

JUDGES 17-18

# DOWN TO THE LEADERS

When things go wrong, it's easy to blame the leaders. They're the ones responsible, not us. We Aussies love to blame our politicians... even when we voted for them!

Israel too would've found it easy to blame the Judges. At first, they were the solution to Israel's problems. But then the Judges themselves got worse and worse. Gideon led them into idolatry and set up his son Abimelek to spark a bloody civil war. Jephthah bargained with God as though God was a Canaanite idol, offering human sacrifice, and he too sparked a civil war. Samson was meant to be more set apart for God than anyone, like a mini-Israel within Israel, but he acted more Philistine than the Philistines themselves! By this stage, when the Judges are more problem than solution, it'd be easy to blame them. But in the final two sections of the book, there are no Judges to blame...

# MICAH & THE DANITES

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**Read Judges 17:1-13.**

1. There aren't any Judges here, but there's a lot that sounds similar to where the Judges themselves went wrong. How many similarities can you spot?

J U D G E S	M I C A H
Ehud repeatedly visited "images" (3:19,26)	
Barak needed Deborah to represent God's presence (4:8)	
Gideon made an "ephod" for people to worship (8:27)	
Jephthah thought he could make God bless him (11:31-32)	
Samson chose a Philistine wife for she was "right in his eyes" (14:3,7)	
Samson was betrayed for "eleven hundred shekels of silver" (16:5)	

2. What point do you think is being made by including all these similarities?

To see how it turns out for Micah, **read Judges 18.**

3. The Danites can't take their allotted territory from the Canaanites. Judges 1:27-2:3 explained such failure by reference to Israel's attachment to idols. Is there confirmation of that explanation in this chapter?

4. For the main actors in the story, what would you say they value most above all? (Find evidence in the story itself)
  - a. Micah
  - b. The Levite
  - c. The Danites



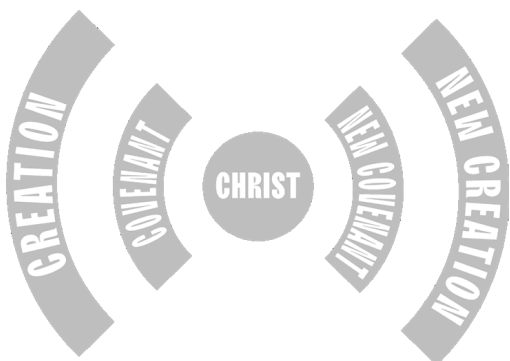
5. Try to find any places in the story where those main actors do not just do whatever they want. What shapes their behaviour throughout? What does this say about the effects of shaping your own image of God?

**GENESIS 12**

<sup>3</sup> "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

6. The Danites find a city outside the promised land (see map), innocent and defenseless. What do they do to it? Is this fulfilling **Genesis 12:3**?

7. The conclusion is in v30-31, and several things here are really disturbing. How so?



**LIVING GOD'S STORY**

It turns out the Judges themselves, bad though they were towards the end, were never the real problem. The problem was Israel's hearts, like all humanity's, corrupt since Creation. Even ordinary people like Micah and the Danites could shape their own image of God and do horrendous things as a result.

Many interpreters take the refrain, “In those days Israel had no king” (17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25), to mean the hope for Israel was the future monarchy. But that would be strange. Monarchy didn’t help Israel in Judges 9. And it was actually the future monarchy which led Israel into exile. The books of Kings put special blame for the exile on Jeroboam, first King of northern Israel after it split from southern Judah (see 1Kings 14:26; 15:30; 2Kings 3:3; 10:29; 13:2; 17:21). And Judges 18:30 shows that this book was put together after that exile...

**Read 1 Kings 12:28-31** about Jeroboam.

8. How were the roots of Jeroboam’s sin already there in Judges 17-18? What similarities can you see?

As well as sounding like the previous Judges, chapters 17-18 are also told in a way that highlights similarities with future Kings. Israel could betray their God without their Judges. They could also do it without their Kings. Since they too had human hearts, they could shape their own image of God all on their own!

9. Where are you tempted to shape your own image of God? Which parts of the Bible would you rather alter or ignore?

10. What has Christ offered you in the New Covenant? Is the God you know in Jesus one you can and should accept ‘as is’?

## 1 KINGS 12

<sup>28</sup> The king made two golden calves. He said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” <sup>29</sup> One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. <sup>30</sup> And this thing became a sin; the people came to worship the one at Bethel and went as far as Dan to worship the other. <sup>31</sup> Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people.

In those days, Israel had no Judge or King to lead them astray. They shaped their own image of God, and did whatever they wanted, all on their own. Such is the corruption of the human heart. But Jesus died for our sins. So we can own up to our sins, not pretending they’re OK, not shifting the blame onto others, knowing that our sins are already fully paid-for and dealt-with. And Jesus rose from death to give us new hearts by his Spirit. So we’re not doomed to repeat our sins. When we own up to our sins, we can actually turn from them by the power of the Spirit. That’s good news! Instead of shaping an image of God to suit us, through Jesus and his Spirit we can be shaped more and more into the human beings we were made to be. Let’s pray that we would be!