

# Open Idolatry - The Danger of Self-Seeking Pragmatism

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 04 July 2021

Preacher: Jim Masters

[0:00] Please take your Bibles and go to Judges chapter 18.

Judges 18. If you're visiting with us, there's a black Bible in the chair in front of you. At least there should be. And start in the book of Genesis and go to page 194.

That's where you'll find Judges 18. Judges chapter 18. And remember from last week, excuse me, we should be in chapter 10, but we jump from chapter 9 to chapter 17 because two reasons it really describes, illustrates how evil Israel had become.

And second, chapters 17 through 21 actually happened earlier in the time of the Judges, not later. As a matter of fact, you'll see even in chapter 18, this happened probably around the time of Joshua and his death around that time.

It's quite interesting. So Judges chapter 18, I'm going to read, we're studying a whole chapter, chapter 18 this morning. So let's read this part two to the intriguing story about Micah and his little shrine.

[1:28] Judges chapter 18, 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.

So the sons of Dan sent from their family five men out of their whole number, valiant men from Zorah and Eshtol 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. 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? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here? And he said to them, thus and so has Micah done to me. He's hired me. I've become his priest.

And they said to him, well, inquire of God, please, that we may know whether our way in which we are going will be prosperous. And the priest said to them, go in peace. Your way in which you are going has the Lord's approval.

[2:31] Isn't that convenient? Then the five men departed and came to Leish and saw the people who were in it living in security after the man of the Sidonians, quiet and secure.

There's no ruler humiliating them for anything in the land and they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone. And they came back to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtor. Their brothers said to them, what do you report?

And they said, arise, let us go up against him for we have seen the land and behold it is very good. Will you sit still? Do not delay to go, to enter, to possess the land.

When you enter, you shall come to secure people with a spacious land for God has given it into your hand. A place where there's no lack of anything that is on the earth. Then from the family of the Danites, from Zorah and from Eshtor, 600 men armed with weapons of war set out and they went up and camped to Kiriath-Jearim in Judah.

Therefore they called that place Mahanadan. To this day, behold, it is west of Kiriath-Jearim. And they passed from there to the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.

[3:35] Then the five men who went to spy out the country of Laish, verse 14, answered and said to their kinsmen, Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod and household idols and a graven image and a molten image?

Now therefore consider what you should do. And they turned aside, turned aside there and came to the house of the young man, the Levite, to the house of Micah and asked them his welfare. And the 600 men armed with weapons of war, who were of the sons of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate.

Now the five men who went to spy out the land went up, entered there, took the graven image and the ephod and the household idols and the molten image while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the 600 men armed with weapons of war.

And when these went into Micah's house and took the graven image, the ephod and the household idols and the molten image, the priest said to them, What are you doing? And they said to them, Shut your trap. Put your hand over your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man or to a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel? And the priest's heart was glad and he took the ephod and the household idols and the graven image and he went among the people.

[4:45] Verse 21, And they turned and departed and put the little ones and livestock and the valuables in front of them when they had gone some distance from the house of Micah. The men in the houses near Micah's house assembled and overtook the sons of Dan.

And they cried to the sons of Dan who turned around and said to Micah, What is with you that you assembled together? And he said, You've taken away my gods which I made and the priests and have gone away.

What do I have besides? So how can you say to me what is with you? And the sons of Dan said to him, Do not let your voice be heard among us lest fierce men fall upon you and you lose your life with the lives of your household.

So the sons of Dan went on their way and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him he turned and went back to his house. Verse 27, And they took what Micah had made and the priests who 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.

And there was no one to deliver them because it was far from Sidon. They had no dealings with anyone. It was in a valley which is near Beth Rehob and they rebuilt the city and lived in it and they called the name of the city Dan after the name of Dan their father who was born in Israel.

[5:57] However, the name of the city formerly was Laish. And the sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image and Jonathan the son of Gershom the son of Moses he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land.

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. In my house in my home kids are around and we're just eating or whatever there's lots of conversation happening because there's lots of people in the house right?

I mean of course. I think they timed it last night that we can actually be quiet for about 20 seconds. That's pretty good. Wouldn't you say?

No? No? So there's a little thing that we do in the house so somebody will do something whatever an event will happen and it will immediately trigger like a one liner from a movie.

