

Judges 17-18

"Everyone Doing Their Own Thing - Part 1"

All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight (before we have communion) to Judges 17. We're going to look at chapters 17 and 18 tonight, and we, like I said, hope to finish this book two weeks from tonight (after Henry comes to make us laugh).

The last five chapters of this book, and hopefully you've been with us as we've gone through, no longer follow the chronological order that we had up through chapter 16 where we came and went with Samson. The last judge in this whole string of judges is Samuel, and he will pick up the story, chronologically, after the book of Ruth in 1 Samuel 1. So the chronology doesn't really start again until 1 Samuel 1.

It is our intention, once we finish the book of Judges, before we go to Ruth and Samuel, to go together through the book of Acts. And we just really feel led of the Lord to concentrate on that. We need God to move by His Spirit in our country, don't we? And there's no better encouragement than the book of Acts. I had the privilege of teaching out of Acts 18 on the site of where ancient Corinth stood; and I've never been more moved by God's Spirit in terms of looking around and seeing what Paul must have gone through, showing up there alone and struggling and wanting to just quit, where the Lord had to come and say, "I've got a lot of people in this town." So I think the Lord's got a lot for us there.

These last five chapters, of which we're just going to take two tonight - chapters 17 and 18, all go together. They kind of form an appendix to the book in that they give you an insight, generally speaking, into Israel's plight at that time - the religious confusion, the political upheaval, the great tragedy that befalls those who decide that they can turn from God and go it alone. It's an interesting time that we would be doing these chapters on communion (night) because I was thinking about that. You know, when we come together to have communion, in taking the Lord's Supper, we affirm lots of different truths. We say that we believe in God just by having communion. We wouldn't be here if we didn't have faith in Him. We believe, by taking communion, and agree that God has a plan to deliver our souls because communion says that. The world has fallen into sin, it needs a Redeemer, and God has come and paid a price, a costly price, to redeem us to Himself; and that the only solution for that redemption is found in Jesus. And every time you have communion, you declare that that is the truth, that you believe that God had a

plan, and He has delivered us. We take the elements - the broken body and blood shed - that they represent of our Lord, and we say, in effect, we believe this is the only way to go to the Father. Right? This is our hope. This is our trust and our confidence. And because of that, and because of what we believe in God's Word, we believe in the authority of what God has told us about this whole thing, that His Word has laid that out for us. In fact, Jesus said as often as we should have communion together, we would remember Him and look forward to His return.

In like manner, if you wanted to make that comparison between us tonight and the nation of Israel, here in the book of Judges, when the nation started under God's calling, they shared those core beliefs. They believed in one true God. The world believed in lots of gods. But not them. They believed in one God. They believed, sincerely, that God had a plan for their life, that God would come. In fact, they believed that He would deliver them from Egypt, and He did. And Passover came, and they walked out of that bondage, led by His Spirit, towards the Land of Promise. They believed that the Word of God was authoritative. They were given a set of commandments, absolutes - ten of them. Not suggestions, not ideals, not philosophies. Ten commandments from God. They were given a sacrificial system by which they could draw near to the LORD by which their sins could be covered, pointing ahead to the day that Jesus would come and be broken as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. They were given a priesthood. They were given a tribe, the tribe of Levi, and these priests were to oversee the sacrifices and intervene for the people, and the people could draw near to the LORD through their ministry and have their sins covered and hang out with God. Just kind of what we're doing tonight. That's how they started the nation.

But by the time you come to these chapters, the nation has denigrated itself to pure, wicked idolatry which is exactly what you find here at the end of the book of Judges. It was absolute mayhem in the nation. The people had left behind their belief in God, their confidence that He had a plan, that He was the LORD, their Deliverer, that His Word was true and would bring life. They forsook the system that God had established, which would give them hope, and they stepped away. And for sixteen chapters, if you've been with us in this book, there has been a recurring theme that is encompassed in a recurring phrase, and the phrase was, "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD." Seven times we read this same sad report of one generation after the other that fell into that sin-drome, where there was rest, and it led to rebellion; and God, who loves us, brought retribution in the form, oftentimes, of captivity and mistreatment; which

eventually brought the people to their knees in repentance; He brought redemption through a judge, and then they went back to it again. Well that was the first sixteen chapters. That was the phrase. "The children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD."

But the last five chapters are very different. In fact, they are characterized by another phrase. It is found in chapter 17:6, in chapter 21:25, and it says this: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." So what dominated the first sixteen chapters, now these last five. The first sixteen, "they did evil in the sight of the LORD;" the last five, "they did what was right in their own eyes." In God's eyes, it wasn't good. They did evil in His sight, but they did right in their own eyes, having rejected the LORD and His way. So, the first sixteen chapters (and we're done with them) the focus was on the deliverers, the judges, if you will. The last five chapters are little cameos; they're random pictures in a society that is now alive and living amongst a people that are driven by moral relativism. "We all do what we think is right in our own eyes." There're no absolute truths. Everyone does his own thing. What is good for me might not be good for you, but I'll do my thing, and you do your thing. And here's the consequence of a culture and a people and a nation that decides they'll just do whatever they think is right and set God aside and the absolutes that He brings where life can be found. Now Israel didn't start there, but they would suffer tremendously in the years to come because of the idolatry that snuck in.

The emphasis of the first two chapters that we're going to look at tonight is the emphasis of one family - one family - going its own way, and, as a result of their poor behavior, they lead an entire portion of the nation - the tribe of Dan - into absolute idolatry. They're able to turn 1/12th of the entire nation away from God because of the wickedness of one family. So it's one story. We'll read it together. Hopefully we'll grab hold of the truths. They're sad truths. Two weeks from now will even be worse. But we'll get through this one tonight, I hope.

Verse 1, "Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. And he said to his mother, 'The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears - here is the silver with me; I took it.' And his mother said, 'May you be blessed by the LORD, my son!' " It's a strange conversation, isn't it? A conversation between a mom and her son. The name Micah means "who is like God." It's a glorious name for a kid, except this kid's a thief. He stole eleven hundred shekels out of his mom's purse, I

guess, which would suggest this was a very wealthy family. It's a lot of money. In fact, he will, at the end of the chapter, hire a personal Levite to serve himself and pay him ten shekels of silver for a year; and the priest thought he was getting a good deal. So you can kind of feel the value of eleven hundred shekels. Upon hearing his mother curse whoever the thief was (and I suspect that she spoke that into his hear because she knew he was the thief), he got a little worried about it and decided to return the money. But rather than being reprimanded for his wickedness, she blesses him in the name of Jehovah. "Bless you, my son. Thanks for coming to your senses."

Verse 3, "So when he had returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, 'I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you.' Thus he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Micah." Now she had originally dedicated all of that money that her son had stolen wholly to the LORD, she said. (Here's the spiritual confusion in the culture). But she wanted to make a carved image and a molded image of her son. So, here's the corruption between the Jews (they who knew one God) and the intermarrying, if you will, of the idolatry of the day. Notice she said, "I was going to give all eleven hundred dollars" (let's say) "to this making of the image. I'll just give it to the LORD." But then she only spent two hundred bucks. She's kind of like Ananias and Sapphira. She pretends to do more than she really does. And she says to the boy, "I will get these idols made, and I will get you the money back." So here's this religious confusion among God's people, where the LORD is mixed with heathen practices that He forbade. The law, "Thou shall have no strange gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3) was already set aside.

We read, in verse 5, "The man Micah had a shrine," (already in his house) "and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest." Micah had already set up a shrine in his house - this idol worshipping, and now the new ones from mom would fit in quite nicely. And he'd also made an ephod. An ephod, if you remember from the Old Testament, is a garment that only the Jews made, and it was only worn by the high priest while he was the high priest. It was a garment in which were those two stones found, the Urim and the Thummim. It was a place (in the Old Testament) where the priest could go seek the counsel of God, and by drawing the black or the white stone out, God gave directions to His

people. It was to be held in honor and in faith, to discover the will of God. But here's a corrupt time, and this guy has actually taken his own son and said, "I'll just make you a priest." And when only a Levite could be a priest, he makes his own son a priest, an Ephraimite. But everyone was doing "what was right in his own eyes." I think if you had stopped Micah in these days and said to him, "What do you think you're doing?" he would have said to you, "I'm just worshipping God in my own way. I'm sincere, I don't go to Shiloh to the tabernacle. I'm not into all that formal stuff, but I love God, and I've got a seriousness about God. I'm a very spiritual man." But here's the corruption of a nation that decides there's no king, there're no absolutes. Everyone will do whatever they want. It's kind of like our culture today. And here's what we might be looking to, and this is what we might have to realize as a country if the Lord should tarry or we fail to repent.

Idolatry, biblically, is always a sign that man has lost his awareness of the nearness of God. He is no longer aware of God's fellowship. Look, if you are in a relationship with God, you don't need an image to remind you of His presence any more than you need a picture of your husband or wife in your hand when they're sitting next to you. "That's you, right there." But if you lost sense of their presence, you could very well then turn again to these idols to try to help you remember. Idolatry sometimes indicates, in the Bible, a desire for the presence of God or looking to recapture that. But it is always the wrong way to go to worship. We will see, years from now, Hezekiah meeting with the people who had found a piece of the brass serpent that Moses had held up in the wilderness, and they had begun to worship this thing. And Hezekiah, to the chagrin of the nation, destroyed it, called it Nehushtan (2 Kings 18:4). "This is nothing more than a thing of brass." Regardless of the motivation behind idolatry, it is always wrong worship. And whether it's an indicator of the loss of the awareness of God's presence or the desire to get it back, it is the flavor of a life where everyone religiously does what they want, and they just mix the truth with a bunch of lies, and the culture goes in that direction.

So here's one guy from Ephraim, Micah, who's going to play a great influential part in the next four or five chapters as we watch his influence spread. I mean, here's a man that was ignorant of the Word of God. "No images before Me. I don't want you to worship Me this way." It's right there in Exodus, it's right there in the law, chapter 20. But, look, he is influenced by the world around him. He's trying, like his mother, to worship God with idols. The explanation is found in verse 6, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." That's the explanation for the behavior. It almost seems, and I can't prove

it to you, as if the writer of this book of Judges wrote it later - when there was a central authority, when there were absolutes, when there was a king who demanded other kinds of behavior, wouldn't have allowed this type of behavior; some good leadership, some standard bearer. But now there is no king, there is no centralized power, there is nobody cheering them on to do the right thing. There's just chaos and sin and idolatry. And, as Micah reject's God's law - the absolute objective standard for life, he embraces something far more subjective, his own opinion, his own imagination, his own desire.

If you don't allow the revelation of God's Word to your heart to guide your life, then you are left with only your imagination to go forward. You'll just do what's right in your own eyes. You'll come up with, "Well, this is what I believe." I don't know if you ever talk to people, and they'll tell you about heaven, and you go, "How did you come up with that?" and they'll go, "That's just what I believe." "Well, why did you come up with that?" "That's just what I believe." It's the dumbest argument in the world! "The moon is made of cheese." "It isn't." "No. That's what I believe." Got this rapper running around now saying the earth is flat. There's no proof of that, buddy! "Yeah, that's just what I believe." Either it is the revelation of God's Word that gives life, or it is the imagination of men that drives your behavior. And one is very irresponsible. Only two camps - imagination or revelation. And, without revelation, you open the door to chapter 17:6 - relativism - everybody just thinks that what they do is right, and that's where we leave it. By implication, when other people do what is right in their own eyes, they are bound to do what is wrong in God's eyes. That's what we read in the first sixteen chapters. Right? They did evil in the sight of the LORD. They did right in their own eyes, but they did evil in the sight of the LORD. And, by the way, the same condition was described back in Genesis 6, right before the time of the flood, and God's judgment came upon the world. He described it this way, "Everyone did right in their own eyes." We might be on the brink, as a nation, of God's judgment. And I hope that we're not, and I certainly am no prophet. But the Bible certainly warns us that, if we continue down this road of existential philosophies of man where everyone just does what makes them feel good and there's no external absolute to govern our life, then we're going to have a religious people that are lost. And yet there's only one true God.

