

Spiraling into Something Real

Introduction

Devotions in Judges

- A. For my own personal devotions, I tend to read a chapter in the Bible every day and just kind of make my way through book by book, bit by bit. And lately I've been reading through the book of Judges.
 - 1. If you've ever read the book, you know it's not exactly light and uplifting reading material.
 - 2. It's actually downright depressing. Some of the most seedy and unpalatable stories in all the Bible are found in this book.
 - a. In many ways, it's like watching the devolution of a people as they nosedive into deeper and deeper darkness.
- B. So naturally, I thought, why not preach a sermon on this?! What better thing to bring in on a Sunday than a message about moral decay and the unchained depravity of man, right?
 - 1. But, in all seriousness, though I know we've really taken some time off from Luke for quite a while now (I will get back to finish those last verses very soon), for this morning there was something that came out of my devotions in Judges that I thought you might find relevant and even, believe it or not, a bit encouraging.
 - a. So that's what we're going to do. You can open up your Bibles to [Judg. 18](#). I'll be reading the whole chapter momentarily, but I should at least catch you up here a bit so you have some sense of what's going on in the book as a whole before we dive in.

Catching Up

- A. Judges comes in as the seventh book in the OT, following the five books of the Torah and then the book of Joshua.
 - 1. So to this point, then, we've seen the people of Israel freed from slavery in Egypt under Moses and brought into the Promised Land of Canaan under Joshua.
- B. But then the opening line of the book Judges begins with these five haunting and very telling words: ["After the death of Joshua . . ." \(Judg. 1:1\)](#).
 - 1. The whole book plays out in the shadow of this funeral, so to speak. Because, as we'll soon see, the great problem presented to us in the chapters and verses that follow is that there's this vacuum of legitimate and godly leadership.

- a. The line that repeats time and again in [chs. 17-21](#) in particular is this: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6; cf. also 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).
- C. And this lack of legitimate leadership leads to what many scholars have referred to as the “Judges Cycle” that really plays out in [chs. 3-16](#).
 1. There we see the people of Israel, because they failed to fully drive out the Canaanites as God had commanded them, they start to pick up the Canaanites’ ways—they compromise and mix and fall into sin.
 2. And so God gives them over to their enemies.
 3. But then they come to their senses, as it were, and they repent and cry out to the true and living God for help.
 4. So he raises up a deliver, here called a “judge” (people like Gideon or Samson—to name a couple of the more well-known). And though these judges themselves are often morally disastrous God uses them to set his people free.
 5. And they enjoy rest and blessing for a little while until they give way to sin and the cycle begins all over again.
 - a. And to be clear we’re not talking about this being cyclical in the sense that they are in some sort of circle, going around and around.
 - b. No, the sense we get is that they are, in fact, spiraling, going around sure, but getting worse, and going down.
- D. And so by the time we get to these latter chapters of the book, [chs. 17-21](#), there’s nothing left to do. There’s no more judges at this point raised up to help. Now it’s not just a threat from some Canaanite peoples outside of Israel, now Israel starts to fight within itself. The nation is self-destructing in many ways.
 1. If the first sixteen chapters were Israel digging their own grave, well, these latter chapters are when we finally lower the corpse and casket and toss in our handful of dirt.
 - a. There’s no godly leader or king with God’s Word ever before him and stored up in his heart as Moses said it should be in [Deut. 17:18–20](#). And so they’re all just doing what they want.
- E. In [ch. 17](#) we meet this guy named Micah . . .
 1. And he essentially establishes his own shrine, his own place of worship.
 2. And he makes his own household god from silver pieces.
 3. And he gets his own priest for hire—he pays the guy, because the dude’s an actual Levite, and he’s thinking that if he could have a real priest it would secure his prosperity.
 4. He makes his own priestly garments and things, even what’s called an ephod, that which only the high priest in Israel was supposed to wear (see [Exod. 28; 39](#)).
 - a. He’s doing whatever seems right in his own eyes. It’s this little anecdote, of a guy gone awry.

