

“Chaos”

Judges 17-18

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Madison, Wisconsin
May 23, 2010**



Introduction:

This morning I would invite you to imagine with me a society that refuses to accept even the concept of absolute truth. Please imagine with me a society where people say, **“What is right for you is not necessarily right for me.”** Try to imagine a society where even the religious leaders become afraid to speak up because they feel as if they have no right to tell others what to do. Please try to imagine a society where children are told by their parents and by their schools to decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong. Please try to imagine a society where telling the truth is good but where telling a lie can also be good. Try to imagine a society where everyone does whatever is good in his or her own eyes. And if you have a hard time imagining this, I would invite you to turn on the TV for one hour or to simply pick up a copy of this morning’s newspaper, because what we will find is a society in CHAOS.

According to Dictionary.com, CHAOS is defined as, **“a state of utter confusion or disorder.”** And in many ways, SPIRITUAL CHAOS is what we see all around us in the world today, **“a state of utter confusion.”** Especially when it comes to deciding what is right and what is wrong, people all around us are confused and there is disorder. Perhaps many people have boiled their moral compass down to the attitude conveyed by Ernest Hemingway, **“What is moral is what I feel good after, and what is immoral is what I feel bad after.”** And for many people, that is their authority, that is their standard for determining right and wrong.

I know that we like to imagine that we are on the cutting edge of societal evolution (as Rush Limbaugh likes to say), but for those of us who are students of the Bible, we know that spiritual chaos has been around for a long, long time. In fact, we could say that it started in the Garden of Eden, as Eve decided that she knew better than God and decided to taste the forbidden fruit. And from that point on, CHAOS has ruled the world as people have made decisions on right and wrong based on their own personal opinions.

So that we can be encouraged to stay strong in a chaotic society, this morning I would like for us to study one of the most chaotic periods in the history of God’s people, a turbulent time that is described for us in the Old Testament book of Judges. It was a time (according to the last verse in the book of Judges), that, **“...there was no king in Israel; [and] everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).** In the book of Judges, we read about great heroes like Ehud, and Deborah, and Gideon, and Samson. However, near the end of the book of Judges,

we have several chapters that include some scattered stories (not necessarily in chronological order), but stories of total anarchy, accounts of some horrible things that took place during the darkest periods of the judges. If the last few chapters of Judges were to be made into a movie, the movie would be rated R, and perhaps even NC-17. There was no authority, no guidance, no discipline, but every person simply did whatever felt good to them. The Lord had told them to go in and conquer the people, but instead they intermarried, they compromised, and they ended up worshiping the local idols. In **Judges 3:7**, for example, the Bible says that, ***"The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth."*** With that in mind, we come to **Judges 17-18**, and we discover that the result of that kind of compromise is CHAOS. The people have no standard of authority, and so as they do evil, they think that they are actually doing good.

I would like to do something rather different with this morning's lesson. In fact, as I struggled with it this week, my brain almost just exploded. I almost could not handle it. But I would like for us to study what happened in **Judges 17-18** by starting with the result in **Chapter 18**, and then I would like for us to move backwards through time into **Chapter 17** to see what led to such a disastrous conclusion. In fact, I would like for us to start in our three point lesson by looking at Point #3. Ten years from now, perhaps you can look back on this day with great fondness—the day that Baxter lost his mind and preached the entire sermon backwards...

III. So, to start with this morning, we come to our conclusion as we notice that there was CHAOS IN THE NATION AS A WHOLE.

If you will, please look with me at the opening words of **Judges 18** as we start to consider the chaos in the nation of Israel. In our pew Bibles, the Scripture is found starting on **page 421—Judges 18:1-10**...

