

Judges 18:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they cried unto the children of Dan. And they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company?

Analysis

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Micah's neighbors "cried" (vayiqre'u, וַיִּקְרְאוּ) to the Danites, calling them to stop and account for their theft. The Hebrew qara (קָרָא, "to call/cry out") can indicate urgent shouting or summoning to attention. The Danites "turned their faces" (vayasibu peneihem, וַיָּסֹבּוּ פְּנֵיהֶם), literally "turned around" to confront their pursuers, indicating they stopped their march to address Micah's protest. Their military superiority allowed them to pause confidently rather than flee.

The Danites' response—"What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company?" (mah-lekha ki niz'aqta, מַה־לְּךָ כִּי נִזְעַקְתָּ)—is deliberately provocative. The phrase "what aileth thee" questions Micah's motives and mental state, implying his complaint is unreasonable or his pursuit unjustified. The verb za'aq (זָעַק, "to cry out/summon") echoes the previous verse's "gathered together," using Micah's own mobilization as evidence of aggression. This rhetorical strategy shifts blame from the thieves to the victim, portraying Micah as the aggressor leading "such a company" against innocent Danites.

This inversion of moral reality—portraying victims as aggressors and thieves as victims—pervades human sinfulness. The serpent questioned Eve similarly: "Yea, hath God said...?" (Genesis 3:1), implying God's prohibition was unreasonable. Wicked men justify evil by reframing righteousness as oppression: "Am I my

brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9), "What is truth?" (John 18:38). Modern culture similarly inverts biblical morality, calling good evil and evil good (Isaiah 5:20). Christians must recognize such rhetorical manipulation, maintaining biblical categories of right and wrong despite cultural pressure to accept inverted moral frameworks.

Historical Context

The confrontational dialogue between Micah's group and the Danites reflects ancient Near Eastern conflict resolution patterns. Before open combat, opposing parties typically engaged in verbal exchange—demanding explanation, asserting rights, and attempting intimidation. Such exchanges appear throughout biblical narratives: Jephthah and the Ammonite king (Judges 11:12-28), David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17:43-47), and Rabshakeh's challenge to Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:19-35). These verbal confrontations served to establish moral justification, demoralize opponents, and sometimes avoid bloodshed through negotiation.

The Danites' question "what aileth thee?" employed standard rhetorical strategy of questioning the opponent's motives and rationality. By framing Micah's pursuit as unreasonable or aggressive, they attempted to seize moral high ground and deflect from their own theft. This psychological warfare aimed to undermine Micah's confidence and justify the Danites' position. However, the power dynamics overwhelmingly favored the Danites—six hundred warriors versus Micah's small group of neighbors—making this exchange largely performative. The Danites could afford to pause and question because they faced no genuine military threat.

Ancient Near Eastern law codes (Hammurabi, Hittite laws) generally protected property rights, punishing theft with restitution or corporal punishment. Micah's pursuit to recover stolen property aligned with cultural norms of justice. However, the decentralized nature of judges-period Israel meant no effective central authority enforced such laws. Tribal military strength determined outcomes more than legal principles, creating the moral anarchy the book of Judges documents. Micah's legitimate grievance couldn't overcome Danite military superiority, illustrating how justice depends on power structures to restrain evil (Romans 13:1-4).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do you recognize and resist rhetorical strategies that invert moral reality, portraying victims as aggressors and evil as good?
2. What does this passage teach about the necessity of just power structures to restrain evil and protect the vulnerable?
3. In what contemporary contexts do the powerful employ similar tactics, questioning victims' motives while justifying their own injustice?

Interlinear Text

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|---|------------|-------------------|--------|-----------------|-------------|
| וַיִּקְרְאוּ | אֶל | בְּנֵי | דָן | וַיִּטּוּ | פְּנֵיהֶם |
| And they cried | H413 | unto the children | of Dan | And they turned | their faces |
| H7121 | | H1121 | H1835 | H5437 | H6440 |
| וַיֹּאמֶר | לְמִיכָה | מָה | לְךָ | כִּי | |
| and said | unto Micah | H4100 | H0 | H3588 | |
| H559 | H4318 | | | | |
| וַיִּשְׁקָצְתָּ: | | | | | |
| What aileth thee that thou comest with such a company | | | | | |
| H2199 | | | | | |