

Judges 16-18 • Chapter Study

INTRO

We pick it up tonight half thru the story of Samson, probably the best known of the Judges.

Samson's parents were told before he was born he'd deliver the Israelites from oppression at the hands of the Philistines.

God gave them instructions Samson was to be a life-long Nazarite.

Since we went over what that meant last Wed & Sun, won't know.

Suffice it to say, it was a commitment of total consecration to God.

A promise to place one's self at God's disposal to be used by Him however and whenever He chose.

It entailed 3 vows that all aimed at carving the Nazarite out from the daily routine that marked others.

So far in the story, Samson's blown thru 2 of those 3 vows.

And he's shown no interest in his call to be Israel's deliverer.

Rather than being consecrated to God, he's willful and determined to spend a good part of his time among the immoral Philistines.

He especially likes the Philistine women and keeps getting in trouble with them.

This puts him at odds with the Philistine men who keep trying to attack him.

Even though Samson's being a knucklehead, God uses the tussles that take place btwn Samson and the Philistines to loosen the oppression of Israel.

It all comes to a messy end in ch16.

Samson visits a harlot in Gaza 16:1-3

¹ Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her.

Gaza was one of the chief Philistine centers.

If there's any doubt about Samson's spiritual health, it's made clear by where he is and what he does.

He's visiting a Philistine prostitute.

² When the Gazites *were told*, "Samson has come here!" they surrounded *the place* and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, "In the morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him."

They plan to ambush him.

³ And Samson lay *low* till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the 2 gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put *them* on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

Samson knows the Philistines are on the lookout for him, so he'd probably snuck into Gaza wearing a disguise.

He learns of the plan to ambush him and leaves in the dead of night instead of the next morning.

He sneaks out, making his way surreptitiously to the city gates which have been closed & locked, standard practice.

Once again the Spirit of God endues him with super-natural strength.

He rips the entire gate structure out of the ground & carries it a lil over 4 mls to the hill next to Hebron.

Most city gates were made of thick wood, banded with either iron or bronze.

Archaeologists estimate Gaza's gate weighed a couple tons.

There's no way one man could carry such a weight, I don't care how much you can press.

Samson's strength wasn't due to his tremendous physique.

What do you picture when you think of Samson; Arnold, Duane "the Rock" Johnson; Hulk Hogan?

Some strapped guy with massive arms and legs?

That's probably not the way Samson looked.

The feats of strength he performed weren't human skill; they were the result of the Spirit's empowering.

Samson has shown a shocking lack of self-discipline.

On the contrary, he's ultra-indulgent.

Doesn't really sound like a guy who would have a body-builder's physique – which only comes with many hours of rigorous training and supreme discipline.

In a bit, we'll see the Philistine leaders conspiring to discover the secret of Samson's strength.

They recognized it was super-natural.

If he was some mega-strapped he-man, they'd have attributed his strength to that.

Samson & Delilah 16:4-22

We covered vs4-22 Sunday, so we'll just summarize.

Samson hooks up with a Philistine woman named Delilah.

In v5, the Philistine leaders promise to reward her if she can wheedle out of him the secret of his strength and find some way to off him.

She's not even subtle in her quest of trying to discover these things.

But he's so sure of his continued call and mission he thinks he can flaunt his disobedience to God.

Samson's ruled by his passions and desires.

Because God's always saved him the past, he assumes He always will in the future.

So Samson tells her plausible ways to bring him low, though each is in fact a bluff.

The problem is, each is a little closer to the truth.

And eventually, he tells her about the last vow, the only vow he hasn't broken yet; cutting his hair.

She lulls him to sleep, calls in a barber who gives him a shave, then wakes him.

When the Philistines rush in & grab him, Samson thinks it'll be as before.

The Spirit of God will come on him and he'll shake them off.

But the Spirit doesn't come. // So

²¹ Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison.

We talked Sunday about how the man whose lustful eyes never saw enough to satisfy ended up blind.

