor son, who seems to have been demoted unceremoniously, And maybe thrown back out into the fields to work. I don't know. But a better alternative has appeared, a Levite.

And of course, Micah's so happy about this. You see, he knows that it's the Levites who ought to be priests. And his son, well, his son wasn't a Levite, and well, in the absence of a Levite, he would do. But now, he had a Levite. What could be better? And not only that, God had provided. It had to be God. Surely that this Levite would appear from nowhere at his home.

[37 : 46] This has got to be the hand of God. And Micah is so happy that now he has a Levite, the genuine article, as his own personal priest over his household.

There was no doubt in Micah's mind that this was the right thing to do. It was right in the eyes of Micah. And how do things go for Micah as he does what is right in his own eyes?

Well, actually, things go pretty well for Micah. He's back in favor with his mother. He has a church in his own front room. And he even has his own personal Levite as his priest.

It's little wonder that Micah concludes, as recorded for us at the end of chapter 17, Now I know that the Lord will be good to me.

All is well in the household of Micah. I know the Lord will be good to me. You can almost feel the warmth of his faith.

[38 : 55] God is good always. And he's going to be good to me. Well, let's move on to the second character, Jonathan the Levite.

What does he do that was right in his own eyes? Well, the first thing we're told is that he left Bethlehem and Judah looking for some other place to stay. We don't know why he got itchy feet. But as fate would have it, he ends up in Micah's house and is offered the position of resident priest. It's not a bad deal that he's offered by Micah food, clothes, lodging, a stipend, and an honored place in Micah's home.

Jonathan weighs up the proposal that has been made to him, and he concludes that this is the right thing to do. He's a Levite, and that's what Levites do.

And what better than to accept this offer of employment as priest in Micah's household. It was right in his own eyes.

[40 : 05] But then matters got interesting for Jonathan the Levite. Spies from the tribe of Dan appear en route to the land that they plan to conquer. And being religious sorts themselves, they ask Jonathan the Levite to inquire of God as to the outcome of their mission.

Jonathan is more than happy to oblige, and seemingly dispensing with the small detail of actually inquiring of the Lord, he assures the spies that their journey has the Lord's approval.

It really is quite striking how this request is made, and without batting an eyelid, Jonathan the Levite is able to say, All will be well. Don't waste time inquiring of the Lord.

You can be assured, I'm a Levite, I'm the priest here. All will be well with your mission. And of course the spies were delighted with the happy outcome to their inquiry.

Jonathan was sure that his advice was right. It was right in his own eyes. Well, the spies head off, and some time later they return with an army of Danites en route to take possession of the land they had wrecked some time before.

[41 : 23] They stop by Micah's place and proceed to take the image, the ephod, the idols to accompany them on their quest. Poor Jonathan is less than happy to see the tools of his trade being stolen by the spies, but to his surprise he has made a very enticing offer.

The Danites invite him to go with them as their priest. We can listen to their own words of invitation. Nothing if not clear. Isn't it better that you serve a tribe and clan in Israel rather than just one man's household?

This was a big promotion. God was pleased with Jonathan the Levite. He was so pleased. He said, look, you're going to be the priest over a whole tribe.

God had brought this message surely through these Danites. And Jonathan is more than happy to accept their generous offer. It was a no-brainer, really.

This is surely a God-given opportunity to better serve God as a priest over a whole tribe in Israel. How does it go for Jonathan the Levite?

[42 : 35] Well, pretty well. We're told in verse 20, very tellingly, that the priest was glad. Oh, yes, he was glad at this turn of events.

And things go from good to better. The Danites, they conquer the land just as Jonathan had predicted. He must surely be a bona fide priest if he told them that it would go well.

And it did go well. And we're told that he and his sons became established as the priestly family for the tribe of Dan for generations to come. Jonathan the Levite did what was right in his own eyes.

And providence smiles kindly on him. God is good. Always. I imagine that's what Jonathan the Levite concluded.