- F. But then in ch. 18, it's no longer just an individual doing this sort of thing. It's a whole tribe. One of the twelve tribes of Israel. The tribe of Dan. And you'll see the two stories actually start to collide here. So let's read it (buckle your seatbelts!) . . .

The Text

¹In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the people of Dan was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in, for until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them. ²So the people of Dan sent five able men from the whole number of their tribe, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to explore it. And they said to them, "Go and explore the land." And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there. ³When they were by the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. And they turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here?" ⁴And he said to them, "This is how Micah dealt with me: he has hired me, and I have become his priest." ⁵And they said to him, "Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether the journey on which we are setting out will succeed." ⁶And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The journey on which you go is under the eye of the LORD."

⁷Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were there, how they lived in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting, lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth, and how they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone. ⁸And when they came to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers said to them, "What do you report?" ⁹They said, "Arise, and let us go up against them, for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. And will you do nothing? Do not be slow to go, to enter in and possess the land. ¹⁰As soon as you go, you will come to an unsuspecting people. The land is spacious, for God has given it into your hands, a place where there is no lack of anything that is in the earth."

¹¹So 600 men of the tribe of Dan, armed with weapons of war, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol, ¹²and went up and encamped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. On this account that place is called Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim. ¹³And they passed on from there to the hill country of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah.

¹⁴Then the five men who had gone to scout out the country of Laish said to their brothers, "Do you know that in these houses there are an ephod, household gods, a carved image, and a metal image? Now therefore consider what you will do." ¹⁵And they turned aside there and came to the house of the young Levite, at the home of Micah, and asked him about his welfare. ¹⁶Now the 600 men of the Danites, armed with their weapons of war, stood by the entrance of the gate. ¹⁷And the five men who had gone to scout out the land went up and entered and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the 600 men armed with weapons of war. ¹⁸And when these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" ¹⁹And they said to him, "Keep quiet; put your hand on your mouth and come 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 clan in Israel?" ²⁰And the priest's heart was glad. He took the ephod and the household gods and the carved image and went along with the people.

²¹So they turned and departed, putting the little ones and the livestock and the goods in front of them. ²²When they had gone a distance from the home of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house were called out, and they overtook the people of Dan. ²³And they shouted to the people of Dan, who turned around and said to Micah, "What is the matter with you, that you come with such a company?" ²⁴And he said, "You take my gods that I made and the priest, and go away, and what have I left? How then do you ask me, 'What is the matter with you?'" ²⁵And the people of Dan said to him, "Do

not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows fall upon you, and you lose your life with the lives of your household.”²⁶ Then the people of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his home.

²⁷ But the people of Dan took what Micah had made, and the priest who belonged to him, and they came to Laish, to a people quiet and unsuspecting, and struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire.²⁸ And there was no deliverer because it was far from Sidon, and they had no dealings with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth-rehob. Then they rebuilt the city and lived in it.²⁹ And they named the city Dan, after the name of Dan their ancestor, who was born to Israel; but the name of the city was Laish at the first.³⁰ And the people of Dan set up the carved image for themselves, and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land.³¹ So they set up Micah’s carved image that he made, as long as the house of God was at Shiloh. (Judg. 18:1–31)

- A. I’ll be organizing my thoughts here under two headings in particular: (1) Counting on the Counterfeit; and (2) Spiraling into Something Real.

