

Judges 18:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?

Analysis

And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel? The Danites' response silences the priest with both threat ("Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth") and temptation (serving a tribe versus one household). The phrase "hold thy peace" (hacharesh, הִחָרֵשׁ) literally means "be silent/be deaf," a command to stop speaking. "Lay thine hand upon thy mouth" (sim yadekha al-pikha, שִׁים יָדְךָ עַל-פִּיךָ) is an idiom for enforced silence, similar to Job 40:4. This constitutes intimidation—armed men commanding silence from someone questioning their actions.

The dual appeal to ambition and pragmatism reveals sophisticated manipulation. Calling him "father" (av, אב) and "priest" (kohen, כֹּהֵן) flatters his ego and authority, while the rhetorical question appeals to career advancement: "Is it better (hatov, הַטוֹב) for thee...?" The Hebrew tov (טוֹב, "good/better") connects to earlier uses in Genesis 3:6 where Eve saw the forbidden fruit was "good"—appealing to perceived benefit while violating divine command. The Danites offer expanded influence, prestige, and compensation if he abandons Micah. This is classic temptation: offering real benefits (greater ministry platform) while requiring sin (theft, covenant betrayal, false worship).

The priest's title "father" carries irony—spiritual fathers should guide God's people in truth and righteousness (1 Corinthians 4:15, 1 Timothy 3:2-7), yet this priest abandoned truth for personal advancement. His failure prefigures corrupt religious leaders who "profess that they know God; but in works they deny him" (Titus 1:16). Jesus warned against religious leaders who love "the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues" (Matthew 23:6), pursuing position rather than faithful service. True spiritual leadership rejects worldly advancement that requires compromising biblical truth (Acts 20:29-31, 2 Timothy 4:2-4).

Historical Context

The Danites' offer to the Levite reflects ancient Near Eastern patronage systems where priests served wealthy households, temples, or rulers in exchange for compensation. The priest's role as "father" indicated his authority as religious advisor and spiritual guide—similar to how Naaman's servants addressed him (2 Kings 5:13) and how Elisha called Elijah (2 Kings 2:12). This honorific acknowledged both age and spiritual authority, though in this case the priest lacked genuine spiritual integrity deserving such honor.

The transition from serving one household to serving an entire tribe represented significant career advancement in ancient Near Eastern terms. Tribal priests enjoyed higher status, greater material support, and broader influence than household priests. They performed public rituals, advised tribal leadership in warfare and policy, and maintained tribal religious identity. The Danites' offer promised all these benefits, making it powerfully tempting to the ambitious Levite. However, this entire system—private shrines, tribal cult centers, unauthorized priesthood—violated Mosaic law requiring centralized worship at the tabernacle (Deuteronomy 12:5-14).

The Danites' characterization of themselves as "a tribe and a family in Israel" attempts to legitimize their offer. They weren't outsiders or apostates (from their perspective) but authentic Israelites with a recognized tribal identity. Yet their self-understanding didn't align with covenant faithfulness—they had abandoned their God-given inheritance, stolen idolatrous objects, and were establishing

unauthorized worship. This illustrates how covenant peoples can maintain external religious identity while internally departing from God's commands. The parallel to New Testament warnings against false teachers within the church (2 Peter 2:1-3, Jude 4) is clear—the greatest spiritual danger often comes from within covenant community, not from obvious outsiders.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the Danites' combination of intimidation and temptation illustrate Satan's strategies for silencing faithful witness?
2. What 'better opportunities' might tempt Christian leaders to compromise biblical truth for expanded influence or institutional advancement?
3. In what ways can external religious identity ("a tribe and a family in Israel") mask internal departure from covenant faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

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|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| וַיֹּאמְרוּ | לֹ | הִסֵּךְ שׁ | שִׁים | יָדְךָ | עַל |
| And they said | H0 | unto him Hold thy peace | lay | thine hand | H5921 |
| H559 | | H2790 | H7760 | H3027 | |
| פִּי יָבֹ | עַמִּי נוּ וְלֹ | הִיוֹתְךָ | לֹ נוּ | לֹא בֹ | כֹה ׀ |
| upon thy mouth | H1980 | H5973 | with us and be to us | H0 | a father and a priest |
| H6310 | | | H1961 | | H1 H3548 |
| הֲטֹ וּבֹ | הִיוֹתְךָ | כֹה ׀ | לְבֵית | אִישׁ | אֶחָד |
| is it better | with us and be to us | and a priest | unto the house | man | of one |
| H2896 | H1961 | H3548 | H1004 | H376 | H259 |
| א ׀ | הִיוֹתְךָ | כֹה ׀ | לְשִׁבְטֹ | וּלְמִשְׁפָּחָה | בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: |
| H176 | with us and be to us | and a priest | unto a tribe | and a family | in Israel |
| | H1961 | H3548 | H7626 | H4940 | H3478 |

Additional Cross-References

Job 21:5 (Parallel theme): Mark me, and be astonished, and lay your hand upon your mouth.

Job 29:9 (Parallel theme): The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth.

Judges 17:10 (Parallel theme): And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in.

Micah 7:16 (Parallel theme): The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf.

Proverbs 30:32 (Parallel theme): If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth.