

## Plan and Purpose Bible Lesson #III-28—Judges 17-21

Judges 17 through 21 portrays a series of stories that seem to be at least partially connected, but I am not sure of their real significance. I don't believe that anything that is in Scripture is insignificant, but I have not learned the full significance of these chapters. Chapter 17 tells us the story of a man from the mount of Ephraim named Micah who first stole 1100 shekels of silver from his mother. He later repented and told her that he had stolen it and gave it back to her. However, she said that she was saving it to give to him to make a molten image. When he returned the shekels, she took 200 shekels and hired a silversmith to make a graven image and a molten image which were then put in the house of Micah. He first appointed one of his sons to be his priest. Later a young Levite man from Bethlehemjudah, or Behtlehem in Judah, went in search of a new place to live and happened to come to the mount of Ephraim to the house of Micah. Micah, upon finding out who he was and where he was from offered him the position of being his priest. The young man accepted the job.

Part of the significance of this part of the story may be to see how the Israelites gradually became idol worshippers while thinking they were still worshipping the God of heaven. The last verse of chapter 17 says, **"The said Micah. Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest."**

Chapter 18 begins by telling us that there was no king in Israel in those days, and then continues with the story of the Micah and his idols. A group of Danites, who had apparently not yet driven the Canaanites out of the land that had been apportioned to them, sent five spies to spy out the land that they were supposed to move into before the mass of the people went to settle it. As the five spies traveled to the land they passed by the house of Micah where they lodged for the night. They met the young Levite man whom Micah had hired and enquired as to why he was there and he told them the whole story. They then asked the young priest to enquire of God concerning their mission and were assured by the young priest that the LORD would be with them as they went their way.

The five spies continued on to Laish, which was their destination, and they determined that it would be easy to defeat and drive out the people of the land because they were living quite carelessly and they were far enough away from anyone that could help them. They then went back to their own people and reported what they saw and the people then traveled toward Laish. Again they passed by the house of Micah and the five spies went to the young priest and convinced him to go with them and take the idols with him. Though Micah tried to stop them when he discovered what had happened, he realized the Danites were too strong for him and he let them go. When they got to Laish, they killed the people that were there and burnt the city. They then built a new city which they called Dan. There is significance in this fact as this seemed to be a trait of this people. They named the cities they built and the rivers they came to and other important sites after their father, Dan. As the Israelites left their captivity later on, we find this same trait being exercised, particular in northwestern Europe where many of those of the tribe of Dan eventually settled.

In verse 30 we're told, **"And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land."** Jonathan was the young Levite man that we have been discussing. Dr. Bullinger points out in his Companion Bible that "Manasseh" here is actually Moses. He says that the name Manasseh here is written in the Hebrew with a suspended letter to show that originally it formed

no part of the word, but was put in to make it spell “Manasseh” instead of “Moses”. He says, *“This was done for two reasons: (1) to spare the honour of Moses’ memory and nature; (2) to put the sin upon one who committed so gross a sin. The Talmud gives this latter as the reason. Jonathan’s name is omitted in I Chron. 23:15, 16 and 26:24. The Chald. paraphrase says that “Shebuel”, there substituted, is meant for Jonathan after his repentance and restoration. Shebuel = “he returned to God.”*

Chapter 19 records an even stranger story and appears at first to be unrelated to chapters 17 and 18, but there is at least a small connection. (Read Judges 19:1-21) In verse 18, the man told the old man, **“We are passing from Bethlehemjudah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence am I: and I went to Bethlehemjudah, but I am now going to the house of the LORD; and there is no man that receiveth me to house.”** If I understand the map right, though I don’t know that there is a map that really accurately outlines the tribal boundaries or even some of the cities, the man was apparently headed away from Shiloh where the tabernacle was set up, and headed toward mount Ephraim, so the “house of the LORD” would have been the house that Jonathan, the Levite priest, had set up for the Danites. Even though they were worshipping idols, they were calling it the “house of the LORD”.

Verse 16 points out that they were in Gibeah in the land belonging to the Benjamites.

(Read Judges 19:22-24) This is the same problem Lot had protecting the two angels that had come to warn him of the destruction that was coming on Sodom and Gomorah. (Read Judges 19:25-30) The men of Gibeah had raped her until she was practically dead and she made it back to the old man’s house where she died on the threshold of the house. The means of sending his message as to what the men of Gibeah had done to his concubine to all of Israel is a rather strange method, but apparently very successful.

(Read Judges 20:1-11) The men of Israel all came together when they got the message to come against the city of Gibeah united in their thought and mission. However, they made an effort to deal only with the men who were guilty. (Read Judges 20:12-17) The effort of the men of Israel to punish only those who were guilty was thwarted by the men of Benjamin by their willingness to protect the guilty for some reason. The odds are not in the favor of the men of Benjamin, being outnumbered about 12 to 1. However, they remained determined to protect the guilty in this case.

A side note that I believe we need to look at is in verse 16. The Benjamites had 700 men who were left handed and were accurate enough with a slingshot that they could sling stones at an hair breadth, or at a hair, and not miss. The word “miss” here is from the Hebrew “*chata*”. This word is translated in several ways, but the primary translation is “sin” and is translated this way 165 times. I think we can define sin then as “missing the standard or missing God’s expectation.” The apostle John defines sin in I John 3:4 as transgression of the law. So sin would be missing the expectation of the law.

(Read Judges 20:18-28) I’m sure the Benjamites were feeling pretty good about themselves at this point and the rest of the Israelites were wondering just what had gone wrong since God had instructed them to go against the Benjamites. The men of Israel did the right thing at this point and went before God to ask Him what they had done wrong.

(Read Judges 20:29-48) When this day was over there had been a horrible slaughter. All that was left of the tribe of Benjamin, including men, women and children, were the 600 men that had fled to rock Rimmon where they stayed for four months, so the tribe of Benjamin was virtually destroyed with the exception of these 600 men.

Now the story gets interesting. The men of Israel had all jointly entered into an agreement and had sworn before God that they would not let any of their daughters marry any of the men of Benjamin.

(Read Judges 21:1-15) The men of Israel, though they had sworn not to let any of their daughters marry any men of Benjamin, they felt an obligation to help the men of Benjamin some way. When they realized that none of the men of Jabeshgilead had come to help them fight against the Benjamites, they determined to destroy the people of that city with the exception of the young virgins of whom there were about 400. They then sent emissaries to the men of Benjamin who were at the rock Rimmon to speak peaceably to them and brought them to Shiloh and gave them these 400 virgins for wives. However, this still left 200 men without wives, so another strategy had to be devised to get all of the men of Benjamin a wife.

(Read Judges 21:16-25) This is the only kidnapping I know of that had the blessing of all the people, with the exception of course of the parents of the young virgins that were kidnapped. It would have been quite a sight to see, but presumably it all worked out okay.

The last verse of Judges again reminds us that there was no king in Israel and that every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Again, I need to mention that these last five chapters of Judges probably took place soon after the death of Joshua as Phineas was still the high priest. These events probably took place before the events in the rest of the book. JRL