(1) Counting on the Counterfeit

A Study in Contrasts

- A. As I read this story in my devotions last week, the idea that what we’re witnessing here is the pursuit of something counterfeit really pressed itself upon me because of the clear contrast that I think is intentionally being drawn between this story and the story of Israel’s exodus and entrance into the land that came earlier.
1. I think we’re supposed to make that connection and see, wow, these guys are trying to work out an alternate redemption it would seem. “We didn’t like doing things in God’s way and on his terms, so we’ll borrow some of the same ideas but rework them for ourselves.”
- B. So much in [Judg. 18](#) overlaps with the previous storyline of redemption . . .
1. We see there that God brought his people out of a desperate and oppressive situation in Egypt;
 2. and he promised them a land, rich and prosperous, flowing with milk and honey;
 3. and he had them send out spies to check out the land;
 4. and he brought them in and gave it to them;
 5. and set up a priesthood and a place of worship;
 6. and ultimately he began to dwell in their midst.
- a. But, what we come to find out is that this wasn’t enough for the people of Israel in general, nor the tribe of Dan in particular. They wanted something else.
- C. And that’s what we see here. What they’re after is counterfeit, oh sure, but it is attractive.
1. And that’s really what it means to be counterfeit, if you think about it. If you’re going to make counterfeit money or something, the goal is to get it to look as much like the real thing as you can, but all the while it’s not. No one would fall for it if you go to pay for your

groceries and you pull out Monopoly money, right? It's clearly fake. It's like bright green and orange and pink. It's not the right color. It's not even the right size. No you've get close enough to be plausible. That's what you're after with a good counterfeit.

D. So here we see the Danites chasing down this counterfeit redemption.

1. And I think we'll see more of ourselves in their story than we'd care to admit.

Six Elements

A. I see six elements in play here, I'll take them one at a time . . .

Element #1: Counterfeit Land

A. There in [v. 1](#) we read: "And in those days the tribe of the people of Dan was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in, for until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them." So they're looking for land.

1. Now, we might immediately be tempted to feel something like pity for the tribe of Dan. It sounds at first read like they got left out of the deal. God allotted land to all the other tribes of Israel, but they didn't get their slice of the pie . . .

B. But that is most certainly not the case. A simple investigation into the context quickly dispels the idea. For we see why they had such a rough go with their portion of the land when we look back at [ch. 1](#).

1. You see, God had given them some great real estate, right along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, but here's the problem: they failed to obey God back at the start and they didn't drive out the Amorites who were there ([v. 34](#)).

a. So there remained this ongoing tension and conflict. First with the Amorites and later with the Philistines. And finally they just got fed up and started looking elsewhere.

C. But it wasn't God's fault. It was their own.

1. While God has been relentlessly faithful, his people not so much. All of their apparent obedience was always mixed in with a good bit of sin and compromise. They'd not been living all out for God. They'd been half in as it were. And that really came back to bite them in the end.

D. I wonder if you can relate? When we're not fully surrendered to God, we will not be satisfied with God.

1. It's as Jesus had said: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" ([Matt. 6:24](#)).

2. Or James puts it even more pointedly: “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:4).
- E. So they tried to have a little bit of God and a little bit of the world, but eventually dissatisfaction grows. And all of this leads them to want some other land—to pursue some counterfeit exodus and entrance, as it were.
1. “We’re oppressed here, not by Egyptians but by these Canaanites. And we want to find our own land, work our own redemption.” So they set off to try find it.

Element #2: Counterfeit Spies

- A. So we read next that these Danites appoint five men from their tribe “to spy out the land and to explore it” (v. 2).
1. And as they’re going out they make a pit stop in the hill country of Ephraim, which happened to be where that man Micah I just told you about was living. And they “lodged there” (v. 2) for a bit.
- B. The scene is meant to immediately remind us of those times Moses and Joshua send out men to spy out the land (cf. Num. 13; Josh. 2), and even then you recall how the spies came to the house of Rahab and “lodged there” (Josh. 2:1).
1. In those instances it was a legitimate call of God to do such a thing.
 2. Here, with these Danites it was an urge of the flesh. There’s a restless dissatisfaction in them. “I want something more. I want something better. And if God won’t give it to me, I’ll go get it for myself.”
- C. When the spies go further north they come to a land called Laish. It’s about 100 miles distance from the land God had actually given them. And it’s good. It’s everything they think they could want.
1. So we’re told that, because the land is so abundant, the foreigners currently residing there are “lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth” (v. 7).
 2. And later these spies report back to all the others in v. 9, saying: “[W]e have seen the land, and behold, it is very good.” And v. 10: “The land is spacious . . . a place where there is no lack of anything that is in the earth.”
- D. And as I read this, I thought: aren’t we often just like this? We aren’t fully surrendered to God and so we’re not fully satisfied with him. And because we’re not fully satisfied with him, we’re always looking elsewhere.
1. We don’t want what he has already given us. We don’t want to be where he’s appointed us to be. So we’re always looking. For a better land. For somewhere else. For something else.
 2. And we’re sending out spies, so to speak, right? Let’s go look, let’s go see. Maybe there. Maybe here. Maybe what I need is a new job, a new house, a new city, a new spouse.