And the man who'd gone where ever he wanted, but wanted to go places he ought not have, ended up tied to a millstone, going round in an endless circle.

Because THAT'S the end and goal the devil has planned in every temptation.

He doesn't want to bring peace, pleasure, or satisfaction. His aim is to steal, kill & destroy.

Samson stands as a sober warning to all those called by God to a special work -

To a ministry or work that's highly visible.

God is sovereign. His Work & Will will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.

But He gives us an opportunity to be a *part* of it.

Whether or not we are isn't going to thwart it coming to pass.

The only question is if we'll *flow with* it, or *resist it*.

Be an *agent* IN it, or an *opponent* TO it.

Over the centuries, there have been many Samsons.

People who are uniquely gifted by God to further His kingdom.

And because they **ARE** greatly gifted, they think it's evidence of a relationship with God that's DIFFERENT from others.

The rules that apply to others don't apply to them.

Because they've done so much for God, it earns them special privileges.

They make morally dubious choices; but God still uses them, & they read that as God's permission.

Just like Samson broke the 1st vow but was still used by God.

And just as he shattered the 2nd vow, but was still used,

They blow thru another moral fence. When nothing happens they assume God approves, condones.

They don't realize that the mercy they're experiencing is just the space God is giving them to repent.

They think it's permission, and ramp up the immorality.

Long before Baker, Swaggart, Haggard, Coy, Moore & a host of others were publicly exposed, they'd been trampling the moral fences for years, while still carrying on seemingly viable ministries.

Success isn't permission.

We Americans love us some Success.

Pragmatism is a thoroughly home-grown American philosophy.

Pragmatism is the philosophy that says, "If it works, it's good."

"Whatever gets the job done."

"Truth is whatever works."

Then, in our consumerist society, it's all about numbers.

So the guy or gal who can draw a crowd is the celebrity, the star.

And Oh! What people are willing to put up with if she/he can draw a crowd!

So what if their marriage is a wreck?

So what if they're personally abusive in relationships?

Who cares if they're looking at things online they ought not?

They give an amazing sermon every week that draws in big numbers and big givers.

So what if they have increasing amounts of time unaccounted for and can't be reached in the middle of the day?

Or that hotel charges are showing up on their credit card?

They still know how to work the room.

Success isn't permission – it isn't the sign of God's approval; just His mercy.

But mercy has a time limit.

Samson mistook God's mercy for permission and time ran out.

But after mercy ran out, Grace continued . . .

²² However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven.

²³ Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands Samson our enemy!"

Time passes & comes round to a Philistines holiday.

Their chief deity was Dagon; a god represented by a half-man, half-fish idol.

The upper half was human, from the waist down it was a fish.

The mermaid is a female version of Dagon.

As it's one of their feast days, they haul Samson out of the prison they'd stuck him in to gloat over him.

²⁴ When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said: "Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy, the destroyer of our land, and the one who multiplied our dead."

Samson's humiliation was an occasion for the enemies of God to exalt.

So it ever is whenever a believer falls, specially leaders.

²⁵ So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars. His performance wasn't a dance; it was just to stand there, blind & blighted.

He's shattered and makes a perfect target for their derision.

Remember, the ancient world viewed the combat of kingdoms as the earthly manifestation of the contest of gods.

When Samson had been free and wrecking havoc on them, Yahweh of Israel prevailed.

But with Samson's capture, Dagon prevailed.

As Samson now stands there, a broken man, he's a trophy of Dagon's superiority over Yahweh.

²⁶ Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them."

The construction of ancient temples is well-known to archaeology.

Dagon's would have been like all the rest; a rectangular colonnade that was open to the sky in the center.

But around the 4 sides were dozens of columns supporting a flat roof which acted as a kind of balcony.

Inside on the ground level were the rulers & nobles, while the roof held the commoners.

²⁷ Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines *were* there—about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed. ²⁸ Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one *blow* take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!"

Samson's prayer was motivated by a desire for revenge.

He's not convicted his sensuality brought him here.