¹ In those days there was no king of Israel; and in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for themselves to live in, for until that day an inheritance had not been allotted to them as a possession among the tribes of Israel. ² So the sons of Dan sent from their family five men out of their whole number, valiant men from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it; and they said to them, "Go, search the land." And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there. ³ When they were near the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young man, the Levite; and they turned aside there and said to him, "Who brought you here? And what are you doing in this place? And what do you have here?" ⁴ He said to them, "Thus and so has Micah done to me, and he has hired me and I have become his priest." ⁵ They said to him, "Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether our way on which we are going will be prosperous." ⁶ The priest said to them, "Go in peace; your way in which you are going has the LORD'S

approval." ⁷ Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were in it living in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure; for there was no ruler humiliating them for anything in the land, and they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone. ⁸ When they came back to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers said to them, "What do you report?" ⁹ They said, "Arise, and let us go up against them; for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. And will you sit still? Do not delay to go, to enter, to possess the land. ¹⁰ "When you enter, you will come to a secure people with a spacious land; for God has given it into your hand, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth."

I do not want us to miss this, but what we find here is that the tribe of Dan was looking for a place to live, and at first, we might think that this is a legitimate concern, a legitimate quest. However, as we consider the entire book of Judges, it seems that the tribe of Dan had, in fact, already been given land of their own, but they had failed to drive out the inhabitants of that land as they had been commanded by God to do. It was too difficult, and so they apparently went looking for their own land—a land that God had not promised them. Basically, they did not like the deal they were given, and so what we find here in **Judges 18** is that the Danites were looking for the easy way out—they were looking for a defenseless people. What I find interesting, then, is that in **verse 2**, the Danites send out five valiant warriors to spy out the land that belonged to their neighbors to the north. They did not ask God about this before they left home, but as they are already on their way to get what THEY want, they happen to run into a young man with a southern accent. They assume that he might be a Levite, and so (already on their way to conquer a weaker people that God had not told them to conquer), the warriors ask for a blessing from this young rent-a-prophet. We find out later that this young man is willing to give a favorable prophecy to the highest bidder, and that he is currently employed by a guy named Micah (not the good Micah that we read about elsewhere in the Scriptures). And so in their attempt to get God's stamp of approval on their conquest of a land that God never told them to conquer, the warrior scouts get a blessing from this young Levite, and they then continue on their way. If they had really been interested in God's approval, they would have consulted God before they left home, but as it is, they hear a southern accent, assume the guy is a prophet (I think we can pretty safely assume that they paid the young man), and the young man (in their opinion) gives their journey some sense of legitimacy.

And so that we do not miss it, please also notice something that the author of the book of Judges emphasizes in **verse 7**. The author was most likely Samuel, the last of the judges, and he emphasizes something in **verse 7**—the fact that the people of this area were living quietly, they were living in security, and they were minding their own business. In fact, they had done nothing to deserve what was about to happen. You may remember that when God first allowed Joshua to lead the people into the land of Canaan, it was a matter of God's judgment—the local people were so bad that they deserved what was coming—but not so with the inhabitants of Laish. They were so far north; they had nothing to do with this. They were not within the scope of

God's punishment. The Danites go up there, not because God sent them, but because they did not like the deal they got in the south, a deal which involved fighting some pretty strong enemies like the Amorites and the Philistines, which they could have done if they had only had faith in God.

Due to the time involved, we will not read the entire chapter, but we find that the five scouts go back home and get 600 armed men, they come back and loot the house of Micah, and then we pick up with **verse 27**...

27 Then they took what Micah had made and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burned the city with fire. 28 And there was no one to deliver them, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone, and it was in the valley which is near Beth-rehob. And they rebuilt the city and lived in it. 29 They called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father who was born in Israel; however, the name of the city formerly was Laish. 30 The sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. 31 So they set up for themselves Micah's graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh.

Please notice: Thinking they have done some great thing worthy of praise, the warriors massacre the innocent and peaceful residents, and then they rename the city of Laish in honor of their ancestor, Dan. And the chapter ends with the Danites setting up and worshiping the graven and molten images that had been stolen from Micah. And again, all of this CHAOS is the natural result of what happens when a nation does whatever is right in its own sight. And from this point on, Dan becomes a symbol for what was wrong with Israel. The author points out (in **verse 30**) that the idol worship continued from that point all the way up until the land was taken into captivity. Jacob's prophecy in **Genesis 49:17** is being fulfilled, ***"Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path, that bites the horse's heels, so that his rider falls backward."*** This morning, we have seen that Dan snuck in like a snake on the path, and his descendants were responsible for so much of the chaos in the nation of Israel.

By the way, the city of Dan is one of the most important archaeological sites in Israel. Not only that, but archaeologists have even gone deeper, and they have also discovered (underneath Dan) the remnants of Laish. It was in the ruins of Dan that archaeologists discovered probably the most important Biblical artifact ever found up to this point in history. Back in 1993 and 1994, they discovered fragments of what has now come to be known as the ***"Tel-Dan Stele [stee-lee],"*** the only non-Biblical reference to the house of David. For years, critics claimed that there was never such a man as David, that David was made-up, that David was simply a legend invented by the Jewish people to strengthen their national identity...and then there was this discovery at Dan. This morning I noticed we have a tract in the lobby about Biblical

archaeology, and the Tel-Dan Stele is featured in that tract. I would encourage you to take a copy and read it sometime this afternoon. And by the way, the picture on the wall is a picture of some of the ruins of Dan, a very important archaeological site.

Nevertheless, **Judges 18** records a time of national chaos in the history of Israel, when the people really did not care about the word of God, and when their lack of concern led them to massacre an entire city full of innocent people. But before we move on to the second point, I should ask: Where did all of this CHAOS come from? What led to this? How did Israel end up in such a bad situation?

II. **And with that, we come to Point #2, as we discover that CHAOS IN THE NATION started with CHAOS IN RELIGION.**

For a description of utter CHAOS in the realm of religion, please back up with me to **Judges 17:7-13**...

⁷ Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there. ⁸ Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he might find a place; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. ⁹ Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to stay wherever I may find a place." ¹⁰ Micah then said to him, "Dwell with me and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year, a suit of clothes, and your maintenance." So the Levite went in. ¹¹ The Levite agreed to live with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons. ¹² So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah. ¹³ Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest."

The men from the tribe of Dan justified their behavior with a made-up god, and they were supported by a prophet who told them what they wanted to hear—and we find how it all started right here in the last half of **Judges 17**. We should not be surprised that the young Levite gave himself to the highest bidder in **Judges 18**, because he had done it before, right here in **Judges 17**. Micah was this man who lived in the area (not the good Micah mentioned elsewhere in the Scriptures), but as the young Levite passed through the area, Micah had called him in and had invited him to be his own private chaplain, and Micah's motivation for doing this is down in **verse 13**, as he says, ***"Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as a priest."*** In other words, this was not something Micah did to be pleasing to God, but hiring the Levite was something he did to get ahead financially. It is almost as if he wanted some kind of good luck charm, and so he hired his own personal prophet. He promised the young man ten pieces of silver, a change of clothes, and some kind of ongoing salary, and the young man agreed to it.

And so we find that the young man blessed the tribe of Dan for money just as he had also apparently done for Micah. The CHAOS in the nation started as CHAOS in the realm of religion. This is what Jesus warned about in **Luke 6:46**, when He said, ***“Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”*** In other words, there are many people who seem to be religious, but they actually do not care one bit about what the Lord has actually told them to do. And so they may go around with one of those silver Jesus-fish bumper decals, they may wear a cross necklace, they may wear those religious t-shirts, they may go to a huge church with a great women’s ministry or youth group or school—that may be their basis for choosing a church, but when it gets right down to it, they do not really care what Jesus is telling them to do. And what amazes me here in **Judges 17-18**, these people are thinking that they are doing the right thing! ***“Every man did what was right in his own eyes.”*** In their own twisted way, they were doing what they thought was right, and so they hired prophets who agreed with their way of thinking! They paid these people to tell them what they wanted to hear. Please notice from **verse 10**, Micah hired the priest to be his father (to be his spiritual advisor), but then in **verse 11**, we find that, ***“...the young man became to him like one of his sons.”*** He was hired to be a father but ended up as a son. He was hired (supposedly) to give spiritual advice, but he ended up taking advice. In other words, Micah did not want God to take control; but rather, Micah wanted to take control of God. The Levite should have said something, the Levite should have known better, but there was CHAOS in the realm of religion. People were making stuff up and claiming that it came from God.

