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JUDGES 18:1 In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought an inheritance to dwell in; for to that day, their inheritance had not fallen to them among the tribes of Israel.

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Some Danites, seeking an inheritance, send five men to search the land, who arrive at the house of Micah, Jdg 18:1, Jdg 18:2. They employ the Levite, who served to his house as priest, to ask counsel for them of God, Jdg 18:3-5. He inquires, and promises them success, Jdg 18:6. They depart, and go to Laish, and find the inhabitants secure, Jdg 18:7. They return to their brethren, and encourage them to attempt the conquest of the place, Jdg 18:8-10. They send six hundred men, who, coming to the place where Micah dwelt, enter the house, and carry off the priest and his consecrated things, Jdg 18:11-21. Micah and his friends pursue them; but, being threatened, are obliged to return, Jdg 18:22-26. The Danites come to Laish, and smite it, and build a city there, which they call Dan, Jdg 18:27-29. They make the Levite their priest, and set up the images at this new city, Jdg 18:30, Jdg 18:31.

#### Verse 1

There was no king in Israel - See Jdg 17:6 (note). The circumstances related here show that this must have happened about the time of the preceding transactions.

The tribe of the Danites - That is, a part of this tribe; some families of it.

All their inheritance - That is, they had not got an extent of country sufficient for them. Some families were still unprovided for, or had not sufficient territory; for we find from Jos 19:40, etc., that, although the tribe of Dan did receive their inheritance with the rest of the tribes of Israel, yet their coasts went out too little for them, and they went and fought against Leshem, (called here Laish), and took it, etc. This circumstance is marked here more particularly than in the book of Joshua. See on Jos 19:47 (note).

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JUDGES 18:2 The children of Dan sent of their family five men from their whole number, men of valor, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said to them, "Go, explore the land!" They came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there.

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#### Verse 2

Five men - men of valor - The Hebrew word חַיִל chayil has been applied to personal prowess, to mental energy, and to earthly possessions. They sent those in whose courage, judgment, and prudence, they could safely confide.

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JUDGES 18:3 When they were by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite; and they turned aside there, and said to him, "Who brought you here? What do you do in this place? What do you have here?"

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 Verse 3

They knew the voice of the young man - They knew, by his dialect or mode of pronunciation, that he was not an Ephraimite. We have already seen (Jdg 12:6 (note)) that the Ephraimites could not pronounce certain letters.

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JUDGES 18:4 He said to them, "Thus and thus has Micah dealt with me, and he has hired me, and I am become his priest."

JUDGES 18:5 They said to him, "Please ask counsel of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous."

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 Verse 5

Ask counsel - of God - As the Danites use the word אֱלֹהִים Elohim here for God, we are necessarily led to believe that they meant the true God; especially as the Levite answers, Jdg 18:6, Before the Lord (יהוה Yehovah) is your way. Though the former word may be sometimes applied to idols, whom their votaries clothed with the attributes of God; yet the latter is never applied but to the true God alone. As the Danites succeeded according to the oracle delivered by the Levite, it is a strong presumption that the worship established by Micah was not of an idolatrous kind. It is really begging the question to assert, as many commentators have done, that the answer was either a trick of the Levite, or suggested by the devil; and that the success of the Danites was merely accidental. This is taking the thing by the worst handle, to support an hypothesis, and to serve a system. See the end of the preceding chapter, Jdg 17:13 (note).

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JUDGES 18:6 The priest said to them, "Go in peace. Your way in which you go is before the LORD."

JUDGES 18:7 Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people who were therein, how they lived in security, in the way of the Sidonians, quiet and secure; for there was no one in the land, possessing authority, that might put them to shame in anything, and they were far from the Sidonians, and had no dealings with any man.

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 Verse 7

After the manner of the Sidonians - Probably the people of Laish or Leshem were originally a colony of the Sidonians, who, it appears, were an opulent people; and, being in possession of a strong city, lived in a state of security, not being afraid of their neighbors. In this the Leshemites imitated them, though the sequel proves they had not the same reason for their confidence.

They were far from the Sidonians - Being, as above supposed, a Sidonian colony, they might naturally expect help from their countrymen; but, as they dwelt a considerable distance from Sidon, the Danites saw that they could strike the blow before the news of invasion could reach Sidon; and, consequently, before the people of Laish could receive any succours from that city.