He's not sorry for the way he's given the Philistines cause to mock God.

He's mad he's blind.

There's only one redeeming quality for Samson in all this; he finally turns to God.

He knows his strength comes from God.

Based on this lone act of faith in God, misplaced as it is, Samson makes it into the Hall of Faith in Heb 11!

If Samson makes it, there's hope for us.

²⁹ And Samson took hold of the 2 middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left.

While their architecture and engineering was sophisticated enough to build with columns, it wasn't advanced enough to allow much of a span btwn those columns.

They were close enough that Samson was able to stand btwn 2 of them with a hand on each.

³⁰ Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with *all his* might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who *were* in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life. ³¹ And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought *him* up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel 20 years.

Samson is maybe the supreme example of **wasted potential**.

Wasted because he lived for himself instead of God.

His entire life aimed at satisfying his flesh; and it led to his ruin.

THAT explains why God instructed his parents to raise him as a Nazirite.

He NEEDED the guidelines the 3 vows of the Nazirite conveyed.

Those vows were meant to keep him close to God.

But Samson rejected them and went his own way, to a tragic death.

Examples of Decadence 17-21

With ch17, we come to the last section of Judges.

Now we get some horrifying examples of how far Isrl has wandered from God.

Micah's Personal Religion Ch. 17

¹ Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name *was* Micah.

The tribe of Ephraim's territory was in the center of Israel.

The middle & eastern portion of their territory was covered by rolling hills.

Living on one of them was a guy named Micah.

² And he said to his mother, "The eleven hundred *shekels* of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears—here *is* the silver with me; I took it." And his mother said, "*May you be blessed by the Lord, my son!*"

At this time, 10 shekels was about a year's wages. So 1,100 shekels was a fortune.

Micah's family is wealthy.

When his mother realizes she's been robbed she pronounces a curse on the thief.

Micah, not wanting to be cursed, admits he stole it.

She then replaces the curse with a blessing.

³ So when he had returned the eleven hundred *shekels* of silver to his mother, his mother said, "I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the Lord for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you."

So typical! When the silver went missing, she said, "Okay, well, that's my offering to God."

Her original plan, she says, was to give it to her son so he could make an idol with it.

But God has expressly forbidden the use of idols.

That's the point of this story – to show how far they've gone from God.

⁴ Thus he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took 200 *shekels* of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Micah. When she thought the silver had been stolen, she said it was her offering.

Now she only gives a little less than 20% of it.

The silversmith made 2 images; one carved of wood, the other molded of silver.

What images they were, we have no idea.

⁵ The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

Micah made a shrine for these idols.

To make it even more special, he dedicated 1 of his sons to serve as a priest and decked him out in a priest's uniform.

So, let's review what's wrong here ...

They weren't to make idols.

They weren't to worship anywhere but at the tabernacle, which, by the way was at Shiloh, not far from Micah's home.

Only the Tribe of Levi could be priests.

And no one was to make a duplicate of the priest's clothes.

In his desire to be **religious**, Micah broke every 1 of these commands.

Because his religion was a thing of his own design, it had **nothing** to do with God.

It isn't long into a conversation on spiritual things many say something like,

"Well I think God is . . ." then go on to explain their view of God.

I like to reply, "Really? Can I ask **where** you found this idea?"

Most just shrug and say, it's just what they believe.

It's the God they WANT there to be.

That's Micah's god; a deity of their own invention.

A god who scratches the itch to believe in something greater than themselves, while at the same time giving them permission to do what they want.

⁶ In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes.

[Sunday]

⁷ Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he *was* a Levite, and was staying there. ⁸ The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find *a place*. Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.

The Levites had no region or territory in Israel like the other tribes.

Their duty was to attend to the tabernacle and its service, which at that time was at Shiloh.

Some Levites were stationed around Isrl so people could get answers to their religious questions and find judgment in court cases w/o having to travel to Shiloh.

This Levite was supposed to be in Bethlehem.

But either he didn't like it there or the people weren't supporting him.

So he decided to move on. He ended up at Micah's house.

⁹ And Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" So he said to him, "I *am* a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find *a place* to stay." ¹⁰ Micah said to him, "Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten *shekels* of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance." So the Levite went in.

Micah offered to hire him as the priest of his home-made religion.

That sounded like solid gold to this Levite.

Room & board, an annual salary & a signing bonus of a new uniform.

¹¹ Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him. ¹²

So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah. ¹³ Then Micah said, "Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!"

The "Rent a Priest" deal was working well. Everything was going along smoothly.

Micah assumed God would bless him // And note WHICH God – v13 = **Yahweh!**

Some Danites Move North Ch. 18

¹ In those days *there was* no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day *their* inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them.

The land Dan was assigned had Judah to the S, Ephraim to the N, & the Philistines on the W.

Really, the Philistines were living on their land.

Instead of the hard work of laying claim to what God assigned them, they decided to look for something easier.

² So the children of Dan sent 5 men of their family from their territory, men of valor from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and search it. They said to them, "Go, search the land." So they went to the mountains of

Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there.

These guys knew they wouldn't find territory among the other tribes.

They had to head far enough N to get beyond them.

As they make their way N, they stop to stay at Micah's house.

They laid claim to the ancient ME's obligation of hospitality.

³ While they *were* at the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. They turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this *place*? What do you have here?"

They knew the Levite. In his earlier wanderings, he'd passed thru their region.

They wanted to hear all about why he'd settled down at Micah's.

⁴ He said to them, "Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest." ⁵ So they said to him, "Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous." ⁶ And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The presence of the Lord *be* with you on your way."

This is the kind of thing Levites were supposed to do; give counsel and guidance.

He told them God would go with them.

⁷ So the 5 men departed and went to Laish. They saw the people who *were* there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. *There were* no rulers in the land who might put *them* to shame for anything. They *were* far from the Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone.

The town they found way up N was an independent colony from the coastal city of Sidon even further N.

Laish was located in a *beautiful* place, with an abundance of fresh water.

The headwaters of the Jordan begin near there & the vegetation is thick.

It looked like easy pickings.

⁸ Then *the spies* came back to their brethren at Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brethren said to them, "What *is* your report?" ⁹ So they said, "Arise, let us go up against them. For we have seen the land, and indeed it *is* very good.

Would you do nothing? Do not hesitate to go, *and* enter to possess the land. ¹⁰ When you go, you will come to a secure people and a large land. For God has given it into your hands, a place where *there is* no lack of anything that *is* on the earth." ¹¹ And 600 men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshtaol,

armed with weapons of war. ¹² Then they went up and encamped in Kirjath Jearim in Judah. (Therefore they call that place Mahaneh Dan to this day. There *it is*, west of Kirjath Jearim.)

The easiest route was to strike E to the Jordan Valley, then head N.

¹³ And they passed from there to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah. ¹⁴ Then the 5 men who had gone to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their brethren, "Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod, household idols, a carved image, and a molded image? Now therefore, consider what you should do."

They've already cased Micah's place. = "This place has some goodies. Let's take 'em."

¹⁵ So they turned aside there, and came to the house of the young Levite man—to the house of Micah—and greeted him. ¹⁶ The 600 men armed with their weapons of war, who *were* of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. ¹⁷ Then the 5 men who had gone to spy out the land went up. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image. The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the 600 men *who were* armed with weapons of war. ¹⁸ When these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" ¹⁹ And they said to him, "Be quiet, put your hand over your mouth, and come with us; be a father and a priest to us. *Is it* better for you to be a priest to the household of 1 man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?" ²⁰ So the priest's heart was glad; and he took the ephod, the household idols, and the carved image, and took his place among the people.

Check this guy out. He's a mercenary-priest; willing to work for the best pay.

He doesn't count this as a theft; it's an opportunity for advancement.

The silver *Micah stole* from his mother, now *gets* stolen *from* him by the Danites.

²¹ Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones, the livestock, and the goods in front of them.