E. It's a counterfeit land. And we're sending out counterfeit spies. Like the 49ers in the gold rush, we're off looking for something shiny, but it's just fool's gold. And, in the process, we get 100 miles off course from where God actually wants us to be.

1. Maybe that's where you're at right now. Feeling far from home.

Element #3: Counterfeit Priesthood

A. But, if you notice, in their search for a better land, albeit a counterfeit land, these Danites end up establishing and leveraging a counterfeit priesthood as well.

1. We always want someone to help us, lead us, guide us, mediate for us, and things. So that's what we see.

B. While they're lodging at Micah's place, they somehow recognize the Levite he'd brought on for a sum to serve in his counterfeit sanctuary there, and they end up commissioning this priest for themselves.

1. So we see in v. 19, when all the warriors show back up later, they say to him: "Keep quiet; put your hand on your mouth and come 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 clan in Israel?"

a. They're playing to his pride, right? "Oh sure, you could be a household priest of sorts, if that suits you well enough, but we want you to be a priest for our whole tribe."

i. We might think, if this man had any integrity at all, he'd oppose the idea and remain faithful to Micah.

ii. But he loves it. "And the priest's heart was glad . . . and went along with the people," v. 20 says. So he and his sons are established as priests for the Danites from that time forward (v. 30).

C. The scene again is meant to remind us, I think, of what happened in the earlier authentic redemption God himself was working for Israel. In the story of the exodus and entrance with Moses and Joshua, God talks about establishing a priesthood.

1. They'll as serve intermediaries between God and man. They'll take our stuff and bring it to God and they'll take his stuff and bring it to us.

2. And they come from the tribe of Levi, and priests in particular would be from the line of Aaron.

3. And you can't hire them. God provides for them.

4. And they aren't for private use. God appointed them to serve all the people of Israel.

5. And they don't minister in makeshift sanctuaries. They minister in the house of God at the place of his choosing.

D. But here we see this self-oriented commandeering of the office. And it's corrupt.

1. “We want a priest that works on our own terms, not God’s. We want a priest who will do what we want him to do and say what we want him to say.” And that’s what we see next . . .

Element #4: Counterfeit Promises

- A. So we see in [v. 5](#), when the spies first met him, what do they say to him: [“Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether the journey on which we are setting out will succeed.”](#)⁶ And the priest said to them, [“Go in peace. The journey on which you go is under the eye of the LORD.”](#)
 1. So they come as counterfeit spies in search of a counterfeit land seeking out a counterfeit priest, and this priest makes for them a counterfeit promise.
- B. The only thing even remotely legitimate about this man was his lineage. At least he was actually a Levite, but everything else that really matters, the substance of it all, he lacked.
 1. He was just a shell of a priest. A mercenary of sorts. Not standing for God nor for man, at the end of the day, but only for himself. He doesn’t work for God and he certainly doesn’t hear from him. He’s a hired hand. He works for pay. Which means he’ll tell you what you want to hear if it’ll keep money in his wallet.
- C. And here’s what we have to understand: these guys come with the pretense that they genuinely want to know from God whether they will succeed or not.
 1. But back in [Josh. 1](#) God had already told the Israelites what they needed to do if they wanted to succeed: obey. Obey the things he’s already revealed. God, speaking to Joshua said: [“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success”](#) (Josh. 1:8).
- D. So, do you want to succeed, do you want things to go well in an ultimate sense? Follow God’s Word. Obey him. Walk in the light.
 1. But you see, that’s not as fun, that’s more challenging. We always want to shortcut the process and find an easier more immediate way to success and blessing. So we establish our own priesthood—where we’ve got priests that will tell us what we want to hear.
- E. And, again, we need to see, we do the same thing. You say I’ve never inquired of a counterfeit priest or something like this. Really? Think about it.
 1. Again, a priest is just an intermediary, a go-between, someone who can get you to the land, someone who can take you from point A to point B. I daresay there are cultural priests all over the place. They position themselves as experts on how to get you into the land of promise as it were. They may define this “land” differently, of course, but it’s all about leading you to joy and satisfaction and the thing you need most and all this.