For example Phoebe's like putting the dishes away or something like that and we're doing the dishes and things like that and then she turns and she's like it won't fit and immediately me one of the other kids will say I'll make it fit now.

[7:30] Do you remember the 1950 movie classic Disney classic Cinderella? So there remember the the duke is going around all the the women and trying the glass slipper on and came to the the home of the stepsisters the stepmother and everything so they're trying to do the first what's it Elsa no no not Elsa what?

Drusilla and Anesthesia yeah so they're trying the one on I don't remember who was first but the second one they're trying it on and she says get out of the way I'll make it fit so she says it out loud so so that's you know this is those are the kind of things that we do we just little one liners in the house I'll make it fit and that's exactly what I thought of when I started studying this passage you might say that's kind of crazy why why is he think this is very similar to pragmatism pragmatism is an approach that assesses the truth of meaning of theories or beliefs in terms of the success of their practical application in other words if it works you do it well that doesn't work for them that doesn't work for them well this works so let's do it that becomes your truth but this stepsister went the next mile and I called it call it self seeking pragmatism

I will make it work for me to benefit me I will seek things that work for me if it doesn't work I'll make it work I'll make it fit so that way she could be the princess right judges is about God's love his overwhelming never ending relentless love for his people and he loves us so much he wants us to solely love him and today what we'll see is rival trust last week we looked at rival love the danger of subjective syncretism today it's rival trust the danger of self seeking pragmatism God takes seriously when our trust in him is rivaled

God takes seriously when our trust in him is rivaled rival trust the danger of self seeking pragmatism God loves us so much that he'll do what it takes for us to love and trust him he wants us to depend upon him for everything he wants us to trust him in everything he wants us to lean upon him in everything and what happens is when disbelief sets in then you're going to make it fit disbelief can lead to self seeking pragmatism which leads to a whole list of other sins and friends this is exactly what you see in chapter 18 it began with disbelief it began with a lack of trust with the Danites and they went down that road and it's a warning to us that we should trust our God and the circumstances in which he's placed us the situations in which he's put us even though we don't like it even though it's not benefiting you see that's how detrimental it can be when we lack trusting the Lord and what he wants for our lives to depend on him for everything to love him chiefly and solely that's why we read from Deuteronomy 13 to love him to serve him to cling to him that's what the Lord says is what he commands us and he commands us trust him with all your heart don't lean on your own understanding when we begin to trust ourselves and our efforts instead of the Lord a whole list of other sins come about so beware

[12:40] Yahweh wants us to trust him and his word following him and his word when we disbelieve our God we immediately turn to self-seeking pragmatism whatever works for my own selfish ends I'm going to make it fit God takes seriously when our trust in him is rivaled and by the way it's not a matter of letting go and letting God no it's a matter of trusting God and obeying what he's revealed in his word trusting God and moving forward in what he said in his word that's what the Dan Knights did not get you'll see so a whole list of other sins follow and this is what you're going to see unfold before you the rival trust happens the lack of trusting in the

Lord then there's going to be self-seeking pragmatism and then it leads to disobedience selfishness deception bullying violence all because they didn't trust God in his word I said no we're not going to trust you in that we're going to take things into our own hands we don't ever do that do we but instead when we trust Christ we'll obey him giving thanks showing selflessness genuineness grace compassion or as the phrase goes you trust and obey that's what happens pragmatism is bad self-seeking pragmatism is even worse and it's this kind of pragmatism we see displayed in the tribe of Dan and this story the continuation of the story in chapter 18 is told with a bit of cynical humor such irony in the things that are said it's really sad

Samuel left us last time with Micah having this Levite become his priest remember he had this nice shrine he had a little priest remember a Levite was supposed to be a priest it was the sons of Aaron a Levite was an assistant he wasn't supposed to be a priest so no shrine political priest he had a vast array of idols perfect now I know Yahweh is going to bless me end of chapter 17 story continues Dan sets out for territory they sent five spies stayed with Micah asked the priest inquired of the Lord found a place slaughter these people set up their little city set up their idolatry that's what we see happen but what's this all about really what's this all about self seeking pragmatism they did whatever worked best for them with no regard for

