

## Living Outside of God's Lines

### Micah and the Danites Judges 17 & 18

Every day we engage in a dangerous, life-threatening activity. We strap ourselves into 3,500 pound machines that scream down thin ribbons of asphalt at deadly speed. We do this within just a couple of feet of other lethal machines also moving at breakneck speed. Yet we do this with complete comfort and confidence. We casually eat lunch, listen to music, talk to passengers, or even converse on the phone while we are hurling down these asphalt tendrils of death. Are we stupid? Do we have some sort of insane death wish? Why do we do this?

Because, if you look on the pavement, someone has painted white and yellow lines. These lines tell us where we can safely travel. We know that as long as we stay between those lines, and everyone else stays in their lines we can safely get to where we want to go. But if even one person strays from those lines, not only are their lives in danger, so is everyone around them.

What would happen if there were no lines? What would happen if everyone could paint their own lines and drive wherever they wanted? I remember riding with my father late one night as a child. Dad pulled into the wrong lane and started driving down the left side of the road. I freaked out, "Dad, what are you doing? You're driving on the wrong side of the road. You're gonna get us killed." With a snicker my dad replied, "I'm a taxpayer." Swerving back to the right side of the road, he says, "I pay taxes for this side of the road," and swerving back to the left, "and I pay taxes for this side of the road. So, if I want to drive on this side, I will. If I want to drive on the other side, I will."

Fortunately, I lived through this traumatic experience. Those lines are there for good reason. They are not there to hurt you or hinder you. They aren't there to keep you from where you going. They aren't there to take away your freedom. They give freedom. They help us all to get where we're going.

Likewise, God has painted lines in life. There are moral principles, standards of right and wrong, and certain spiritual truths that mark out for us where we can safely travel in life. Nearly all of our problems occur when we, or someone near us strays from those lines.

Over the last several weeks we have explored the book of Judges. We have seen what happens when individuals, families, cities, tribes, and entire nations ignore the lines. Judges is a story of a people who had no lines. Four times in Judges' closing chapters we are told that *"In those days Israel had no king."* It doesn't just mean an earthly king. Israel had rejected God as their divine king. With no ultimate moral authority, Israel had no lines, and we are told in Judges 17:6, *"so the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes."* Everyone painted their own lines.

Judges closes with two troubling and tragic stories. We'll be looking at the first of these. It is

the story of one man's sin which eventually infects an entire tribe. This story is a mirror of what's going on in our own culture, and it might even be a window to what's going on in our own lives as we try to live outside of God's lines.

Turn to Judges 17 and 18. Our story begins with a man named Micah from the tribe of Ephraim. Micah stole what amounts to several million dollars' worth of silver from his mother. It is not surprising then, when his mother pronounces a curse upon whoever stole the money. Micah, because of his culture, has this pagan, magical view of God, and he was afraid of the curse. So he returns the idols.

Micah's momma was so happy that she dedicated the silver to the Lord. That sounds good, until we read she had some of the silver made into idols. Micah then takes these idols and sets up a family shrine inside of his home. This was a typical pagan practice. Each family would have their own idol worshipping shrine. He even makes priestly garments and ordains his own son as the priest. It was his personally customized religion. It is not surprising then when we read in verse 6, *"In those days Israel had no king, so the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes."*

Not long after this, a homeless Levite from Bethlehem arrives in town. Remember, Levites were the priestly tribe. Micah saw in this Levite an opportunity to upgrade his customized religion. Michahism 2.0. He offers him room and board and an annual stipend to be his personal priest. Micah's do-it-yourself religion is now complete. Again we read, *"In those days Israel had no king."*

All went well until five scouts from the tribe of Dan arrive on the scene. The tribe of Dan had not been obedient in taking the land God gave them, so they were looking for some other place to live. They were painting their own lines. These spies sought guidance from Micah's priest, and he tells them they could successfully take the peaceful city of Laish.

With this good news, an army of Danites arrive, steal Micah's family idols, and give his priest a better offer to come with them. They're thinking, "These idols are sources of good news, so we don't want to lose them." Then they went and brutally slaughtered the innocent city of Laish, took it as their own, and renamed it Dan. Again we read, *"In those days Israel had no king."* They were a people without lines.

### **I. The Growth of Sin**

There are many lessons in these two chapters, but I want to draw your attention to three of them. These are three results of living life outside of God's lines. The first is the cancerous growth of sin.

Sin almost always starts small. It seems unthreatening and controllable. It's like someone who gets a pet lion as a cub. It's cute and fun, and not much trouble. But it never stays that way. It grows. It changes. It becomes fierce. It becomes uncontrollable. And it always comes back to bite you.

Look where this story begins. It starts with one man stealing money from his mom. It ends with an entire nation seduced by idol worship. What began between one man and his mother, soon affected the entire family as they all worshipped at the shrine. It then infects the whole community. Look at what happens in 18:22 after the Danites stole Micah's idols. Look who goes after them, *“When the people from the tribe of Dan were quite a distance from Micah's home, Micah and some of his neighbors came chasing after them.”* Now, it's not just the family; it's the neighbors too.

