

A Hero Will Rise

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 18:1-31

Topic

The tribe of Dan abandons the conquest of their own allotted territory and instead conquers the land of Laish by murdering its peaceful inhabitants

Title

“This Land was Your Land, This Land is My Land”

It is arguably Lawrence Tureaud’s greatest on-screen performance. We know him better as Mr. T, and the role I’m talking about was Clubber Lang in the 1982 film, *Rocky III*.

Mr. T was a dangerous contender seeking a title bout against the reigning champion. Mick had been dodging the fight. As Rocky’s manager, he didn’t believe the Rock could defeat Clubber Lang, so he protected him by arranging fights with lesser opponents.

In our text, the Israelite tribe of Dan decides that the fight to conquer the territory allotted to them by God through Joshua is just too hard. Instead of eliminating the enemies in their own land, they go searching for a territory that is easier to conquer.

Their faithlessness resulted in the slaughter of an innocent and peaceful people.

The Israelite conquest of the Promised Land can be seen as typical of our own walking with Jesus in the world. We are called “conquerors” (Romans 8:37). In fact, we are called “more than conquerors.”

One pastor commented, “To be *more than a conqueror* means we not only achieve victory, but we are *overwhelmingly* victorious.”

We aren’t given a physical inheritance of land to more-than-conquer. But we do have a sense that the circumstances of our lives are the territories where we are to be overwhelmingly victorious.

Unless I am like a Danite, and decide that my circumstances are too hard, and I set out to find an easier territory.

Being more-than-conquerors in our allotted circumstances will be the application as we work through this chapter. I’ll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 Are You Treading In The Territory God Has Given You To More-Than-Conquer?, or #2 Are You Trespassing Into Territory God Has Not Given You To More-Than-Conquer?

#1 Are You Treading In The Territory
God Has Given You To More-Than-Conquer?

(v1-10)

A couple of disclaimers before we move on:

1. There **are** circumstances in your life that you have the freedom to change. Your employment, for example. There’s nothing wrong with you looking for, and getting, a better job. *Unless God wants you to stay in your job and meet its*

- hardships in His power.* Only you can determine, with the Lord's help, if He is moving you on, or if you are escaping.
2. There are circumstances in your life in which you **do not** have the freedom, as a Christian, to escape. Your marriage is the prime example. If you do not have the narrow grounds for a biblical divorce, then you are to remain in the territory of your marriage as a more-than-conqueror.

I don't want anyone to think you're stuck somewhere if God is giving you new direction. But the main exhortation is to realize that we most often want out of any circumstances that are less than favorable. Those are the territories within which we are to conquer.

A variation of that is thinking we have total freedom to choose where we live and work. God wants to give you the desires of your heart. But He is also changing you, day-by-day, into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. He uses your circumstances to make you, and to mold you.

So while I may think I'd be better-off pastoring Calvary Chapel of Anaheim, so I could minister to Mickey more often, God has assigned me Hanford as a territory.

Don't get me wrong: I love serving here. But way back more than thirty years ago, Hanford wasn't my choice. It couldn't have been, because I had never heard of it. It was God's choice.

Jdg 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.

When the writer (who we believe was Samuel) said “there was no king in Israel,” he meant two things:

1. It was before the time when Israel had human kings.
2. It was a time in which they had rejected God as their King.

After leading the Israelites into the Promised Land, they were told by God, “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses” (Joshua 1:3). In that faith, they were to conquer the enemies in the land.

Joshua had led them to decisive, major victories. But it was up to each tribe to finish the job and destroy or dispossess the pagan peoples squatting in their allotted inheritance.

The Danites were “seeking an inheritance” because they failed to conquer the enemies that were in the land God had allotted them.

The Amorites were in the territory given to the tribe of Dan. Moses had some earlier dealings with the Amorites. Notably he defeated one of their kings, a guy called Og. He is first introduced in the Book of Numbers. In Deuteronomy we learn he was a giant.

Not just a tall guy. We’re told that he slept in an iron bed that was at least 13½’ x 6’ when converted from cubits. There were three different cubit measurements; using what was called the longer cubit, Og’s bed would be even larger, and he may have been 16’ tall.

He was Nephilim - the offspring of the mating of fallen angels with human women. It was something you read about in Genesis six, that precipitated Noah's global flood. In Genesis six you read that there were Nephilim on the earth again, *after* the flood.

Og was long dead but the Old Testament mentions several times that giants remained in the land until David and his mighty men eradicated the last of them.

The Amorites were formidable. They forced Dan up into the mountains, and would not let them come down into the plain (Judges 1:34 & 35).

What do you do when you're facing giants? Some years later, when David was still a gangly young boy, he had the faith to believe that *any* Israelite could defeat another giant, Goliath, who had four brothers who were similar in size. It wouldn't be by might, or by power; it would be by the Lord empowering him.

It's clear God had called the tribe of Dan to more-than-conquer the Amorites, by faith. The Danites had a different approach. They got out of Dodge to find their own inheritance.

Does your 'fight' seem too difficult? It is - for you to battle alone. But you're not alone. Cast your care upon the Lord; let Him take the lead in the fight by yielding to His indwelling Holy Spirit. Rest in His grace and mercy. Your circumstances may not change; but you can conquer within them by enduring them.

Jdg 18:2 So the children of Dan sent five 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.

Danites had mighty warriors - "men of valor." But this was a human evaluation. These were big, skilled guys, who among their peers were skilled combatants. Compared, however, to Nephilim, they were like grasshoppers in their sight.

And that's the problem. They were walking by sight, not by faith. We must analyze our circumstances, and walk in them by faith.

Take your job, for example. Sure, you can quit, and get another one, if your circumstances aren't ideal. But even then, you are to more-than-conquer while you remain employed there. Handle the stress in the power of the indwelling Spirit.

I hear the word "represent" used popularly. Let's say you go to some kind of competition and excel; your peers will say, "Way to represent."

We **represent** Jesus in all of our circumstances. We want others to be able to say, "Way to represent."

Jdg 18:3 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?"

We met “the young Levite,” whose name was Jonathan, in chapter seventeen. He was a poser. Levites were to remain in their assigned cities, teaching and counseling from God’s Word. Instead, because worship at the Tabernacle in Shiloh had fallen-off, and times were lean, Jonathan hired himself out to idolatrous Micah as his household priest - something he was not called or qualified to be.

Jdg 18:4 He said to them, "Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest."

Jonathan served in a forbidden household shrine that featured a replica of the high priest’s ephod, and two carved idols.

He made it sound spiritual, but the entire arrangement was evil. He should have remained in the city assigned to him, and more-than-conquered the financial hardships that were besetting the Levites in apostate times.

Instead he did exactly what the Danites were doing - he abandoned his allotted territory to find something easier.

We can make almost anything sound spiritual. But not if we honestly measure everything by the objectivity of the Bible.

Jdg 18:5 So they said to him, "Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous."

Jdg 18:6 And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The presence of the LORD *be* with you on your way."

Not spiritual; not at all. The place to “inquire of God” was near - at the Tabernacle, which was in Micah’s Ephraimite territory.

There's no way God could have given this answer, because their "journey" was wrong from the get-go.

We can assume that Jonathan's answer was typical of the false counsel he always gave, telling everyone what they wanted to hear.

You can sometimes get godly counselors to tell you what you want to hear. One way is to omit certain key details from the story you tell them. If you're going to seek counsel, be honest, and lay everything out.

Jdg 18:7 So the five 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.

About forty years earlier Joshua led the Israelites to conquer Canaan but Laish was not part of the territory they were commanded to occupy. The inhabitants of Laish were peaceful and secure, not cruel and war-like.

They were just the opposite of the Amorites; they were an easy conquest.

Don't go for the easy conquest. Take the ministry as an example. Don't establish something that is easy when there are real needs to be met. Don't start a church in a town where there are other good churches. Go someplace that is hungry for God's Word.

Jdg 18:8 Then *the spies* came back to their brethren at Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brethren said to them, "What *is* your *report?*"

Jdg 18:9 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.

Jdg 18:10 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."

God was not giving the Danites anything. They were going to take it, and invoke the name of God. It was blasphemy.

Christians do this, too. They disobey God, very blatantly, then point to all the ways God seems to be blessing them as proof that their disobedience is approved by Him. It is blasphemy.

What are your territories? In one sense, they are everything about your life. Whether home or church or employment or school or relationships in general, God has called you to more-than-conquer.

One reason we don't experience victory more in our Christian walk is that we escape rather than take our stand.

You are either David facing Goliath... Or you are the Danites fleeing the Amorites. The choice is yours.

Your circumstances are no match for the indwelling Holy Spirit and for all the spiritual resources at your immediate disposal. You are provided every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in order to live-out a godly life. You are promised that you can do all things through Christ strengthening you.

God wants you to discover Him in your circumstances. He is using them to mold you and to make you like Jesus.

#2 Are You Trespassing Into Territory God Has Not Given You To More-Than-Conquer?

(v11-31)

In some cases, the law requires that you post a sign declaring “No Trespassing” on your property in order for it to be enforced.

I came across the following expressive No Trespassing signs:

- No Trespassing - Are You Bulletproof, or Just Stupid?
- No Trespassing - We're Tired of Hiding the Bodies
- No Trespassing - Do Not Stand, Sit, Climb, or Lean on Zoo Fences. If You Fall, Animals Could Eat You, and That Might Make Them Sick
- No Trespassing - This Home Protected By Husband with Gun and By Wife with PMS.

The Danites were going to trespass twice:

1. First, on Micah's property.
2. Second, in the territory of Laish.

Sadly, in these cases, it wasn't the trespassers who suffered. It was those trespassed against. The Danites would suffer consequences later.

When you or I abandon the circumstances in which we should stand and more-than-conquer, we end up trespassing - and everyone suffers from our faithless disobedience. People get hurt.

Jdg 18:11 And six hundred men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshtaol, armed with weapons of war.

Jdg 18:12 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.)

Jdg 18:13 And they passed from there to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah.

Jdg 18:14 Then the five 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."

I think you have a pretty good idea where this was leading. They were going to rob Micah.

Note the phrase, "Consider what you should do." By itself - great counsel. Someone should have been able to say to the entire tribe of Dan, "Consider what you **SHOULD** do." They *should* abandon their trespassing, return to their inheritance, and beat the giants.

That's a great principle for counseling, is it not? To hear the matter, in full, then say, "Consider what God says you should do."

And by "consider," we mean *do it*.

Jdg 18:15 So they turned aside there, and came to the house of the young Levite man - to the house of Micah - and greeted him.

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

Jdg 18:17 Then the five 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 six hundred men *who were* armed with weapons of war.

It was bad enough that the Danites left God's enemies in the land for other Israelites to deal with. Now they were stealing from their brothers.

Once again it's an example of just how deceived we can be in thinking that God is "blessing" us in our disobedience.

Jdg 18:18 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?"

Jdg 18:19 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 one man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?"

Jdg 18:20 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.

Jonathan's influence in the household of Micah was terrible. But at least it was confined to one family. Now it would be multiplied to a whole tribe of people, who were already deep into disobedience.

The Danites desperately needed a Jeremiah to tell them the truth.

For his part, Jonathan saw this as a promotion. It was a promotion, but it was a worldly one, not a godly one.

Promotion needs to come from the Lord - and that means it has to be in accordance with godliness.

In our society, promotion is almost always seen as not only good, but necessary. There is pressure to promote. But not every promotion is good, let's say, for your family. Sometimes the godly thing to do is to stay put.

Jdg 18:21 Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones, the livestock, and the goods in front of them.

"Little ones" means children, and this is telling us that they kidnapped members of Micah's extended household. These guys keep sinking deeper and deeper into sin.

Jdg 18:22 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.

Jdg 18:23 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?"

This is incredible. They were so convinced that they were in the right that they thought it an affront to be pursued.

Jdg 18:24 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?' "

Just a quick note: If your gods can be kidnapped, that ought to tell you something.

Jdg 18:25 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!"

Jdg 18:26 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.

Bullies. The real fight was back home, against Amorites. Instead they picked on those who were weaker.

Jdg 18:27 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.

Jdg 18:28 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.

The end result was murder; mass murder. What began as a simple act of disobedience started an avalanche of sin resulting in the mass murder of innocent people.

What's even worse is that the Jews were to be an example to the non-Jews, leading them to convert to Judaism. They ought to have come to Laish as missionaries - *not as murderers*.

When we abandon our circumstances, and trespass, it kills evangelism. For one thing, we no longer "represent" Jesus - and that might be the very reason God has us in those places.

Jdg 18:29 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.

They called it “Dan” as if it was the land God had allotted them. If some traveler came by years later, by all outward appearances it would seem as though they were in their own territory.

Ah, but their story - their real story - was recorded in the Bible.

What’s your story? If you told it, all of it, would it be godly?

You’re working on it all the time, by your choices. Make it a good one, a godly one.

Jdg 18:30 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.

Jdg 18:31 So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

They settled down into a false city, with a false worship, and seemed to prosper for many, many years.

They enjoyed a land without any enemies to overcome, and they followed a feel-good religion.

Is that what we want? To enjoy a life without any conquest, and to be reinforced in our own selfishness?

Well, on some level, that sounds just fine. If you are in the midst of an intense conflict, it is tempting to escape it. Some trials are so, so hard.

God left enemies in the land because the Israelites needed to learn how to do battle with them. They needed to see God overcoming their enemies through them, as they walked by faith.

In law enforcement, and in emergency services, personnel require continuing training in their perishable skills. Christian - you need continuing training in applying your spiritual resources to the circumstances of your life.

Take inventory of your life. If you are where you are supposed to be, and I'd wager most of us are, then believe that victory can be yours, despite your hardships.

Your circumstances may not change; *they may even worsen.*

But you are more than a conqueror through Jesus, Who loves you.

And remember that He is changing you from glory-to-glory, to look a little more like Jesus in every way, every day.