- a. In this sense, then, someone like Oprah becomes a cultural priest. I don't know much about her, never really been a big fan, but I know she tries to position as a spiritual guide of sorts. I'll show you the way. Trust me.
 - b. And, of course we could talk about people like Martha Stewart or whoever it is ladies look to these days to learn the ins and outs of homemaking. The promised land is a home well-kept that people come in and see you've got it together and you're a good mom and they're impressed. And so you look to her to tell you how to get there.
 - c. Or maybe for you it's the scientist. He's the priest who unlocks for you the meaning of life. It's not God or the Bible, it's physics and biology and things like this. They'll tell you how to make sense of your existence.
 - d. Silicon Valley has its own priesthood in the tech world doesn't it? Guys like Steve Jobs even had his own priestly garb, you could say—he was always wearing a black turtleneck, blue jeans, and sneakers. He looked so clean and put together. And he'd show you what tech you needed to get into the promised land of ease and luxury and status and things.
 - e. Or there's those health and wellness coaches. Maybe the promised land is six pack abs. Okay, how do I get there? Sign up, pay a small fee, and I'll show you the way.
- F. And, of course, they're all trying to sell you something, so they're not going to tell you what you truly need to hear. They're going to tell you what you want to hear, whatever it takes to keep you shelling out the cash.
- 1. So they're always trying to offer you that shortcut. Here's the quick way to the promised land. Just subscribe to this newsletter or follow my blog or buy this product, right?
 - a. If it's that chiseled body you're after, if abs are the promised land, I've got the thing for you! Have you seen those silly commercials where they're trying to sell you these belts that pulse while you sit on the couch eating Doritos and watching TV or whatever? It does the work for you is the idea. You just sit there and this thing make your abs flex and chisels them while you veg out. And they've got some guy on the stage using it. Here's the before picture. He's a sad specimen of a man with a big jelly belly jiggling about. He's always home alone, eating TV dinners, no woman in her right mind would date him. And then, well look at him now. He doesn't even wear shirts anymore. He's like perpetually greasy, shiny, the light is glistening off of his six pack. Maybe the shine is from the ladies drooling, because there's always at least one on his right and his left. And all he did was put this silly pulsating belt on for fifteen minutes a day. Nobody gets ripped like this. It's ridiculous. But we buy it, because we want it to be true. Not only is a hot body the promised land I've been looking for, but it's easy to get it. Both of those are lies.
- G. And if we follow where all this leads it has devastating effects . . .