And had no business with any man - In the most correct copies of the Septuagint, this clause is thus translated: *Και λογος ουκ ην αυτοις μετα Συριας*; and they had no transactions with Syria. Now it is most evident that, instead of *אדם* adam, Man, they read *אֲרָם* aram, Syria; words which are so nearly similar that the difference which exists is only between the *ר* resh and *ד* daleth, and this, both in MSS. and printed books, is often indiscernible. This reading is found in the Codex Alexandrinus, in the Complutensian Polyglot, in the Spanish Polyglot, and in the edition of the Septuagint published by Aldus. It may be proper to observe, that Laish was on the frontiers of Syria; but as they had no intercourse with the Syrians, from whom they might have received the promptest assistance, this was an additional reason why the Danites might expect success.

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JUDGES 18:8 They came to their brothers to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brothers said to them, "What do you say?"

JUDGES 18:9 They said, "Arise, and let us go up against them; for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. Do you stand still? Don't be slothful to go and to enter in to possess the land."

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#### Verse 9

Arise, etc. - This is a very plain and nervous address; full of good sense, and well adapted to the purpose. It seems to have produced an instantaneous effect.

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JUDGES 18:10 When you go, you shall come to a secure people, and the land is large; for God has given it into your hand, a place where there is no want of anything that is in the earth."

JUDGES 18:11 There set out from there of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men girt with weapons of war.

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#### Verse 11

Six hundred men - These were not the whole, for we find they had children, etc., Jdg 18:21; but these appear to have been six hundred armed men.

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JUDGES 18:12 They went up, and encamped in Kiriath Jearim, in Judah: therefore they called that place Mahaneh Dan, to this day; behold, it is behind Kiriath Jearim.

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#### Verse 12

Mahaneh-dan - "The camp of Dan;" so called from the circumstance of this armament encamping there. See Jdg 13:25 (note), which affords some proof that this transaction was previous to the days of Samson.

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JUDGES 18:13 They passed there to the hill country of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah.

JUDGES 18:14 Then the five men who went to spy out the country of Laish answered, and said to their brothers, "Do you know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and an engraved image, and a molten image? Now therefore consider what you have to do."

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Verse 14

Consider what ye have to do - They probably had formed the design to carry off the priest and his sacred utensils.

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JUDGES 18:15 They turned aside there, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, even to the house of Micah, and asked him of his welfare.

JUDGES 18:16 The six hundred men girt with their weapons of war, who were of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate.

JUDGES 18:17 The five men who went to spy out the land went up, and came in there, and took the engraved image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image: and the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men girt with weapons of war.

JUDGES 18:18 When these went into Micah's house, and fetched the engraved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?"

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Verse 18

These went unto Micah's house - The five men went in, while the six hundred armed men stood at the gate.

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JUDGES 18:19 They said to him, "Hold your peace, put your hand on your mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?"

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Verse 19

Lay thine hand upon thy mouth - This was the token of silence. The god of silence, Harpocrates, is represented on ancient statues with his finger pressed on his lips.

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JUDGES 18:20 The priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the engraved image, and went in the midst of the people.

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Verse 20

Went to the midst of the people - He was glad to be employed by the Danites; and went into the crowd, that he might not be discovered by Micah or his family.

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JUDGES 18:21 So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the livestock and the goods before them.

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Verse 21

The little ones and the cattle, etc. - These men were so confident of success that they removed their whole families, household goods, cattle, and all.

And the carriage - כבודה kebudah, their substance, precious things, or valuables; omne quod erat pretiosum, Vulgate: or rather the luggage or baggage; what Caesar calls in his commentaries impedimenta; and what the Septuagint here translate βαρος, weight or baggage. We are not to suppose that any wheel carriage is meant.

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JUDGES 18:22 When they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men who were in the houses near to Micah's house were gathered together, and overtook the children of Dan.

JUDGES 18:23 They cried to the children of Dan. They turned their faces, and said to Micah, "What ails you, that you come with such a company?"

JUDGES 18:24 He said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and have gone away, and what more do I have? How then do you say to me, 'What ails you?'"

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Verse 24

Ye have taken away my gods - As Micah was a worshipper of the true God, as we have seen, he cannot mean any kind of idols by the word אלהי elohai here used. He undoubtedly means those representations of Divine things, and symbols of the Divine presence such as the teraphim, ephod, etc.; for they are all evidently included under the word elohai, which we translate my gods.

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JUDGES 18:25 The children of Dan said to him, "Don't let your voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows fall on you, and you lose your life, with the lives of your household."

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Verse 25

And thou lose thy life - This was argumentum ad hominem; he must put up with the loss of his substance, or else lose his life! It was the mere language of a modern highwayman: Your life or your money.

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JUDGES 18:26 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.

JUDGES 18:27 They took that which Micah had made, and the priest whom he had, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burnt the city with fire.

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#### Verse 27

Unto a people - at quiet and secure - They found the report given by the spies to be correct. The people were apprehensive of no danger, and were unprepared for resistance; hence they were all put to the sword, and their city burnt up.

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JUDGES 18:28 There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon, and they had no dealings with any man; and it was in the valley that lies by Beth Rehob. They built the city, and lived therein.

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#### Verse 28

There was no deliverer - They had no succor, because the Sidonians, from whom they might have expected it, were at too great a distance.

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JUDGES 18:29 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 was Laish at the first.

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#### Verse 29

Called the name of the city Dan - This city was afterwards very remarkable as one of the extremities of the promised land. The extent of the Jewish territories was generally expressed by the phrase, From Dan to Beer-Sheba; that is, From the most northern to the southern extremity.

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JUDGES 18:30 The children of Dan set up for themselves the engraved 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.

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#### Verse 30

The children of Dan set up the graven image - They erected a chapel, or temple, among themselves, as Micah had done before; having the same implements and the same priest.

And Jonathan the son of Gershom - Either this was the name of the young Levite; or they had turned him off, and got this Jonathan in his place.

The son Manasseh - Who this Manasseh was, none can tell; nor does the reading appear to be genuine. He could not be Manasseh the son of Joseph, for he had no son called Gershom nor could it be Manasseh king of Israel, for he lived eight hundred years afterwards. Instead of מְנַשֶּׁה Manasseh, the word should be read מֹשֶׁה Mosheh, Moses, as it is found in some MSS., in the Vulgate, and in the

concessions of the most intelligent Jews. The Jews, as R. D. Kimchi acknowledges, have suspended the letter: נ nun, over the word משה, thus, נ משה which, by the addition of the points, they have changed into Manasseh, because they think it would be a great reproach to their legislator to have had a grandson who was an idolater. That Gershom the son of Moses is here intended, is very probable. See the arguments urged by Dr. Kennicott, Dissertation I., p. 55, etc.; and see the Var. Lect. of De Rossi on this place.

Until the day of the captivity of the land - Calmet observes, "The posterity of this Jonathan executed the office of priest in the city of Dan, all the time that the idol of Micah (the teraphim, ephod, etc.) was there. But this was only while the house of the Lord was at Shiloh; and, consequently, the sons of Jonathan were priests at Dan only till the time in which the ark was taken by the Philistines, which was the last year of Eli, the high priest; for after that the ark no more returned to Shiloh." This is evident; and on this very ground Houbigant contends that, instead of הארץ haarets, the Land, we should read הארן haaron, the Ark; for nothing is easier than the ו vau and final nun to be mistaken for the ך final tsade, which is the only difference between the captivity of the Land and the captivity of the Ark. And this conjecture is the more likely, because the next verse tells us that Micah's graven image, etc., continued at Dan all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh; which was, till the ark was taken by the Philistines. Those who wish to see more on this subject may consult Calmet, and the writers in Pool's Synopsis. This chapter is an important supplement to the conclusion of the 19th chapter of Joshua, on which it casts considerable light.

The Danites were properly the first dissenters from the public established worship of the Jews; but they seem to have departed as little as possible from the Jewish forms, their worship being conducted in the same way, but not in the same place. Surely it was better to have had this, allowing it to be unconstitutional worship, than to have been wholly destitute of the ordinances of God. I think we have not sufficient ground from the text to call these persons idolaters; I believe they worshipped the true God according to their light and circumstances, from a conviction that they could not prosper without his approbation, and that they could not expect that approbation if they did not offer to him a religious worship. They endeavored to please him, though the means they adopted were not the most proper.

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JUDGES 18:31 So they set them up Micah's engraved image which he made, all the time that God's house was in Shiloh.

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