Is that sounding a little familiar? In Friday’s newspaper, perhaps you noticed the little article about a man in Louisiana who told police that God had told him to walk the streets naked in order to save his soul. Thankfully, the police did not accept that as a valid excuse, and the man was arrested. But that is nothing compared to what we see going on around us today in the religious world. We see so-called Christians consulting the horoscopes, a practice that is strongly condemned in the Bible. We see religious leaders taking votes on matters of doctrine as they ignore what the Bible actually says. Two weeks ago, the Episcopal Church elected its first lesbian bishop. There is so much wrong with that—from the name of the church, to the sin she is committing, to her gender in a position of leadership, to the role of a bishop in overseeing anything other than a local congregation, to the fact that they had the audacity to take a vote on the whole thing! Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, and wrong!

And so just like today, ancient Israel was also going through a time of religious CHAOS. But where did that CHAOS start? Where did it come from?

- I. **If you will, please go back with me to Point #1 of this morning’s lesson (and I know this is really weird—I will need to take a day off tomorrow just to recover from delivering such a bizarre sermon), but Point #1 comes from Judges 17:1-6 as we discover that the CHAOS IN THE NATION and the CHAOS IN RELIGION can all be traced back to CHAOS IN THE HOME.**

Let us please look at Judges 17:1-6...

¹ Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah. ² He said to his mother, "The eleven hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse in my hearing, behold, the silver is with me; I took it." And his mother said, "Blessed be my son by the LORD." ³ He then returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother, and his mother said, "I wholly dedicate the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son to make a graven image and a molten image; now therefore, I will return them to you." ⁴ So when he returned the silver to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver and gave them to the silversmith who made them into a graven image and a molten image, and they were in the house of Micah. ⁵ And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols and consecrated one of his sons, that he might become his priest. ⁶ In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.

And so we find that Micah steals 1100 pieces of silver from his own mother. We are not told how big the pieces are, but even if the pieces were rather small, that is a lot of silver! Remember, as we learned earlier in this morning's lesson...or should I say as we will learn later in this lesson: The prophet was paid a yearly salary of ten pieces of silver. If my math is correct, Micah had stolen from his mother the equivalent of 110 years' worth of salary. In Madison, with an average yearly salary of around \$50,000, this would have been an amount equal to about \$5.5 million—a lot of silver! When Micah's mother discovers that this silver is missing, does she go to God in prayer and ask for help in finding it? No, she does not; but rather, she blurts out some kind of curse so that her son can hear it. Where did Micah learn to order God around for his own personal benefit? He learned it from his mother!

Notice what happens: Micah apparently gets scared, he admits that he took the silver, and does his mother get him in trouble? Does his mother scold him or teach him some kind of valuable lesson about how bad it is to steal? Does she use this as a teachable moment? No, she does not! But Micah's mom gives a blessing on her son, **"Blessed be my son by the Lord."** And by the way, the word **"Lord,"** here is the covenant name for God, not **"Lord"** as in **"Master,"** but **"Lord"** as in **"Yahweh"** or **"Jehovah."** So, Micah admits he stole 1,100 pieces of silver, and his mom basically says, **"Oh, you're such a good boy! And I am thankful to Yahweh for such an amazing boy as you!"** According to the Law of Moses, Micah should have repaid the original amount plus 1/5, and then he should have gone to the tabernacle in Shiloh to offer a sacrifice for his sin. But there is no mention of that here. Where do you think Micah learned to do whatever was right in his own sight? He learned it from his mother!

And then in verse 3, we find that when Micah returned the silver, his mother said that she would **"wholly dedicate"** the silver to the Lord. And then at that point, Micah's mother gave him only 200 of the pieces that she had just **"wholly**

dedicated” to the Lord. I don’t know about you, but to me that sounds a lot like the situation with Ananias and Sapphira in **Acts 5**. They claimed to be giving everything, but then they only gave a part. They were hypocrites about it. Again, where did Micah learn to put his trust in the externals of religion while ignoring the heart? He learned it from his mother!

And then there is the whole issue of honoring the one true and living God with an idol, by using this silver to make a molten and a graven image! They were honoring the God whose first two commandments condemned the worship of idols by making two idols! Again, where did Micah learn to blatantly ignore the word of God? He learned it from his mother!

And then in the next few verses, we find that Micah takes these two new idols and makes a shrine in his own backyard, instead of at the tabernacle in Shiloh (where God had directed them to perform acts of worship). He makes an ephod (a priestly garment reserved for the Levites). He makes a few more household idols (a reference to the local practice of making idols based on your ancestors, so that you could worship your ancestors). And then to top it all off, Micah appoints one of his sons as a priest—again, not from the tribe of Levi (as God had directed). So here is Micah basically attending the **“Church of Micah.”** It looked good, it looked religious, but God had no part of it. Where did Micah learn to disregard the word of God? He learned it from his mother!

But before we become too critical of Micah’s mother, we need to ask ourselves how we are doing in this department. Are we teaching our own children (not only by our words but also by our behavior as a family) that God comes first? That God comes first in the family finances? That God comes before sports? That God comes before school activities? That God comes before family functions? That God comes before sleeping in? I would beg all of us to read the article in the mailboxes this morning—an article written not by a preacher but by an engineer. The article came in the **Gospel Advocate** that came just a few days ago, and it deals with the challenge of sports being scheduled during the regular assembly times of the church. I would encourage you to read that article to see how he and his family dealt with that challenge. What are we teaching our children? Are we more like Micah’s mother than we would like to admit?

As I was preparing for this morning’s lesson, I read about two preacher’s boys who found a small dog. It was a black dog with a white tail, and they loved that dog, they wanted to keep it. Then they heard about a new family in town and how they had lost their dog which was black with a white tail. Well, the preacher didn’t want his two sons to have to give up the dog, so he painted the white tail black, and when the new neighbors asked whether this could be their dog, the preacher lied and said, **“No, the tail is the wrong color.”** What could they say? Do you know the sons’ names? Frank and Jesse James, two of the most notorious criminals of all time.

As far as I can tell, Micah sincerely believed what he had been taught by his mother, and that CHAOS spread. It spread within the family (with the hiring of his own son as a priest), it spread to the religious community (with the hiring of the Levite), it

spread to the entire nation (with the Danites getting some bogus advice from the priest), and the result was that an entire tribe (the tribe of Dan) became eternally separated from the very same God who had saved them from a life of slavery in Egypt. You know, if we could have talked with Micah and his mother about this, if we could have condemned them for what they were doing, you know what they would have said? My guess is they would have said, **“Well, that’s just your opinion.”** You see, there was no authority in Israel, but **“...every man did what was right in his own eyes.”** And this is exactly where we are as a nation today. We are living in a city with more than 400 religious groups. But as we have learned this morning, man-made religions do not fix the problem. In fact, 400 man-made religious groups all teaching something different actually makes it worse, a lot worse!

Conclusion:

In our Scripture reading this morning, Jesus asked the question, **“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”** For those who build their lives on the foundation of what Jesus has said, their lives will be stable over the long run. But for those who ignore what God has said, they will have a hard time spiritually. From history, we know that the tribe of Dan basically disappears. In fact, there is a genealogy in Chronicles and also in Revelation where Dan is not even mentioned. They just kind of disappear, and the Danites become a symbol of those who go off and do their own thing, a symbol of those who become a law unto themselves.

But to be stable, we must listen to what Jesus tells us to do in the Scriptures, and then we must act on it. We must then work and dig down deep to build that stable foundation. Jesus is the cornerstone, the perfect sacrifice. We respond to that sacrifice by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, we would love to talk with you sometime this afternoon. If you would like for us to pray about some situation in your life right now, you can write it down and bring it to the front or give it to me after the service. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org