Element #5: Counterfeit Worship

- A. As the Danites, with their warriors, are travelling to do battle with those in Laish, they stop again by Micah's house once more as I mentioned. And did you see what they do?
1. They don't just bribe away the man's priest.
 2. They steal all the counterfeit religious stuff he had. So v. 17 says that they "took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image." They just rob from a fellow Israelite. They don't care.
 - a. And when Micah comes out in protest, they threaten to kill the guy and his family, v. 25: "Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows fall upon you, and you lose your life with the lives of your household."
- B. And you've got to know this is what happens when we begin to worship something other than God.
1. When we truly come to know God and his love for us, worship means I lay my life down for you. I become a "living sacrifice." That is my "spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1) as Paul says.
 2. But when you start to worship a false god, listen it always ends up meaning I sacrifice you for me.
 - a. False gods always take and take and never give. The true God gives and gives and enables us to do the same.
- C. So to just tag onto that silly example of the six pack abs. If that's the promised land, you see yourself in competition with everyone. You're jealous of the people who look better than you. And you look down on the people who look worse.
1. But you're not loving or serving anyone. You're competing. It's about you and your image. And you'll do what you've got to do to get on top.
- D. It's counterfeit worship. And the author of Judges accents this in the very last verse of our text when he writes in v. 31: "So they set up Micah's carved image that he made, as long as the house of God was at Shiloh."
1. I love that. You see, the authentic house of God, the tabernacle with the ark of his presence, it was set up at Shiloh at this point. There was your legitimate expression of worship.
 - a. And the author makes note of that here so as to accent the fact that whatever was happening with these Danites, it wasn't legitimate. It was counterfeit. It was idolatry.
- E. And it ultimately wouldn't end well . . .

Element #6: Counterfeit Freedom

- A. At the end of the day, the freedom and redemption they were pursuing, they wouldn't find it. This isn't it. Even though it seems to have worked for a little while.

1. You can buy a lot with counterfeit money, and it's probably pretty great . . . until you get caught, until the truth comes out, and it always comes out. You were living high and then just like that, you're living behind bars or worse. The apparent freedom gives way to captivity.
- B. So we've got that remark there in v. 30: "And the people of Dan set up the carved image for themselves, and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land." As if to say, Oh man they lived it up for a while. But it ended badly.
1. It's probably referring to 722 B.C. when the Assyrians come into the north there and led them all out in chains. It's God's judgment for their idolatry and wayward hearts. It never ends well.
- C. In Rev. 7:1-8 there's this sobering omission, where John's given this vision of those who have been sealed by God from all the tribes of Israel for the world to come. And, you know, the tribe of Dan isn't on that list.
1. Whatever the reason is, I can't be sure, but I do have to wonder if it has something to do with what we've been discussing this morning. They wanted the land on their own terms here and now, so they forfeited their right to any land in the new Jerusalem, in the land to come. It looked so good. They wanted it now. And they lost it all.
- D. Some of us are maybe experiencing this even now. The brokenness and captivity that comes from idolatry, counterfeit worship and redemption and things. So what do you do?

(2) Spiraling into Something Real

Looking Back and Looking Forward!

- A. In one sense, the point of this story is to get you to look back to the more authentic redemption God had worked with Moses and Joshua. That's why there's been this contrast all along. We've gone off the rails from what God's been up to.
1. But, in another sense, the point is to get you to look forward as well. After all, even the exodus and the entrance into the land under those legitimate leaders, were but foreshadows, pictures of something greater yet coming.
- B. The redemption brought by God through men like Moses and Joshua wasn't counterfeit but it also wasn't complete. There's still things left unfinished there.
1. Moses dies tragically outside the land.
 2. Joshua dies and leaves this vacuum of leadership.
 3. So the book of Judges talks about the need for a righteous king who would come and lead the people well.

- a. And we think surely this David, right? I mean that's where things pick up next with the book of [Ruth](#) and then [1 Samuel](#). But David has his problems and the kings are hardly better than the judges, maybe even worse.

- C. You know Jacob, when he's blessing his twelve sons, when he gets to Dan it's very interesting, [Gen. 49:16-17](#): "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. ¹⁷ Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that his rider falls backward." That sounds like these Danites, doesn't it? A serpent, a viper. Crafty and violent. But then Joseph says something quite intriguing and seemingly off script.
 - 1. In [v. 18](#) it's as if, considering all that would come with Dan and things, he pauses and interjects this prayer: "I wait for your salvation, O LORD."
 - a. And I understand this to be prophetic of all that we've seen here. We try to work out salvation for ourselves. But Jacob knows: "We can't do it. If it's up to us it's over. We're going to fall apart, spiral down ad infinitum. We need you. We wait for you. You have to come and save us O LORD!"