So, man loses his conscious awareness of God, and he no longer has a standard to live by other than the one he creates for himself. That's the problem here. That's what verse 6 tells us. "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the

LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8) That's what God has shown you. And so valuable is this book, at least in God's eyes, that He protects the contents with these extreme warnings about adding to it or taking away from it, and, man, you're in big trouble. Right? Revelation 22:18-19 ends with that warning. This is an important book! We read in Revelation 22:9 that the angel said, " 'See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant,' " (as John sought to bow down before an angel) " 'and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book.' " If we don't have an absolute, we have verse 6, and we have everything in these five chapters.

We read, in verse 7, "Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he was a Levite, and was staying there. The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find a place. Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. And Micah said to him, 'Where do you come from?' So he said to him, 'I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find a place to stay.' Micah said to him, 'Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten shekels of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance.' So the Levite went in. Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him. So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah. Then Micah said, 'Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!' " From Bethlehem (seven miles southeast or so of Jerusalem) up to Mount Ephraim (which is about twenty-five miles more to the north), here comes a Levite who is supposed to be appointed to a place of service, who is not comfortable where he's at and decides that he'll just move himself around. And, as he goes out on a tour to figure out where to live, he, perchance, comes to this guy's house. He's a young Levite. He's unemployed. He's wandering. He's looking for a job. Micah can't believe his great fortune, "a real priest at my doorstep. I'll give you benefits and a meal and housing and pay." And because the Levite is not consecrated to the LORD (he now sees his religious service, if you will, as a job), he immediately moves on what is now the highest bidder. "I'll take that job." And notice that Micah's feeling about all this was, "Well, God's going to really bless me now because I've got a real priest! I made my son a priest. I know that wasn't the best. Now I've got a real guy! A card-carrying Levite." By the way, if you read chapter 18:30, this Levite happened to be a grandson of Moses. So just having godly ancestors doesn't guarantee godly descendants. Everybody's got to make a choice.

Worship God. Accept no substitutes. I think that's what John wrote, right? In 1 John 5:21, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Worship God. Accept no substitutes. So, here's a people who, like these elements of communion speak about, believed in God at one time, knew that God had a plan for them, believed in the redemption by the blood of the Son, had an absolute basis for belief in the Scriptures, an unbendable guidebook for life, and now we find them here completely lost, following the wrong god. "God's going to bless me. I just hired me a Levite." Your faith is only as good as its object, and if the object of your faith doesn't exist, or you've concocted it, no matter how sincere your faith, you're going to be lost.

"In those days," verse 1 of chapter 18, "there was no king in Israel." There's the second time it's mentioned. Again, no ruling authority, no influence for good. "And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them. So the children of Dan sent five men of their family from their territory, men of valor from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and search it. They said to them, 'Go, search the land.' So they went to the mountains of Ephraim," (and guess where they ended up) "to the house of Micah, and lodged there. While they were at the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite" (who had come to him). "They turned aside and said to him, 'Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here?' He said to them, 'Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest.' " (By the way, completely ungodly; you don't hire the priest for yourself). "So they said to him, 'Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous.' And the priest said to them, 'Go in peace. The presence of the LORD be with you on your way.' " Gave them the blessings.

Now Dan was given, if you remember, the land just below Jerusalem in the mountains of Jerusalem but towards the Mediterranean coast. It's kind of the way you drive into Jerusalem from Tel Aviv. The problem for them was the Philistines lived in Ashdod and Ashkelon along the coast, and because they were more powerful, Dan, who was given the land by the LORD - a place they should have stayed, began to be pushed off of their land. Rather than fighting in the name of the LORD against the enemy, they began to curl back, and the Philistines began to push them inland until, at this time, they were living on a very small strip of land, and they wanted to be relocated away from their powerful adversaries. "Let's find

a better place, man. This is too hard for us here." Rather than standing their ground, where God had put them, they were just going to move away. So they send five spies (tough guys) on a mission to spy out all of the other places. "See if you can find a place for us." And, in going forth, they end up in the northern area of Ephraim where they lodged at Micah's house. They recognized the priest by voice. They ask him how he got there. He told them how he was hired. And then they said to him, "Well, do something priestly. Pray, and see if we're going to find a place, man, because we've got this big job. We've got a whole tribe to move. If you could just help us with that." And they saw this religious guy, and they asked his blessing, and he immediately, notice, bestows his blessing on them and says, "God go with you. Your travels are going to be successful." And he almost, on cue, blesses them appropriately. It's kind of this cheap, heartless religion at its finest. You go through the motions. But nobody's seeking the LORD here. There's nothing godly about any of this stuff, but it looks good on the outward. But this is a country and a people that are all doing what's right in their own eyes - no central authority.

We read, in verse 7, "So the five men departed and went to Laish. They saw the people who were there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. There were no rulers in the land who might put them to shame for anything. They were far from the Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone. Then the spies came back to their brethren at Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brethren said to them, 'What is your report?' So they said, 'Arise, let us go up against them. For we have seen the land, and indeed it is very good. Would you do nothing? Do not hesitate to go, and enter to possess the land. When you go, you will come to a secure people and a large land. For God has given it into your hands, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth.'" So Laish - forty miles inland from the coast of Sidon. They found this city without commerce, without an army, without a wall or a care, kind of isolated from the world. If you ever go with us to Israel, one of our favorite places is in the north - a place called the Dan Nature Preserve. It is one of the two headwaters of the Jordan. The word "Jordan" just means down from the Dan, which is exactly where these guys would move. And Banias is about seven miles up further, near the base of Mount Hermon.

So these five guys.....remember now, first they go to Ephraim, and there's a priest, the holy guy, who goes, "Yeah, you're gonna be blessed." They find a people kind of isolated from everyone, far away from the Sidonians (forty miles inland),

living in the woods, kind of undisturbed by everyone. They go home salivating, and they say to the Danites, "Oh, man. We have got to go kill them! We've got to go take..... Now remember, the LORD is going to bless us. We're going to go kill a whole town and take it over so we can leave. They have no army, they've got no help, they're exposed. This is going to be easy! Thank the Lord Jesus." You know? Can you imagine? Supposedly blessed by the priest at Micah's house, "We can go take it for ourselves. It is secluded, and it's beautiful."

Verse 11, "And six hundred men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshtaol, armed with weapons of war. Then they went up and encamped in Kirjath Jearim in Judah. (Therefore they call that place Mahaneh Dan to this day. There it is, west of Kirjath Jearim). And they passed from there to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah. Then the five men who had gone to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their brethren, 'Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod, household idols, a carved image, and a molded image? Now therefore, consider what you should do.' So they turned aside there, and came to the house of the young Levite man - to the house of Micah - and greeted him. The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land went up. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image. The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men who were armed with weapons of war. When these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image, the priest said to them," verse 18, " 'What are you doing?' And they said to him, 'Be quiet, put your hand over your mouth, and come with us; be a father and a priest to us. Is it better for you to be a priest to the household of one man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?' So the priest's heart was glad;" ("All right, I'm gettin' a promotion!") "and he took the ephod, the household idols, and the carved image, and took his place among the people. Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones, the livestock, and the goods in front of them." So they turned around, and they walked away. So six hundred guys head out. Eventually they end up at Micah's house. Five of them go in. They steal everything religious from Micah - the ephod, the idols, stole their priest. While six hundred guys stood guard, five guys ransacked the house. They told the priest to shut up, and then they gave him a better job offer. "You can be the priest of all of the Danites!" And he went, "Oh, this is great! I'm gonna get a promotion." It's a pretty good test of character - whether you're going to serve the LORD out of love or just to try to gain something

for yourself. But notice in verse 20 and verse 21, they even put everything in front of them. Here's the religious in this religious superstition. "Let's put the blessing things in front of us so we'll have easy travels, and God will go before us."

Meanwhile, verse 22 tells us, "When they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house gathered together and overtook the children of Dan. And they called out to the children of Dan. So they turned around and said to Micah, 'What ails you, that you have gathered such a company?' So he said, 'You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have? How can you say to me, "What ails you?" ' And the children of Dan said to him, 'Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life, with the lives of your household!' Then the children of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house." "What's your problem, Micah?" "What do you mean, what's my problem? You stole my gods!" It's always worrisome when your god can be stolen by someone. (Laughing) I knew a guy who kept his god in his garage. Beautiful. Polished. He'd spend hours admiring it and showing it off to others. Kept it under lock and key. Maybe you know that guy.

So Micah raises his voice, but he's got no power. They're stronger than he is. This isn't about God or love or His Spirit at work. This is all the world, man, all the flesh. So off they go. Micah goes home. But now the whole corruption has crawled into the lives of the Danites.

Verse 27, "So they took the things Micah had made, and the priest who had belonged to him, and went to Laish, to a people quiet and secure; and they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon, and they had no ties with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth Rehob. So they rebuilt the city and dwelt there. And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel. However, the name of the city formerly was Laish. Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan" (again, shouldn't be priests) "until the day of the captivity of the land. So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh."

So here's the end of the first two stories. Horrific actions followed with a priest on board, praying for the blessings of God as these men took advantage of a farming community far removed from anyone, a threat to no one. They absolutely slaughtered them. And here's the cameo of what happens in the days of judges when "everyone does what is right in their own eyes," and the idolatry of one person, Micah, has now spread to an entire tribe and will last for generations. Why? Because they had forsaken their belief in God, they had laid aside any hope that God had a plan, they no longer believed in the sacrifice of blood to cover their sin, they had no absolutes to walk with. The law was ignored. They chose to do what was right (in their own eyes). And the sad thing, in verse 31, a few miles away from here is Shiloh, where the true temple stood, where the true worship of God was approved by God, and the people were invited to go there. They were just that far removed. They looked every bit the religious group, but they couldn't find it. In the end, they will foster (here) a new religion in the days to come. In fact, in the days of Jeroboam, the northern kingdom will come to Dan. When there's a split in Israel, in Jerusalem, ten of the tribes will head out north (over this taxation issue-1 Kings 12) when Solomon died. Rehoboam and Jeroboam - and they will set the Temple aside in Jerusalem, they will set the law of God aside. In 931 B.C., there's a split (as Solomon dies); 209 years later, all of these people in the north at Dan fall into the hands of the Assyrians who will wipe them out because, for 209 years here in Dan, they were now worshipping calves and lowering the standards of the priests. Man, they were completely lowered already. In the south, the Babylonians, in 606 B.C., would take out the south, but they would be restored because that was the place God had sought to put His name. But here's the groundwork already laid, if you will, 400 years earlier, for this disaster to come.

And notice we read here, at the end of verse 30, "until the day of the captivity of the land." This happened for 400 years - a nation that just decided everybody could do what they want. And here's what you end up with. Here's how things turned out. In the north, their gods would fail them. Captivity would not restore them. In the south, seventy years of captivity in Babylon would drive a Jewish people home who had all kinds of problems. But here's what they never had a problem with again - idolatry. You don't read it anymore after their captivity in Babylon.

The world has lots of diamonds. I was reading a couple of weeks ago about synthetic diamonds, and they're pretty good today. I guess you - I don't know

anything about diamonds as far as looking at them, but the refractive index of synthetic diamonds is 2.09, and a real diamond is 2.19. You can fool experts, right? Yet synthetic diamonds cost about thirty times less than a real one. The thing is it's not the real thing. Looks like it.

And the world is full of synthetic religions today. They look pretty good sometimes. But if they're not walking with a hope in God and in His Word and having confidence in it, it's going in the wrong direction. It's idolatry. And we have to be careful because there're a lot of fakes out there. Yet communion and the elements that are presented to us there should bring us back to the reality that we serve a true God who loves us, who has a plan, who sent His Son, who bought us with His blood, who has given us His authoritative Word to be able to look forward and say, "We're going to make it because He said so, and this is what He's done."

But it's a horrible chapter, and, like I said, the next three are even worse. So please show up for those (Laughing) so I don't have to do this by myself.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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