Yahweh and his revealed word that's what you see happen and notice how Samuel begins this and this is the second time he says this verse one of chapter 18 in those days there was no king of Israel so first point is kind of easy the people needed a king there you go we need a king there had had there been a good king this would not have happened in Israel a good king who would be faithful to Yahweh in his covenant a good king that would destroy this kind of pragmatism this kind of syncretism and direct God's people to love him solely and chiefly and that's what we find in Jesus isn't it you can almost see and sense that it's pointing us to the future and the need for our perfect Messiah who will direct the hearts of the people back to the

Lord that's what Jesus is there for so you see it there even from this one verse but notice even here as well in verse one the beginnings of this disbelief and 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 Dan what's happening here their lot was not allotted to them so this is possibly during the time of Joshua

when he was still alive or maybe a little bit after he died but even still they would not like what they had been given they didn't like it and if you remember some weeks ago they were struggling with the Amorites of that area do you remember that the end of chapter one they were struggling with the

[18:04] Amorites which is near Judah and Ephraim so if you're looking at a map it would be like Ephraim is here Judah is here Dan was supposed to be right here the Amorites were taking over and as we saw this some weeks ago why were they having such a problem with the Amorites why were they having such a problem with all these different nations Israel was commanded to drive out these nations because of the they and to carry out his command but instead what did they do they tolerated them they didn't obey the Lord they didn't trust the Lord it was a lack of faith remember that remember we talked about that so already Dan the tribe of Dan they lacked trusting Yahweh in the conquest of this area that would be marked up for them and remember they were already resorting to worshipping

Baal they were already going down that path that's why Joshua said choose who you're going to serve this day we will serve the Lord we will serve the Lord what did Joshua say no you won't we will serve the Lord no you won't he was right they had a lack of gratitude for what God had allowed to them they did not trust Yahweh and where he wanted them to be they thought they knew best so they were left to find their own land and search for themselves they were not happy with the circumstances God gave them now if that doesn't apply to us wow what doesn't that happens to us so many times we so don't like what's going on I'll make it fit I'll make it work and that's what you see the self seeking pragmatism again verse one was seeking inheritance for themselves verse two the sons of

Dan sent from their family five men the whole number valiant men to spy out the land they said go search the land so what did they do they did what was right in their own eyes oh that that that that sounds familiar they did what was right in their own eyes and sought out their own territory this truly revealed their lack of faith in Yahweh there's there's the warning for us oh lord help me to trust you more oh lord help me to depend upon you more and not to take things on myself i'll make it fit so you see they spied out the land notice what happens at the end of verse two into verse three they came to kill country Ephraim house of Micah when they were near the house they recognized the voice of this young man so they spied out the land they end up staying with Micah possibly maybe they could tell from his accent he was from their area but what they saw in

Micah's house impressed them so much so they asked him a serious question what are you what he brought here blah blah blah and he said thus and so Micah has done for me he hired me I become his priest so what do they do they were so impressed that he was asked this man to be the priest so they used the ephod to find out if Yahweh would bless their conquest can you believe this they are already lacking their faith in God going about their own circumstances trying to make things happen for themselves and then they had the audacity to say wait inquire of God see he's going to bless us you see this this is pragmatism and then notice verse six the priest he said to them go in peace your way in which in other words the Lord would view your actions with favor that's how one writer put it the ephod and the teraphim it was used for this purpose now did the Lord Yahweh did he truly give them his approval his approval probably not I doubt it because it was recorded he was asked not to mention the fact that this Levite he wasn't even a true priest he was a fake he was a con man he just wanted money he didn't care about anything else there's something else too wait a second if they really wanted to know if they had the approval of Yahweh why didn't they go to Shiloh which was in Ephraim why didn't they go there you ever thought about that why didn't they go there to the place where the Lord was where the tabernacle was because they didn't really want to know I'll make it fit

[23:36] I'll make it work so that disbelief and notice what happens the list of sins that happens from this disbelief into self-seeking pragmatism and then you have violence verse 7 to 12 they came to Leish they saw these people this was Leish was far north 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee a long distance from potential enemies had a great water supply that area the people there enjoyed security and peace they had no defenses because how remote they were they came back to the brothers oh man you gotta see this place it's awesome this is so great and notice what they say verse 10 when you enter you shall come to secure people with a spacious land for God has given it oh that's nice just pull that God card out oh God had said that's convenient the Lord told me to tell you these