The sin had spread from Micah to his community. From there, it infects the entire tribe of Dan, and if you follow Dan's history throughout the O.T. Dan became an idol-worshipping center for the whole nation. Their idols became a tempting snare for all of Israel which leads to their ultimate downfall. When God finally sends in the Assyrians as judgment, Dan is the first to fall.

Sin is no different today. It starts small and it grows and spreads like cancer. Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that murder begins with anger; that adultery begins with lust. We begin by straying over God's lines by just a little bit. Next thing you know we're plunging headlong over a cliff falling toward the jagged rocks below.

No person is bigger than his or her sin. We fool ourselves into thinking that we can keep it personal and private. But sin never stays in the closet. It doesn't stay swept under the rug. You can't tame it. You can't manage it. Sin consumes you and it begins to consume those around you.

Gal 6:7-8

*Don't be misled. Remember that you can't ignore God and get away with it. You will always reap what you sow! Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful desires will harvest the consequences of decay and death. (NLT)*

Numbers 32:23 says, *“You may be sure your sin will find you out.”* I had a friend at my last church who was sexting with a woman who wasn't his wife. He thought it was secret. He thought no one would find out. But then in a bad case of fat thumb syndrome he accidentally sent a highly inappropriate picture not to the other woman, but to his twelve year old daughter. His sin found him out. There was a guy who robbed a bank where we used to live. He got away with the money, but the only problem was the note that he gave the teller was written on the back of his own deposit ticket, with his name and address. His sin found him out.

British Newspaper, The Mirror tells about a 20-year-old girl drops out of college. She knows her folks will be disappointed if they find out she dropped out of college. Short of funds she starts working for an escort service. Meanwhile, a married father of 3 is having some marriage problems. He decides to rent a hotel room and hire a prostitute. When he answers the door, he is shocked to see his daughter standing there. He collapses to the floor. She flees the hotel in tears.<sup>i</sup>

Be sure of this. Your sin will find you out. This doesn't just mean that your sin will be discovered, or found out. It says that your sin will find YOU out. Simply put that means your sin will bring its own punishment. Your secret sin will be your public undoing. It will ruin and destroy you. It's the idea that your sin will catch up to you. It will overtake you. The worst part for my friend wasn't that his daughter saw a part of her daddy she should never have seen. The worst part was the months of anguish, lost trust, threat of legal action, fractured relationships and divorce that followed. His little secret sin caught up to him and made a very big, public mess.

It found Micah. Isn't it ironic that the man who stole silver from his mother, had that same silver stolen from him. Don't buy the lie that you're the exception, that you can get away with it. Your sin will always find you out. When you go outside the lines, sin will grow and spread in your life. Some may succeed in getting away with it all through this life, only to be caught in eternity. Usually, though our sin finds us out much sooner. And that's a good thing. It gives us an opportunity to repent, to turn our lives over to Christ. It gives a chance to discover the grace of God and experience His love in our lives.

## **II. Increase of False Religion**

A second result of living outside of God's lines, is an increase in false religion. Whenever man rejects God, he makes his own. It has been wisely said, "God created man in his own image, then man returned the favor."

This is what was happening in Israel in Micah's day. As they began to travel outside the lines, disobeying the laws of God, they substituted their own religious practices. Micah made his own designer religion. He chose all the parts he wanted. He took some from Moses and mixed it with 2 cups of local paganism. He added a pinch of superstition and a few ingredients of his own, mixed them all together and baked them at 375 for 45 minutes. He made his own idols, designed his own priestly garments and ordained his own priests. It was user-friendly religion customized to his own personal desires.

Thanks to modern technology, you now have your own chance to pick your own religion customized to all your personal preferences. It's a website called *Belief-O-Matic*. By answering a series of questions, you can design your own religion. It says so much about our culture. Though we are becoming increasingly non-Christian, we are no less religious. In fact, the United States may be more religious now than at any other point in her history.

As people continue to leave traditional Christian churches, participation in Wicca and pagan practices are booming. Chapels and universities are appointing pagan chaplains.<sup>ii</sup> A well-known coven leader fears that attendance in pagan rituals is growing too rapidly.<sup>iii</sup> In fact, Wicca is the fastest growing

religion in the United States. Our nation has become a spiritual smorgasbord, a religious buffet, where beliefs and convictions of every flavor are put alongside of each other from which we can choose.

83% of Americans are still fairly certain there is a God, but many of them hold a view of God that is completely foreign to the Bible. 80% of our fellow citizens believe that there are multiple religions that lead to eternal life. This includes 70% of those who profess to be Christian, even though Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the father except by me."* It's ala Carte. You're not limited to a formal menu. You can take a little from here, and a touch of that, mixed with a dab of this.

Michelle often attends a Lutheran church with her friend, but she also regularly prays to birds. She believes birds are embodied spirits, who can respond to her prayers. She also believes that she communicates to animals.

Although Brett was raised in a strong Southern Baptist family and still maintains ties to the Baptist church, he feels a much stronger spiritual relationship with Mother Earth. He takes time every Saturday to commune with nature. That is his time of worship.

