

CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF JUDGES 17-18

(Judges 17:1-18:31)

Lawson Younger

Moral Bankruptcy. What kind of son steals from his own mother? What kind of mother leads her son into idolatry? What kind of a Levite serves at an idolatrous shrine and then happily moves to serve at a bigger idolatrous shrine? And what kind of people plunder their own people while on their way to annihilate a peaceful city in a region outside the boundaries of their God-ordained allotment?

When God's Word is unknown or ignored, the results are human-manufactured, culturally conditioned innovations. Self-consumed individuals (and a group) dominate this passage, which itself, at its very root, is immersed in the misconception of human manipulation of deity (i.e., idolatry). The participants in both parts of the story in this first conclusion appear quite silly in all their efforts and activities. Don't they realize what they are doing?

This would be humorous if it weren't so real. But when humankind rejects God's Word, then all activities ultimately appear foolhardy. The massive efforts by people today to substitute all kinds of things in the place of God—idols of their own making—appear the same way in the light of Scripture. Such things include riches, pleasures, security, human wisdom, advancement, personal happiness, and so on. Certainly the writer of Ecclesiastes has more than adequately shown the futility, meaninglessness, and frustration of any worldview that does not rise above the horizon of a human being. Happiness can never be achieved by pursuing it, since such a pursuit involves the absurdity of self-deification. So all these things that our current society seeks as God-substitutes—its idols—are allusions and materialistic props that are ultimately nothing but absurdities.

Determining God's Will. Amazingly, people will, like the Danites, inquire again and again to know God's will when God has already revealed it. For example, one hears from time to time a Christian asking this question, "Is it God's will for me to marry this person (and the person is an unbeliever)?" God has revealed his will on this in both the Old and New Testaments. But because of emotional involvements, this clearly revealed will of God is often ignored and rationalized away, and the inquirer marries the unbeliever anyway.

Attempts to divine God's will or the future are certainly not limited to the context of ancient Israel. The human race has used a vast array of illicit methods to inquire about the future throughout history. The increase of access to psychics and horoscopes has impacted the church too. In the last decade, more Christians are making inquiries via these means than in the prior generation. Since it has become more socially acceptable, more and more Christians find themselves becoming reliant on these practices in spite of the clear condemnation in Scripture.

The allurement of sin. A striking feature of this passage is how one sin leads to another (this is also observable in the Samson account and the second conclusion). This is not something we tend to reflect on. Yet some reflection on the interlocking nature of sin may help us see how we have gotten to where we personally are. In this passage, what is needed among the different characters is repentance (which, unfortunately, is not forthcoming). But as we reflect on the pattern of sin in our own lives, we should call out to the Lord in repentance and



seek his forgiveness, so that God can intervene to break the power and pattern of sin with all of its destructive force.

In Judges 17-18, various sinful activities achieve success. We will mention only a few examples. Micah's theft, in a number of ways, becomes positive for him. Not only was there no punishment or restitution for the crime, but Micah receives a blessing! In the end the aimlessly wandering Levite succeeds in becoming the high priest of the Danite cult shrine. The Danites, who have failed to trust Yahweh in possessing their God ordained allotment, succeed in possessing their own allotment without any trust in Yahweh. None of the characters in this section acts with integrity, yet they succeed in most of their agendas and machinations.

Thus in this section there is an important warning for the modern church. Success, especially as the world judges this concept, is not necessarily a sign of righteousness or an indication that we must be doing something right or the way that God would want things done. In fact, it may be the opposite. God does not squelch every corrupt motive, thought, or scheme of human beings (whether unbeliever or believer). Just because there is the appearance of success does not signify that the means or methods to this apparent success are godly. The issue of personal and corporate integrity matters, and the ultimate evaluation of success will be based on God's judgment of men's and women's hearts.

It is interesting that the Danites manifest attitudes and actions that are nothing short of raw paganism, brutalizing Micah in the process. In the same way, one cannot help but think of how some Christians treat other Christians. Every Christian counselor can share stories in which God's people have been or are brutalizing one another. This subject, in particular as manifested in the brutalization of women, becomes fully blown in the final section of Judges.

The double conclusions refrain, "In those days Israel had no king, everyone did as he saw fit," emphasizes there is no spiritual king in Israel and life is a free-for-all (see comments above). Perhaps the modern expression of this is found in the famous song of the late Frank Sinatra, "I Did It My Way". While the song is about being stoic and heroic in the face of difficulties, its emphasis on self to the complete neglect and omission of the sovereign Lord proclaims the essence of modern society's orientation. Sinatra's song could have been the theme song for the Israelites in the days of the judges.