Danites were fierce warriors who showed no mercy verse 11 600 men armed with weapons and war set out they camped at this place Kiriath Jearim dropped down to verse 27 oh oh oh wait I want to put this up there for you they even used scripture to back up the merciless slaughter of a peaceful helpless undefended people amazing these guys are something else so notice verse 27 now they took what Micah had made priests they took that packed up their gear set off for this land they came to Laish and they struck them all down completely annihilated in the city and then burning it with fire notice how Samuel puts Dan in a bad light and the people of Laish he kind of puts them in a good light you see that they're quiet and secure and then verse 29 and they called excuse me in 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 this shows their brutality and the lack of mercy for others they were not given this land they took it for themselves disbelief self-seeking pragmatism leading to violence and then leading to selfishness and deception verses 13 through 20 look at verse 13 came to the house of Micah oh now here we go the spies gave their comrades this info notice verse 14 do you know that there are in these houses an ephod and household idols and graven image molten image now consider what we should do brethren the teraphim graven image molten image so while the 600 stood guard verse 17 the spies went the five men went to spy out the land took the graven image ephod household idols while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the 600 men with weapons of war standing there and the priest is like what are you doing like he's going to do much anyways because there's 600 men of war with their weapons what's he going to do right yeah right and the notice they said be quiet put your hand over your mouth and come with us basically they said shut up and get in the car and be a priest to a whole clan talk about pragmatism talk about self seeking pragmatism and such deception and this

Levi said no no I'm not going to look verse 20 Levi's heart was glad I'm going to make some serious dough now this is great remember the Levi was an opportunist he wanted a good spot to make some good money and make some serious cash by going with his whole clan so he starts helping them let's go alright he's helping them put the stuff in he believed this one writer says he quote happily sells his fidelity to the higher bitter end quote you know another writer said that this priest is a good depiction of Israel at large fickle and a mercenary attitude you know this whole shenanigan scenario you know one writer pointed this out this is keen it fulfilled

Jacob's prophecy regarding Dan that he would be serpent like in nature Genesis chapter 49 verse 17 Jacob prophesied Dan would do this and here it is such deception selfishness when we stop trusting God and the circumstances in which he's placed us then anything goes and then last you have here well not last almost last oh oh here I didn't put up on the screen beware when we stop trusting and loving our Lord we might find ourselves getting caught into a bunch of other sins too when we stop trusting and loving our Lord we may find ourselves getting caught into a bunch of other sins too may this spur you on to trust the Lord may it spur you on to depend on him may it spur you on to love him now we get into the last one or almost last one which is bullying look at what happens in verse 21 they took off and Micah from verse 22 men from the house of Dan they went off after them overtook them verse 23 they cried to the son of Dan to turn around and said what's with you what's the matter with you what are you coming after me for the response is classic in verse 24 you've taken away my gods which I made you see that you see the cynical humor in that you've taken away the gods which I made talk about irony what a ludicrous statement sad statement to say a god who can be stolen and pilfered is no true god it was if he lost it all because he stole his gods friends this was how far

[31:01] Israel had gone in sin this is how far they've gone and then verse 25 the son of dad said to him if you don't shut your trap and go back home you'll be sorry you stopped us on a road trip pal we'll cut your heads off you better turn right around and go back home there's that bullying there we'll make you pay disbelief had brewed even more sin disunity hatred theft pilfering that's what you see verse 26 sons of Dan went on their way when Micah saw that they were too strong for him he turned back went back to his house I guess Yahweh wasn't blessing him anymore remember chapter 17 verse 13

I guess Yahweh wasn't blessing him anymore now the last one open idolatry flat out right out in the open verse 30 and the son of Dan set up for themselves the graven image and Jonathan the son of Gershom the son of Moses he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Danites until the day of the captivity of the land now what Samuel does he gives you two parts to this that are very vital for you

to understand first Dan was one of the places selected by Jeroboam the first way in the future as the site for the golden calf worship of the northern kingdom when the kingdom split in half Jeroboam picked two places Bethel and Dan possibly he continued what was already happening in Dan most likely which means it probably was a golden calf what they had but you know it's a second bit of information the second bit of information you have here not just Dan was one of the places selected by Jeroboam the first but the second bit of information is this man this priest was Moses' grandson now you have a textual variant here in verse 30 where it says the son of Manasseh but actually originally in the manuscripts it's Moses this was Moses' grandson so now you know who this priest was this is how Moses second generation third generation can you believe this so they set up for themselves in verse 31 Micah's graven image which he made and this was like this