Stephanie reads her Bible every day along with her horoscope. She scans each looking for important signs to help her make daily decisions. She also regularly consults a psychic in her town. Her advice is crucial in her relationships and finances.

Stephan practices yoga meditation every day to get in touch with the god within. He believes his regular meditations have helped him achieve a higher state of consciousness.

Brandi regularly participates in the high school youth group in the church down the street, however, she is also an ardent vegan and animal rights activists as she believes many animals are reincarnated human spirits. Everyone does what seems right in their own eyes.

64% of us believe that truth is relative; that there are no absolutes, and that we define for ourselves standards of right and wrong. That means what is right and wrong for me depends on me, and what is right and wrong for you depends on what floats your boat, and I have no business telling you that you're wrong. What this means is: that we believe we can paint our own lines, regardless of where God painted them. And that's exactly what we are doing. We're painting lines anywhere and everywhere. When we live outside the lines there is a growth in false religion.

### **III. Spiritual Hypocrisy**

It's not a surprise, then, that in a culture that lives outside the lines, we find ourselves overwhelmed in double standards. You see, the third result of living outside of God's lines is we begin to accept spiritual hypocrisy. Painting my own lines is great, until someone else's lines get in my way. All the sudden, what I think is alright for me, I don't think is so nifty for you, especially when puts a kink in

my style. For example, I may feel perfectly justified in twisting the truth and fudging the facts as long as it gets me where I'm going, but when you start playing loose with the truth and I get the short end of the stick, well that's a different story. If I go to the store and the clerk gives me too much change, that's great, but if she overcharges me \$5, then I'm going back to get what's rightfully mine

This is what was going on in Micah's world. He had no problem stealing the silver from his mother, did he? No. But what was his reaction when the Danites stole his idols made out of that silver? He rounds up a posse of his neighbors and goes chasing after them, and he whines, *"You've taken away all my gods and my priest, and I have nothing left."* Painting his own lines was fine, but when someone else painted their lines across his lane, he didn't like that one bit.

And then there's Micah's priest. He objected when the Danites were stealing Micah's shrine, until they offered him more money. Then he was quite happy. His standards of right and wrong changed real fast. His spiritual services were for sale to the highest bidder.

When you live outside the lines you lose your sense of direction. Your standards for right and wrong and truth and error begin to look like a work of M.C. Escher or Salvador Dali. Up is down is in is out is over is under is sideways is down. Everything is twisted and warped. Nothing is really as it seems.

Consider the following. There is a growing movement in academic circles to normalize pedophilia. The not quite Supreme Court has ruled that virtual child pornography is constitutionally protected free speech. We have a sitting Supreme Court Justice who once argued in a paper for the ACLU that the legal age of consent should be lowered to 12.

Destroying a bald eagle egg will get you a prison sentence and a heavy fine, but it is perfectly fine to rip an unborn human baby limb from limb. We are developing amazing medical procedures that allow premature babies to live outside the womb weighing as little as a pound and 3/4, and the same time we have perfected a procedure that sucks the brains out of perfectly healthy, full-term, fully conscious, human babies.

You can put a cross in a jar of urine and it is protected free speech, it is called art, and receives public funding but if you speak out against gay marriage it is called hate speech, and you are fined and put out of business.

That's the culture in which we live. It's a culture of double standards and spiritual hypocrisy. We are not immune. Do we tell our kids not to lie, but then they catch us telling little "white lies" that serve our own interests? Do we tell our kids to stop yelling, but they see mom and dad yelling at each other? Do we tell our children not to whine and complain while negative words fall from our lips? Do we profess our faith to our coworkers while we are a source of hostility and difficulty at the office? Do we

act one way at youth group at church, and are someone completely different at school?

Even we as Christians have ignored God's lines, have painted our own, and our lives are filled with double standards and spiritual hypocrisy. Dear friends, it's hurting our spiritual walk with God. It's eroding our spiritual influence in our lives. It's destroying our churches. It is profaning the name of our Lord and Savior.

The book of Judges is a story of sadness and tragedy. It is the story of a people who had all of the promise and potential that God could give. They never realized the potential. They missed promise, because they lived outside the lines. They squandered their greatest opportunity. Sadly, this could become the story of the American Church. So much promise. So much potential. But we've become complacent. We've adopted the values of the world around us. We've neglected and ignored the call of God.

***Conclusion:***

Friends, if I go out on the road and I paint my own lines; who cares where MDOT put them; instead of the Missouri Department of Transportation it's DDOT, the Dan Department of Transportation, and you paint your own line, and you paint your own lines, what are we going to have? Chaos, confusion, and crashes. Lots of 'em. Look at what's going on in our world. Look at the conflict and violence. Look at what's happening to our homes and families. Look at our public schools and universities in many places. Look at the complete loss of trust in the government most Americans share. Look at the school shootings. Look at the political hostility. Look at our overcrowded prisons. Look at our clogged courts. Look at our corporate scandals. It's the result of living outside the lines.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/man-hires-prostitute---and-his-daughter-94578>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.thecollegefix.com/post/38436/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.thecollegefix.com/post/38436/>