

Lectures on the Book of Judges

Judges 17–18 — Appendix: Micah and the Danites

William Kelly

The end of the book — and it is important to make this remark — consists of an appendix. It is in no way a carrying forward of the history. We have come to the close as far as the sequence of persons and of events is concerned. We could not go lower than Samson; but we have what was exceedingly necessary for us to learn — the fact that the dismally wretched condition that we have seen throughout all the Judges was true even from early days; and therefore the Spirit of God giving us this as a sort of supplement, or a conclusion, but with such marks of time as show that it was of a comparatively early date (and this can be proved before we have done with the book), is, I think, of considerable interest and importance. I presume that the reason why these incidents are not given before in the order of time may have been that, if inserted earlier, it would have completely interrupted the course of the history, and the main instruction of the book of Judges. It is only another proof of what we have always to assume in reading the Bible — that not only the things given are divine, but that the arrangement, even when they look somewhat disorderly, is just as divine as the communication itself. There is not a single jot in the Scriptures that God has written or ordered which is not worthy of Himself; nor is there the least possibility of improving either. Here then we have certain facts, apart from the historic course, introduced in these words: "There was a man of mount Ephraim." The great point of the preface is that "in those days there was no king in Israel" — the opening words of Judges 18. "And in those days the tribe of the Danites." It is the Danites again; only the account of Samson is chronologically at the close, whereas the new tale, as we have remarked, was comparatively early. There was then "a man of mount Ephraim whose name was Micah," who, not satisfied with carrying out the impiety of his mother in making a graven and a molten image of silver dedicated to Jehovah, for this purpose gets a Levite to be consecrated as his priest. What avails the show of Jehovah's name, or form of consecrating a Levite to be priest? Ceremony is easy and attractive to the flesh, and there may be the more, as there usually is, where there is least power or reality. It is at least certain that the whole business was heinously evil, and none the less because Micah settles down with the persuasion, "Now know I that Jehovah will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest" (ver. 13). Judges 18 shows that the moral condition, especially of the priest-Levite, was as bad as the religious state. His heart

was glad of a better living and of a larger sphere (verses 19, 20), as he goes off from the house of Micah with the lawless children of Dan to blot out Laish with fire and sword, and call their new city after their own name, where the graven image was set up, and a succession that failed not till the day of the captivity of the land; for error takes root faster, and bears fruit more luxuriantly as well as permanently than the truth.* Yet there is little reason to suppose that the exile of the land means Shalmaneser's, but rather under the Philistines; for it was merely all the time the house of God was in Shiloh. There being no king is in contrast with other lands which had kings, as Israel themselves subsequently. (Compare Ps. 78: 60, 61) Such are the prominent points of instruction in this appendix. The first and gravest departure is that Jehovah could be so forgotten and so shamelessly dishonoured as to set up in His name a rival; and the more seriously it was set about, so much the worse. It was flying in the face of His law and word to have an idol; it was adding profane insult to enter on its worship with such ceremony as to get a Levite consecrated priest in order to invest it with solemnity. We have seen the political confusion: here is the religious aspect of Israel so soon after entering the holy land! * It is possible that verse 30 may be one of those later additions which Ezra or one of the prophets was inspired to make in putting together at a subsequent epoch the books of Scripture. If this be so, the captivity might be the Assyrian, and not that of the Philistines. But verse 30 seems adverse to this view. There is no difficulty in principle either way. Is it then a matter of wonder that men went wrong in early days under the Christian profession? The danger was incomparably greater where the trial was to stand to the truth fully revealed and to walk in the Spirit, and not subjection to commandments and ritual observances. The ruin of Christianity was when two systems so distinct got confounded. And be assured that if the people of God fail in their responsibility to God, they are not to be trusted elsewhere. I am not speaking of what men of the world may be, for they may be conscientious and honourable in their own way; but it is different with God's people. Never trust those that bear the Lord's name, if they are false to Him. The case before us, in Judges 17, 18, is one where God was openly, deliberately, and systematically dishonoured.