Samuel said until the day the northern kingdom went into captivity into Syria that's how much it was that's how for long it was and this was contrary to God's command not to have private sanctuaries there's only one sanctuary notice the end of verse 31 all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh there's only one sanctuary there's a tabernacle that's where it should be I'll make it fit I'll make it work you need to do things my way God no it's only supposed to be one sanctuary the tabernacle because God is the one who tells us how we're supposed to worship him it's because God wanted them to be him to be central in all their thoughts and actions he was to be first he was to be foremost he was to be their king he was to be their God he was to be the one they would trust it's him and you realize this communicates to us that Israel had rejected

Yahweh's king now you can worship Yahweh right in the comfort of your own home your own territory this is convenient it works better it's pragmatism self-seeking pragmatism I want to review a little bit what we looked at but before I do that I want to point something out to you so you have this whole situation the Danites moved up here way north right and from now on in the Old Testament the nation of Israel would be referred to the nation of Israel from Dan to Beersheba Beersheba isn't that interesting because what do you see here Yahweh showed grace to Dan they should have never done this he showed grace in this way by now referring to the nation of Israel from Dan to Beersheba isn't that amazing which it shows us he shows us grace to to draw us to himself that we would love and trust him

[36 : 47] God is very gracious to you because when you go down the road of not believing in him he's very gracious to you and he's going to discipline you he's going to squeeze so you would trust him because he wants you to love him that's how much he loves you God loves us so much he'll do what it takes for us to love and trust him he wants us to depend upon him for everything that's why we're going to partake of the Lord's Supper I mean that's the idea behind this it's a renewal of how I'm trusting in you Jesus I'm trusting you Lord I should be condemned I should be facing your wrath and your justice but instead I'm facing your mercy and your grace and your compassion and the elements are a physical tangible display of the gospel the bread

Jesus body the juice his blood it reminds you of God's grace to you it reminds you of his mercy and it reminds you to renew your trust in Christ and Christ alone right it renews that in you God takes seriously when our trust in him is rivaled Yahweh wants us to trust him and his word following him and his word you need to renew your trust today oh Christian and let this be a way that we do this when we partake of the Lord's supper we're going to do that as a way to remind ourselves and renew our trust in him again but you know we need to ask this question as well maybe you're here today and you have not trusted him maybe you're here today and you have not put your dependence upon Christ you should repent and trust Christ you should come to Jesus and trust him and him alone he'll save you you should be judged yet God will show you grace and mercy in Jesus come he says he likes it when people trust him because he's trustworthy let's take a moment and pray

Lord Jesus we know that we we do fall short in so many ways and yet we're very thankful for your grace and your compassion for your patience and your gentleness and as we prepare our hearts at this time Father we pray that you would help us by your spirit to renew our trust in you once again our faith in Jesus and Jesus alone our love for Jesus and Jesus alone our dependence upon Jesus and Jesus alone for Jesus only you can save us and we remind ourselves of this great gospel truth may we be encouraged may the gospel the elements the Lord's supper encourage us reminding us of your gospel truth and to look forward to the day when our trust in you will be perfect when you will return you will set up your kingdom and then we can enjoy you and trust you and not be distracted

by our sin we look for that day we look forward to that day we long for that day  
I want to encourage you at this time to prepare your heart for the Lord's supper come with humility  
and yet with thanks with brokenness and yet with gratitude that there's forgiveness and mercy  
found in Jesus and Jesus alone and if you're here and you say well I'm not a member of this church  
if you come from a church of like faith and practice we would prefer being baptized by immersion  
partake of the Lord's supper with us but we would advise you if you don't know Jesus you've not  
trusted Christ this is not for you you can watch but you should see the reality of the gospel truth laid  
out before you and may we as we partake of the elements and you're here you're not a  
Christian a follower of Jesus one of his disciples may it drive you to Christ may it drive you to Jesus  
may it drive you to the cross to repent and trust in Jesus and if you're a follower of Christ I would  
also encourage you if you have something against another believer brother or sister in Christ or  
anyone else for that matter and you've not gone to reconcile with them I would encourage you not  
partake of the elements wait till next time first go reconcile with that person brother or sister and  
then come and partake of the elements with us let this time just a few minutes of silence where you  
can fill your mind with truth with gospel truth preparing your hearts for what we're going to see and  
taste in the gospel do that now please and you you you you you you you you