They suspected Micah would come after them so they made preparations.

²² When they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men who *were* in the houses near Micah's house gathered together and overtook the children of Dan. ²³ And they called out to the children of Dan. So they turned around and said to Micah, "What ails you, that you have gathered such a company?" ²⁴ So he said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have? How can you say to me, 'What ails you?'" ²⁵ And the children of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life, with the lives of your household!" ²⁶ Then the children of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they *were* too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house.

What a pathetic remark Micah makes – "You've stolen my gods."

Here's a good test to see if the god you serve is worthy of your devotion: Can it be stolen?

If the answer is "Yes," it's not worth your time.

None of this ought to have surprised Micah.

After all, the idol stolen FROM him, he'd originally stolen from his mother.

The priest already made clear his willingness to sell himself.

How could Micah *expect* loyalty when it was disloyalty that had brought the priest to his house in the first place?

Micah's whole religion was made up.

And it seemed to work for a while; right up to the moment it didn't. Then it all came crashing down. Because Micah calls God *Yahweh* in the last v of ch 17, we can safely assume he believed what he was doing with the idols, shrine, ephod and priest was all good stuff and that God was pleased.

He was being *religious*; giving Yahweh His due. // So—How unfair God would let this happen.

But wait – None of what Micah had done was what God wanted.

On the contrary; it was all wrong; and most likely, Micah knew it.

That is, being so close to Shiloh and the tabernacle, he'd likely been there many times.

He knew how things OUGHT to have been done. // But he wanted to do his *own* thing.

And who's to say his way wasn't just as good as the way the priests at Shiloh said?

Then, when he found a priest who was willing to alter things to fit his ways, that clinched it.

Listen: There will always be the so-called religious experts who'll tell the world what it wants to hear for 10 shekels, a shirt, & tenure.

²⁷ So they took *the things* Micah had made, and the priest who had belonged to him, and went to Laish, to a people quiet and secure; and they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. ²⁸ There was no deliverer, because it *was* far from Sidon, and they had no ties with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth Rehob. So they rebuilt the city and dwelt there. ²⁹ And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel. However, the name of the city formerly *was* Laish. ³⁰ Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. The shrine that had been a Micah's was re-installed at Dan with this pseudo-priesthood to serve it. Here's where we learn the name of the rent-a Levite = Jonathan.

And it means we need to do a little textual work because we have a problem.

The Tribe of *Levi* were priests, not *Manasseh*.

Nowhere do we read of a son of Manasseh named *Gershom*. // He is, however, a son of *Moses*.

In Heb, the difference in spelling btwn Manasseh and Moses is a single consonant..

Both the Septuagint and Latin Vulgate read *Moses*, here rather than Manasseh.

It's thought by scholars later scribes wanted to protect Moses' name by disconnecting him from this errant descendant and so changed it to Manasseh.

That Jonathan is repeatedly called a *Levite* means he's from that Tribe, not Manasseh.

³¹ So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made,

Then the writer adds this for perspective

all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

Everything in this chapter was unnecessary because the tabernacle was in Shiloh.

All Micah had to do was travel a few miles and he could have worshipped the real God the right way.

Instead of asking Micah's hired priest, all the Danite scouts had to do was visit the tabernacle & ask Yahweh what to do.

But they **KNEW** if they went to Shiloh and the priests who *really* spoke for God, He'd tell them to go home and conquer the land assigned them.

So they sought out an *alternative* spirituality.

One that already made it clear it was willing to adapt itself to human preference.

Folks: Here we are. Teaching & Studying Scripture. // Looking into what God says.

We often encounter stuff that's difficult; not hard to understand so much as to accept and practice.

Because our flesh doesn't want to.

But we've come to understand God's ways really are best.

But all across this county are hundreds of people seeking to satisfy the spiritual itch, not by seeking out a Bible teaching church, but some *alternative* spirituality.

One of the many New Age faiths, Buddhism, Meditation, Yoga, Progressivism, the list is endless.