- D. And he does! God takes on flesh and comes down himself in Christ. Here's the king we've been waiting for. Here's the one who can lead us out of the death spiral up towards life. Here's the one who can truly redeem.

- E. All of this counterfeit stuff we've been looking at, Jesus is the way to the real thing.
 - 1. So he comes on the scene and he says: "I know you're longing and looking for the promised land, for the land flowing with milk and honey. But it's not found in all this stuff. It's found in God. And I'm the door. I'm the way in. I'll take you there. It's relationship with God at the deepest level. You were created for it. I'll bring you back to it."
 - 2. In many ways, Jesus is the real spy. He's seen the promised land of God's presence. He left it to come down to us. And he says, listen, I'm going back to the Father, but I'll be preparing a place for you.
 - a. [John 14:1-3](#): " ¹Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." "You don't have to look anywhere else but to me. I've got you. I'll get you there."
 - 3. He's the true priest. The book of [Hebrews](#) makes it abundantly clear, all the priesthood of the OT finds its fulfillment in him. He's the true intermediary. No one's ever been more qualified. He's fully God and fully man. And he's come to bring God to man and man to God.
 - 4. And the promises he makes, they're not cheap words carefully crafted to make the sale. His promises to us have been purchased at the expense of his own blood. Our great high priest in order to secure our redemption and our ticket into the land, he lays down his own life as a sacrifice for our sin.

- a. As Peter says, we've been redeemed " ¹⁸not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1:18–19). He doesn't demand that we pay for him and his services. He pays for us and secures for us by grace all the promises of God.
 - i. So Paul can say in 2 Cor. 1:20: "[A]ll the promises of God find their Yes in him." He's purchased your right to them at the cross.
- 5. And this is why our worship becomes increasingly less idolatrous and self-oriented. When we get the love of God for us in Jesus, sinners though we are, it melts the heart, it changes us from the inside out. And we move closer towards that spiritual worship I mentioned earlier, where we're "living sacrifice[s]" (Rom. 12:1), worshiping God "in Spirit and truth" (John 4:23), not on this or that mountain anymore, but everywhere we go.
 - a. Laying our lives down in love for God and others in response to the one who laid down his life in love for us.
- 6. And this, my friends, is true freedom and true redemption: "[I]f the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36) . . . and forever. It only gets better from here!

"Spiraling into . . .?!"

- A. I titled this heading, and this sermon really, "Spiraling into Something Real" because that's how it always happens. We don't come to Jesus all clean and polished. We come filthy, total disasters, like smoking rubble.
 - 1. In all the spiraling down in sin, God doesn't leave us. The floor falls out from under us, sure, but we fall into the arms of Jesus. That's how it works.
 - a. The prodigal son has to wake up and realize: "I'm eating pig slop. How low have I gone here? What am I doing? I could be sitting around the table with my father!" And he comes spiraling and stumbling home.
 - b. Or the woman at the well. How broken was she at this point? She'd been through guy after guy after guy after guy. So much wreckage in her relationships, in her heart. I mean she just comes skidding in to Jesus—just road rash, black and blue.
 - c. Or Paul on that Damascus road. He's fallen not so much into sin as much as into empty self-righteous religion. And he literally faceplants his way into Jesus' kingdom. That's how we find him. We fall into his arms.
- B. That's how I found him. He had to systematically break my dreams, my idolatries really, down so that I would finally come to that place of saying: "I need help. I need you." So that I could finally own up to my sin, my need for grace, surrender all to him, and find authentic freedom and redemption.
- C. And that's what Jesus wants for you. So don't settle for the counterfeits anymore. Come to him and find the real thing.