What about the tribe of Dan? Well, we've already met them as we go through the characters. Of course, we're meeting the other characters as well. But specifically, what about the tribe of Dan? What is it that they do that was right in their own eyes?

[43 : 43] Well, they decide to finally secure their own territory. Something that they had singularly failed to do since the original conquest. Indeed, specific references is made to that at the very beginning of the book of Judges.

In chapter 1 and in verse 34, we read, The Amorites confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain. And we don't know how long has passed, but it would seem that that remained their predicament.

They had never taken possession of their own territory. And they want to put things right. And that is the mission that they are on. And the procedure that they follow as we read of it, it's what you might describe as textbook conquest.

You can almost, not almost, you can see the parallels with the original conquest. They send spies. That rings a bell, doesn't it?

They consult of the Lord. That's good, surely. They enthuse the masses. The spies go back and say, look, let's go. We can do this. And they conquer the land. Moses would have been proud of them.

[44 : 53] And it was very much right in their own eyes. How did it go for them? Well, it went really well. Listen to what the spies reported about the land in chapter 18 and verses 9 and 10.

What do they say to their fellow countrymen or their fellow tribespeople? Come on, let's attack them. We have seen that the land is very good. Verse 10, when you get there, you will find an unsuspecting people in a spacious land that God has put into your hands.

A land that lacks nothing whatever. God was with them. God was giving them this land. It's almost surprising they didn't say flowing with milk and honey. It was good in their own eyes what they were doing.

Nobody could stop them. If God was for them, who could be against them? Certainly not the unarmed men of Laish. And so it proved they very easily conquer the land and take possession of it.

Micah and Jonathan the Levite, the tribe of Dan, all doing what was right in their own eyes. And so it would appear, enjoying the smile and blessing of God upon their endeavors.

[46 : 06] But now, we need to tell the same story about the same characters from a different perspective.

Not through the eyes of the actors themselves, but through the eyes of God. Does God see things differently? Well, we'll start with Micah.

How does God see Micah's confession and return of the stolen shekels? Surely he must approve of that. In this matter, he must be of one mind with Micah.

It was the right thing to do. But remember, God sees the heart. And the question is, why did Micah confess and return the money?

Well, we don't know for sure, because we're not told. But I think we're given a clue in verse 2. In verse 2, we're told that Micah had heard his mother utter a curse upon the thief.

[47 : 10] She had done so within his earshot. Who knows? Maybe deliberately. Maybe she suspected of her son. We don't know. But the point is, she utters this curse within Micah's earshot.

And as a result of Micah hearing this curse being uttered upon the thief, he confesses and returns the money. It makes you wonder, doesn't it?

Why did he confess and return the money? Was it heartfelt repentance for the sin that he had committed? Or was it fear of the curse that had been uttered by his mother?

Well, it seems to me that the second possibility is much more likely. What he had done that was right in his own eyes? I wonder if it was right in God's eyes, given what it would appear was his motivation.

What about Micah's concern for family worship? Well, here we don't need to speculate. In the matter of the shekels, well, there's an element of speculation. But in the matter of what Micah does with regard to the worship of God, no speculation is required.

[48 : 24] We know what God would have made of Micah's private chapel. He hated it. He hated the shrine. He hated the image. He hated the idols.

He hated the poisonous cocktail of truth and error. He hated the indignity of sharing his rightful place as Micah's God with gods that were no gods at all.

Michael's chapel was offensive to the eyes of God. It was right in the eyes of Micah, but it was offensive in the eyes of God.

What about his Levite priests? Did Micah not get at least this right? Well, God knew what Micah was about. God knew what Micah was trying to do.

Micah was trying to buy God off. He employs a Levite priest and God blesses him. Of course, he's got to bless him. He has a Levite as his own priest.

[49 : 23] This is man-made religion to a T, buying God's favor, earning his mercy, deserving his rewards. You see, when Micah concludes, as recorded at the end of chapter 17, Now I know that the Lord will be good to me.

What he's saying is, I've paid for it. He's got to be good to me. Look at everything I've done for him. It's payback time. And God is going to be good to me.

And God sees through all this. And God hates it. He hates it because it perversely misrepresents and cheapens God and his grace.

And he hates it also because he knows the end of it for Micah, that it will all end in tears. But didn't we say a moment ago that all went well for Micah?

And all did go well for Micah for a season. And even there, let me just interrupt and just introduce a word of caution. How we need to be careful when we imagine that we enjoy God's favor because things are going well for us.

[50 : 38] Well, be careful. Things were going well for Micah for a season. But how does the story unfold? When the men of Dan steal Micah's image and hijack his priest, and Micah fails miserably in his attempts to recover his portable chapel, what does Micah say?

Well, in verse 24 of chapter 18, we read what Micah says. You took the gods I made. And my priest, and went away.

What else do I have? And the picture is pathetic. It is profoundly sad. This man who had done what was right in his own eyes, who had made his own gods, who had constructed his own religion, and it's all gone.

It's all been taken away, and he has nothing left. What else do I have? And he turns around, crestfallen, returning to an empty house with nothing left and nothing to live for.

What else do I have? Nothing. Micah is left with nothing. And that's the way with man-made idols. They seem to satisfy for a season, but in time their foolish worshippers are left with nothing.

[52 : 06] Absolutely nothing. It's true of our modern idols of wealth and status and influence. They cannot ultimately deliver or satisfy.

So much for Micah. What of Jonathan the Levite? How is he to be seen through God's eyes? He looks like a priest. He's from a tribe of priests.

He's got the heritage. But his heart knows nothing of piety and devotion to God, the God he claims to serve. He is a hired hand, willing to go with the highest bidder, and willing to save whatever will soothe and please his paymasters.

And this is what God sees. And note the tragic irony of his heritage that is only revealed at the very end of the story. Jonathan, the son of Gershon, son of Moses.

That's right, Moses. We all know about Moses. And yet, very different from Moses.

[53 : 19] But what are the blessings that he enjoys? Unlike with Micah, we don't read of any final disaster to befall Jonathan.

And I wonder, is this not a more solemn judgment upon Jonathan? Jonathan, right in his own eyes, sleepwalking his way to a lost eternity.

A crisis can be a gracious thing. I wonder if for Micah the crisis proved a gracious thing. We don't know. But it's more so when a man imagines that what he's doing is right, right in his own eyes.

And yet, he is sleepwalking into a lost eternity. And many are like Jonathan the Levite to this day. What are the men of Dan?

How are they seen by the eyes of God? What are their textbook conquests? But from God's perspective, there is a problem, a very big problem. You see, the land they conquer is outwith the promised land.

[54 : 32] It wasn't part of what God had promised to them. It's not their land. But they know better than God. And self-righteously and triumphantly, they brutally subjugate a peaceful and unsuspecting people, as they are described here in the chapter.

And God looks down upon them in anger. But they are guilty not only of brutality, but also of crass and continuing idolatry, as we're told they continue to use the gods Micah had made.

And what is their ultimate fate? You see, for them also, things appeared to be going so well. From being hemmed in to the hill country where they were poor and looked down upon and threatened. Now they had spacious lands and they were prosperous and all was going well. God was being good to them, so they thought. But what is their ultimate fate? Well, we're told in verse 30 in a very fleeting manner.

At the very end of the verse, we're told what was happening until the time of the captivity of the land. A day of reckoning was coming for the men of Dan.

[55 : 59] Generations would come and go, but the judgment on the men of Dan would come. And it would come through the Assyrians. As generations later, God would use the Assyrians to conquer the northern kingdom, what became the northern kingdom, and send into permanent exile the men of Dan and many others.

But you know, there's an even more solemn reference to God's reckoning on the men of Dan. In Revelation chapter 7, we're not going to read it now, time doesn't allow it, but you might want to have a look at it later on today and confirm what I'm about to say.

In Revelation chapter 7, we're presented with a picture of God's redeemed people in heaven. And it is a picture. Men and women represented by the 12 tribes of Israel.

But there's an intriguing detail. And the intriguing detail is that there aren't 12 tribes mentioned in chapter 7 of Revelation.

There are no one is missing. There is no mention of the tribe of Dan. Very solemn.

[57 : 17] And when we bring that to ourselves and to our own eternal destiny, is it not wise for us to ask the question, when the role is called out yonder?

When the role is called out yonder. When the role is called out yonder, will you be there? One story. Three characters. Two perspectives. What can we learn from this peculiar tale? Well, we can learn a great deal by asking a question. Why were Micah and Jonathan and the men of Dan so wrong when they thought they were so right?

Why was their perspective so different to God's perspective? Well, we're brought back to the matter of a king. In those days, Israel had no king.

And to speak of no king is to speak of no absolute authority. No one to represent God and His ultimate authority. There was no one to instruct Israel in what was right in God's eyes.

[58 : 25] No one to keep Israel on track in the matter of the right worship and service of God. And in the absence of a king, everyone did what seemed right in their own eyes.

Illustrated in many ways, but perhaps most vividly in Micah's private chapel. But there is perhaps one further telling comment of the author. A final salvo to explain the chaos and confusion.

The chapter ends with these somber words. They almost seem unnecessary. At the very end, they're thrown in by the author. Having told all this sorry tale, he ends with these words.

All the time. When all this was going on, all the time, the house of God was in Shiloh. There it was.

In the place determined by God. But empty and silent as the Israelites busily worshiped and served God as they saw fit. In a manner that was right in their eyes.

[59 : 37] But what about us today? Can we make the same mistake? Are we often guilty of doing what seems right in our own eyes?

In our man-made worship. In our private morality. In our selective reading and application of God's Word. And you know, we need to be very careful because we can be doing all of these things. And yet, everything seems to be going so well. God is good to us. All is well. God is good to us. And yet, we are guilty of the very thing that Micah and Jonathan and the men of Dan were guilty of. How can we worship and serve God in a manner that is right in His eyes? This must be the matter of greatest urgency for us in the lives that we live.

Day by day. In the worship that we offer. In our service to God. In everything we are and everything we do. Is it right in our eyes? Or is it right in God's eyes?

[60 : 43] This is the big question. This is what ought to occupy our urgent concern. How can we be sure that we live and worship and serve in a manner that is right in God's eyes?

Well, it's all about the King. It's all about the King. We need a King to govern over us. We need a King to instruct us. We need a King to correct us.

We need a King to protect us. We need a King to bow down before. We need the King God has provided for us.

We need King Jesus. And we need to listen to our King. And we need to submit to our King. How do we do that? By listening and submitting to the word of the King.

As it has been given to us in the Bible. We honor the King by submitting to his word. We demonstrate our love for the King by obeying his commandments.

[61 : 45] And as we do, with God's help, we will live and worship and serve in a manner that is right in God's eyes. Not in our eyes.

What about you? Who is your King? Is Jesus your King? Have you and do you bow down before him?

How can you, how can anybody become a citizen of King Jesus? By answering his call to trust in him as Savior and Lord.

By confessing to him a life lived as seemed right in your own eyes. And asking and receiving the forgiveness that only he is able and more than willing to grant.

May God help us live and worship and serve in a manner that is right in his eyes. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we come before you.

[62 : 51] We can do no less and confess that so often we live our lives. We take our decisions. We plan our future as seems right in our own eyes.

And we imagine and we deceive ourselves that indeed what we do and what we say is right. The right thing to do. We sometimes even imagine that you are the one who is opening the doors and blessing us.

And confirming our foolishness by your goodness to us. And so we come and we ask that you would forgive us when we are guilty of doing what is right in our own eyes.

But we pray also that you would help us and direct us and show us how we might live and how we can live in a manner that is right in your eyes.

Help us to know your Son, Jesus, as our King. As the one we bow down before. As the one who will help us and direct us to live our lives in a manner that is pleasing to you.

[64 : 00] That is right in your eyes. In these things we pray in his name. Amen.