

## MAY 3

### Judges 17-18

This is the first of two snapshots given to show the depth of the religious confusion that followed when Israel refused to love and obey the Lord. The first story deals with the religious apostasy and the second deals with the moral apostasy. You could title the stories “worse” and “worser.” Looking at Romans 1:18-32, you see that religious confusion always precedes moral catastrophe.

We will get two more views into this time period in the book of Ruth and in the early history of 1 Samuel. Ruth will show some confusion, but overall, this book will show us people who followed God. 1 Samuel will show one family that seems fairly balanced, but it will also show a corrupt priesthood and the defiled worship at the tabernacle.

#### Judges 17

What stands out in this story is the sincerity of the mixing of the true and the false. These people were highly sincere, yet couldn't have been more lost.

The time when this takes place might be very important. Look at Judges 18:30. It identifies the Levite as *Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses*. A couple of considerations here. In most copies of the OT, Moses' name is found. It is thought that a well meaning scribe added an "n" to turn "Moses" into "Manasseh" and get Moses off the hook. They have so many copies of the OT that they can see that this is an error. Also, it is possible that Jonathan was not the son of Gershom, but a grandson or great grandson, etc. There are instances of a grandson being called the son of someone and the generations in between are skipped. I think he was the grandson. And to think that this guy was related to Moses.

However this works out, there are two terrible dynamics at work here. First, this shows that after Joshua's generation died (Joshua told the people in his farewell speech to put away their foreign gods), the nation sank into almost immediate spiritual confusion. Gershom, Moses' son, would have been that generation of elders who lived with Joshua. Jonathan would have been the next generation. Second, it means that even those closest to the truth, the family of Moses, became too busy with life to really know the law (Bible) well. The system God set up, and the nation He created, could only function if everyone obeyed. If the people didn't worship, they wouldn't support the Levites. If the Levites had to fend for their own living, they couldn't learn and teach the law as they were supposed to. It was all very interconnected. Apparently very few obeyed and the nation fell apart immediately.

So what was the cause, besides sin? This reminds me of something Jesus repeatedly told His disciples, as in Matthew 6:25, *“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”* What Jesus is warning against is not just anxiety, but allowing these things to take our attention away from serving Him on this earth. It was because of this preoccupation that Israel never celebrated a Sabbatical year or the Feast of Booths. Like Israel we forget that we are not here to live; we are here to serve. God says He'll take care of the rest. That means as disciples we are free to devote our hearts to following our Lord in the harvest. Or as Jesus put it in Luke 12:33-36, *Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.*

I know this seems hard to grasp and other worldly, but if we cannot grasp the spirit of what Jesus is saying, as disciples, we could end up like Samson, or the story we are about to read.

Vs. 1-6 Notice the editor's note in v. 6. That means this is written during the time when there was a king and order was taking root, looking back on this time of lawlessness.

V. 2 The mother praised God and then dedicated the money to God, to make an idol. They were sincere in their belief and service, and totally displeasing to God. How awful.

Some of what she did here was to remove the curse she put upon whoever stole the money.

V. 4 Either she made two images or it was simply one process, the wooden image, covered with silver.

V. 5 Micah's shrine is a little, eclectic temple, filled with something from all the gods of the land. Notice that he has an ephod. I think the ephod was a tool for discerning the will of the gods. In Israel, the ephod held the Urim and Thummim. In chapter 18, I think, it gets used.

God had put the ephod with the high priest at the tabernacle. One aspect of our need and our worship is to find answers to our questions. The key is really the relationship with God, on His terms, not ours. Still, God set up a way for answers to be found. All you had to do was go to the tabernacle. Well, if the tabernacle was far away, and if the priests and Levites couldn't be trusted, why not have your own ephod and your own Urim and Thummim? This got Gideon in trouble and we see here, in this story, it began years before Gideon, in fact, right after Joshua died.

Vs. 7-13 This brings the confusion to a stellar level. A Levite of the best upbringing is totally lost.

V. 13 is an incredibly ignorant and sincere statement.

#### Judges 18

Vs. 1-6 Notice again that v. 1 is a commentary given at a later date to explain the sin and confusion of this particular time in Israel's history. You don't flaunt your ignorance in your national literature, unless this isn't national literature, but the record of God's redemptive working with humans, sick with sin.

The tribe of Dan never controlled the land of their inheritance and must have begun looking for a place to live very early.

Vs. 5-6 I think this is where the Levites used the Urim and Thummim to give them advice. Apparently you could get a pair of these at any convenience store.

Vs. 7-26 This story is very straightforward and spiritually dysfunctional. For the tribe of Dan to steal the idol and the ephod and take the Levite made perfect sense, since they were a tribe and these things were better in the service of a tribe of Israel, than for a single individual. The irrationality here is of epic proportions. What kind of god do you have if you can steal him?

Vs. 27-31 The significance of this story is not only the description of the spiritual ignorance and confusion, but it shows how Dan was the first tribe to go entirely apostate.

Vs. 30-31 Dan as a tribe set up official worship away from the tabernacle; after all, it would have been a long way to walk. Some of the tribe of Dan stayed in the south on the original homestead and were spared this apostasy: Samson's parents for example. Verse 30 is like a surprise unveiling in a movie. The Levite turns out to be the grandson of Moses. This shows that the Levitical system and the worship at the tabernacle must have gone to seed pretty soon after the death of Joshua. Again, remember that in Joshua's last address, he was warning people to put away their idols.

In Revelation 7:2-8, when the 144,000 are selected to give testimony during the Tribulation, there is no mention of the tribe of Dan. The presumed reason is that Dan was the first tribe to fall into total idolatry and apostasy. In other words, the punishment for what they did here is that they were removed as a tribe of Israel. Those who were true to the Lord would have been

absorbed into the other tribes through intermarriage. After the exile, too, many people lost track of their genealogy and family tree.

It is obvious that our "need" for spiritual connection can be sincere and still be controlled by the power of sin in us. We cannot deny the need, but we can deny God and make "spirituality" what we define it to be. This is tragic and true. What is alarming in this story is that it only took one generation to fall into total confusion. That is very sobering, especially with our desire today not to be bored and to have our needs met. Our churches have been built, in previous generations, by men and women committed to the truth. They sat through boring sermons in very plain services being built on very strong teaching. I'm not confident that same emphasis exists today. As a result, and all the studies show it, our biblical literacy is plummeting. We have more resources than any generation that has ever lived, yet we insist that reading the Bible is just not "the way" we learn. And we don't sit through sermons that are full of teaching and content. Paul's command to Timothy was to preach the Word urgently, because people would turn from listening to the truth and seek teaching that tickled their ears. I think we need that same charge today, and leaders need not be ashamed to expect and exhort people to read their Bibles every day.

### **John 3:1-21**

Vs. 1-16 It seems that Nick sought Jesus out of his own interest, otherwise there would have been two or more witnesses with him from the Pharisees. Nicodemus will be mentioned a couple more times in a good way.

V. 3 Jesus' words were trying to force Nick away from his focus on the signs, to what was going on behind the signs. Even though Nick was a "spiritual leader," he was fixated on the physical.

*Born again* is the right interpretation as seen in Nick's question of crawling back in his mother's womb. He understood what Jesus meant, but the spiritual dimension was too deep for him.

V. 6 Jesus was trying to get Nick to see that before there is entrance into heaven, there has to be a spiritual birth. Like most religious people, Nick focused on behavior and rules. Sin is the most powerful force on the earth. Without a new spiritual life (the breaking of sin's power in repentance, forgiveness and regeneration) and the help of the Holy Spirit (every minute, every day, leading us in the Word to obediently follow our Savior), we'd be toast.

V. 7 The wind illustration simply says there are things you can't see, but they are real. The spiritual is real and the spiritual life is real. The same word for wind also means spirit.

V. 14 So what is the point here? I think it is that the cure for those people was unseen and spiritual. It didn't come through medicine or cutting the wounds and sucking out the poison. It came transmitted invisibly and spiritually through faith. But, you had to believe and you had to look at the brass serpent. In the same way, salvation and rebirth come through faith and turning to the object of that faith, Jesus.

V. 16 This is one of the most well-known verses in the Bible for good reason. It is the gospel in a sentence, beginning with God's love and ending with our salvation in Christ.

Vs. 17-21 I memorized these verses the first year I gave my life to Christ. In fact, I think they were part of the Awana leader's memory verses, and not knowing any better, I thought I was supposed to memorize them because I was an Awana leader. I was overwhelmed by the timelessness and simplicity of this truth. This is exactly why people don't come to Christ.

### **Psalm 104:1-23**

What a beautiful psalm.

Vs. 1-4 This seems to express the grandeur of God being surrounded by what He created, framing Him and giving glory to Him.

Notice that v. 4 is quoted in Hebrews 1:7, where "winds" mean spirits. (See the note on John 3:7 above.)

Vs. 5-9 Here it shows God's control and power over the might and chaos of His creation.

Vs. 10-13 Through God's power, He uses the forces of nature to feed and water the creatures He made.

Vs. 14-15 Not only does God care for animals, but He cares for mankind, each day. I had to laugh because I looked in a commentary and it mentioned the oil and food, but skipped the "W" word. God made it, too, for a purpose, but like all the good things God made, there needs to be control.

Vs. 16-18 These animals are probably mentioned by David, because David saw these as he lived in the mountains. These animals are hidden from and forgotten by man, but never by God.

Vs. 19-23 Notice that the creation of the moon and sun is mentioned for the same purposes expressed in the creation account in Genesis. This means, especially given that the sun, moon, planets and stars were created on the fourth day, that their sole purpose was for us and the rest of His creation on earth to mark times and seasons, day and night. There was already light for three days before God made the sun.

Notice the mentions of power, provision, protection and control in this psalm.

So, what does this psalm say to you? How did God intend this psalm to strengthen our hearts?

#### **Proverbs 14:20-21**

I think v. 21 is telling the rich guy in v. 20 to make friends with the poor, who is his neighbor in both verses. That sure sounds like, "Love your neighbor as yourself," to me. It's amazing where you find that command.