

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 13B

JUDGES

CHAPTER 18

INTRODUCTION

The ministry of the word is fraught with a million problems. However, there is one problem that is arguably bigger than them all. It is the problem of selling the ministry for money. When a pastor becomes a hireling, the flock suffers and the shame brought to the ministry is insurmountable. A hireling is one who sells his service to the highest bidder. He has reduced his calling to dollars and cents.

They are a dime a dozen nowadays. The passage of time has evolved the ministry of the pastor to one of "more money, more preached, less money, less preached and no money no preached". It is no different from the ordinary jobs that bring in money in the business world. These hirelings hop from church to church with no more than a second thought. The second thought is to gauge whether the new job brings in more money and perks and a better future. If these criteria are not met, he remains and will not move.

Will he die for the flock as the Good Shepherd exemplified? Not in a million years. He would run as soon he realizes that there is not much more he could get out of the flock. His all-consuming goal is to protect self at any cost. He loves no one but himself. If it benefits him, he will be friendly, genial and helpful. The moment he sees his side losing, he changes. His loyalty is to money and how much he gains out of his loyalty.

"Everything has a price" is his motto. The highest bidder wins i.e. buys his soul and service. He will be loyal as long as the price is right. This is the game and the ministry is a show. This describes the days of the Judges and our days as well.

Much can be learned from this chapter. The Levitical was sold for a song by the young Levite. He cares not for right or wrong, only for what was expedient. Expediency was measured by personal gain, security and prestige. What a way to live and a most miserable way to die. For at the end of life's journey, this man and all like him have nothing that is of eternal value for they have sold the highest office bestowed upon man by God for filthy lucre.

OUTLINE

1. The Danite Migration -- 18:1-6
2. The Danite Idolatrous Cache – 18:7-21
3. The Danite "Conquest" – 18:22-31

COMMENTARY

The Danite Migration – 18:1-6

Chapter 18 narrates in detail the migration of the tribe of Dan and how it relates to Micah. The tribe of Dan numbered 64,000 when the census of Israel was taken by Moses (as commanded by the LORD Numbers 26:1, 42-43). Like all the other tribes, the Danites did not wish to destroy the Amorites when they had the power to do so. After the wasted opportunity, they were unable to occupy the territory which was allotted to them (Joshua 19:40-46). Soon they were forced out of their territory into the mountains by the Amorites (Judges 1:34).

After sometime, the Danites sent a five-man spying mission to search for a better land. The men came to the hilly country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah. They recognized the Levite Jonathan through his voice (18:3) and apparently had contact with him. Jonathan told them how Micah had hired him as his priest. The spies then asked Jonathan to seek advice from God where they should go and whether their mission would be successful (18:5). Jonathan gave them his assurance that God would prosper their mission. Would God prosper their mission since they were disobedient to Him, and this blessing was given by a priest who was not appointed by God?

The Dan Idolatrous Cache – 18:7-21

The five Danite spies soon left and continued in their search. They came to Laish, a city of the Zidonians in the extreme north of Palestine. It lay near the sources of the river Jordan. They found the place serene and secure. There was no magistrate in the land to prosecute any person. The inhabitants of Laish lived a carefree life like the Zidonians who lived far away and had no dealings with them. The spies returned and urged their people to take Laish as there was “no lack of anything”. (18:10) They even attributed this to God having given it to them.

Accordingly, they mobilised an army of 600 soldiers. They proceeded to Kirjath-jearim, a city in Judah, and pitched at a place behind the city and called it Mahaneh-dan (“the camp of Dan”). Then they moved on to the hill country of Ephraim and came to Micah’s house. The same five men told their 600 soldier-brethren about the shrine of idols in Micah’s house. They planned to steal the idols. The intention was to bring the idols with them to Laish, which was far north of Shiloh where the Tabernacle was. They wanted to set up their own place of worship of the LORD in Laish. This was a direct rebellion against the commandment of God.

The 600 men stood guard outside Micah’s house while the five men went in. When the Levite priest

questioned their action, they told him to shut up and to go with them to be “a father and a priest” (18:19). They persuaded him that it would be better for him to be a priest to a whole tribe in Israel than to only a man. This offer looks like a promotion for the priest who gladly accepted the offer and assisted the five men to take the ephod, the teraphim and the graven image. These objects of idolatrous worship were repeated for emphasis. The emphasis was that the sin of Micah was great and the depth of idolatry in Israel was thorough and complete.

These were adored by the Danites as real gods, which they could use to enhance their worship. They were prepared to take them by force if necessary. The thought of stealing them was so natural that their conscience was seared. There was no second thought or any feeling of wrong doing.

The Levite priest was clearly an opportunist. He had no sense of loyalty to Micah or to his calling. Surely, he was a mercenary hireling priest who would give his services to the highest bidder. They quickly proceeded with their journey to Laish.

When Micah returned home, he was horrified to find that his idol-gods were missing and his priest too. With his neighbours they pursued the children of Dan. They caught up with the thieves and the traitor. Micah and his friends protested and the Danites challenged them. Micah mildly said

that they had taken away his “gods” which he had made and the priest too had gone with them. He was left with nothing. The Danites told Micah plainly that he should not continue to protest or else some angry fellows among the children of Dan might kill him and his family. The Danites just ignored him and went on their way.

Micah could not retaliate because he and his friends did not have the strength to overcome the enemies. So he returned to his house. How strange it is for Micah to save his “gods”, which were made by him. Just imagine, he made the gods and he worshipped them! He should consider himself greater than his gods! The men from Dan did Micah a great favour by getting rid of the house of idols and his idolatrous priest. But Micah was too blind to see it. It was not a loss but a great gain.

The Danite “Conquest” – 18:22-31

The children of Dan continued in their march to Laish with the idols stolen from Micah and the Levite priest who followed them. On reaching Laish, they slaughtered the peaceful and unsuspecting inhabitants and burned their city. The city under the jurisdiction of the Zidonians could not deliver them from the Danites because they were too far away. The children of Dan then rebuilt the city and renamed it Dan after the name of their father. The children of Dan set up their own worship of God with the stolen idols.

Jonathan and his sons became their priests. This they did in opposition to Shiloh the place where the LORD God had chosen for the rightful worship of Him.

Everything seemed to be going smoothly and successfully in favour of the children of Dan. They had a place of their choice, a place which was not given by God. They were contented to worship God in their own idolatrous way instead of making the yearly pilgrimage to Shiloh. Their deeds were an abomination to the LORD. Now we can understand why in 1 Chronicles the tribe of Dan was left out from the list of tribes of the nation Israel. In the New Testament in the book of Revelation, the tribes from which the 144,000 witnesses were to be drawn, the tribe of Dan was also omitted. God had given the tribe of Dan over to their idolatry and sins. The Danites brought these judgements upon themselves and there is no one who can deliver them.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The wickedness of sinful man knows no bound. His evil heart's desire is seen in this episode of a young Levite's life. He would sell his ministry for money and to the highest bidder. He has no fear of God.

The highest office bestowed upon sinful man by God is to be shepherd of His flock whom He has redeemed by Christ's precious blood.

To dishonour this godly and most noble task by selling it for money is to insult God. Such a high honour must never be sold. Any pastor or elder who practises partiality is selling his office. It may not be for money but it is for fame and favoritism. There is no difference. It is still selling even though it might not be for money. This is the norm nowadays. The last days are upon us. Godly and good shepherds who are prepared to die for the flock are very rare indeed. They will serve for no reward for it is a calling. They would serve unto death for it is for lives redeemed by the blood of Christ and no longer their own to live any way they like.

Micah was blind and dead in sin. He was being done a great favour by the Danites who cleaned out his house of idols. Did Micah learn from this incident and never to worship idols again? We shall never know. But idolatry blinds a person into believing that objects of wood or stone or metal can protect and guard our lives. In this account of Israel's dark history, the idols themselves need protecting. This is so ridiculous and yet Micah could not see the irony of the whole matter. The idols were worshipped to protect its worshippers. Yet Micah had to defend the idols and nearly at the cost of his life.

The Danites had to steal their gods from another to worship them. What a mockery of who God is. He has to be stolen to be worshipped!

The sin of theft did not prick their conscience. Every time the worshipper see these idols, they must have been reminded of their origin and how they have stolen them from Micah.

Jonathan was a hireling that bore the brunt of the condemnation for he was a Levite i.e. a teacher of God’s Word. He should know better. Leaders who know better and sin are judged with a greater condemnation by God. Their accountability and influence for evil is higher. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Judges 18:1-6; Proverbs 14:12;

TUESDAY: Judges 18:7-21; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5;

WEDNESDAY: Judges 18:22-31; 1 John 5:19-21. Revelation 22:14-15;

THURSDAY: Judges 18:1-31;

FRIDAY: Judges 18:1-31.

Discussion Questions

1. Was it right for the Danites to migrate from their assigned plot of residence? Is it OK for us to move house today?

2. Can we use success to affirm that God is the One who gave me this land or business or project? Explain your answer.

3. What makes the sin of Jonathan so great compared to that of the Danites or Micah? What behaviour committed by a pastor or an elder would be comparable with what Jonathan did?

4. How would you describe the spiritual condition of Danites mentioned in Chapter 18?

5. How did the Levite pervert religion and misrepresent God?

6. What motivated the Levite? What do you think of a pastor with a similar motivation? What do you think of a Christian with such a motivation? Do you have the same motivation as Jonathan?

7. What have you learned in this chapter about the character of God, and Jonathan the Levite?

8. What steps can you take to ensure that your faith remains pure?
