Research on: Dan Judges 18

**Tribe of Dan**: a son of Jacob and Bilhah, Rachel’s maidservant (Gen. 30:4). In the biblical account, Dan is one of the two children of [Bilhah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bilhah), the handmaid of Jacob's wife Rachel, the other child of Bilhah being [Naphtali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naphtali).

As the Israelites came into the land of Canaan about 1200 BCE, by lot certain areas of territory were assigned to each tribe. The tribe of Dan was given a tract of land that was smaller than the other land grants but was fertile and also had a boundary along the Mediterranean Sea where there was fishing and commerce available to them.

However, the tribe of Dan never fully conquered this area as a result of a lack of faith in God. This was true of the other tribes as well, as the early chapters of the book of Judges clearly teach, and led to a time during the period of Judges where it was said, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his *own* eyes.” [Judges 18:1–31](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Judg%2018.1%E2%80%9331) tells the story of the people of Dan falling into idolatry. They also did not like the territory that was theirs, so they sent out spies to find a better area.

In the north, some representatives of Dan learned of an area where a peaceful group of people lived. The tribe of Dan took things into their own hands and wiped out the people of that land so they could then move the entire tribe up to a region close to the sources of the Jordan River, just south of present-day Lebanon near Mt. Hermon. There they established their main city and called it Dan.

From after the conquest of the land by Joshua until the formation of the first [united Kingdom of Israel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Israel_%28united_kingdom%29) in c. 1050 BC, the Tribe of Dan was a part of a loose confederation of Israelite tribes. No central government existed, and in times of crisis the people were led by ad hoc leaders known as [Judges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_judges).

Later in the history of the Hebrews, the kingdom was divided after the reign of Solomon. The kingdom split into Israel’s ten tribes in the north and Judah’s two in the south. The people of Dan were in the northern kingdom of Israel. We learn in [1 Kings 12:25–33](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%2012.25%E2%80%9333) that King Jeroboam was afraid that those who lived in his kingdom in the north would still go down to the southern kingdom to worship at Jerusalem, since that was where the temple that God had authorized was located. So Jeroboam built two additional altars for the people of his nation to worship. He established worship in the south at Bethel and in the north at Dan. *to* He built a golden calf at each location and instituted special days and feasts when people would meet. Sadly, this man-made worship at Dan has been one of its lasting legacies.

In the downfall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 718-721 B.C., the inland portion of the tribe of Dan was carried into captivity with the other tribes composing the northern Kingdom, led by Ephraim. This portion of Dan was taken into captivity beyond the Euphrates River, into Assyria, and when the Assyrian Empire fell in the seventh century B.C.

The most celebrated Danite was [Samson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samson), a Danite [judge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_judges) from the period of settlement in the lands allotted by Joshua.

Modern artists use the "scales of justice" to represent the Tribe of Dan due to [Genesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Genesis) [49:16](http://tools.wmflabs.org/bibleversefinder/?book=%20Genesis&verse=49%3A16&src=HE) referencing Dan "shall achieve justice for his kindred".

However, more traditional artists use a snake to represent Dan, based on Genesis 49:17, "Let Dan be a serpent by the roadside, a horned viper by the path, That bites the horse's heel, so that the rider tumbles backward."

The [Book of Revelation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Revelation) (7:4–8), mentions that people from the twelve tribes of Israel will be sealed. The selection of the [twelve tribes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve_tribes_of_Israel) does not include the names of Ephraim and Dan, although their names were used for the twelve tribes that settled in the [Promised Land](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Promised_Land). It has been suggested that this could be because of their pagan practices. This made [Hippolytus of Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippolytus_of_Rome) and a few [Millennialists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennialism) propose that the Antichrist will come from the tribe of Dan.

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Gen. 49:1, 17

1And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you *that* which shall befall you in the last days.

“All Jacob's sons were living. His calling them together was a precept for them to unite in love, not to mingle with the Egyptians; and foretold that they should not be separated, as Abraham's sons and Isaac's were, but should all make one people. We are not to consider this address as the expression of private feelings of affection, resentment, or partiality; but as the language of the Holy Ghost, declaring the purpose of God respecting the character, circumstances, and situation of the tribes which descended from the sons of Jacob, and which may be traced in their histories” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

**“Jacob called unto his sons”—This link will describe each son and Jacob’s pronouncement and blessing or cursing on them. Click here if you are interested.**

[**http://biblehub.com/commentaries/guzik/commentaries/0149.htm**](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/guzik/commentaries/0149.htm)

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17Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.

“adder] or, horned snake. The horned snake is a small, dangerous, and venomous serpent. The simile is that of a small serpent disturbed, and suddenly with deadly fangs striking a horse from behind. Dan is dangerous to his foes by ambuscades, secret raids, and guerilla warfare” (Cambridge Bible, www.biblehub.com).

“The adder is the *cerastes* or horned serpent, of the color of the sand, and therefore, not easily recognized, that inflicts a fatal wound on him that unwarily treads on it” (Barnes’ Notes, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“An adder in the path, which covereth and hideth itself in the sand or dust of the highway, watching for men or beasts that pass that way. He notes the subtlety of that tribe, which should conquer their enemies more by craft and cunning, than by strength or force of arms” (Matthew Poole’s Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

Joshua 19:47

47And the coast of the children of Dan went out *too little* for them: (not in this week’s Lesson--therefore the children of Dan went up to fight against Leshem, and took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and possessed it, and dwelt therein, and called Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their father.)

“The words "too little" are an insertion of the King James Version Render rather, "the border of the children of Dan was extended." The Hebrew appears to mean "the children of Dan enlarged their border because they had not room enough."

“The reason of this was that the Danites, a numerous tribe, found themselves cooped up among the hills by the powerful and warlike Amorites. Hence, the Danite expedition, which surprised the Sidonion inhabitants of Leshem, an unwarlike and peaceable race, exterminated them, and annexed their city and territory to the portion of Dan” (Barnes’ Notes, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“1-6. In those days … the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in—The Danites had a territory assigned to them as well as the other tribes. But either through indolence, or a lack of energy, they did not acquire the full possession of their allotment, but suffered a considerable portion of it to be wrested out of their hands by the encroachments of their powerful neighbors, the Philistines. In consequence, being straitened for room, a considerable number resolved on trying to effect a new and additional settlement in a remote part of the land. A small deputation, being despatched to reconnoiter the country, arrived on their progress northward at the residence of Micah.” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

Judges 18:2, 7, 8, 9, 26, 27, 28

2And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it;

“**From their coasts.**—Literally, *their ends*. Some explain it to mean “from their whole number.”

**Men of valour.**—Literally, *sons of force*([Judges 21:10](http://biblehub.com/judges/21-10.htm)).

**To spy out the land.**—As in [Joshua 2:1](http://biblehub.com/joshua/2-1.htm).

**They came to mount Ephraim.**—It would have been an easier journey to pass along the *Shephelah,*but that was mainly in the hands of the original inhabitants” (Ellicott’s Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

“these men were sent from the borders of the tribe, the extreme parts of it, as the word may signify, where perhaps they were the most pressed and overcrowded: Zorah and Eshtaol are particularly mentioned, and were the first cities in their lot, and were the coast of their inheritance” (Gill’s Exposition, www.biblehub.com).

7¶ Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that *were* therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; and *there was* no magistrate in the land, that might put *them* to shame in *any* thing;

“*Laish*- Leshem. After the place was occupied by the Danites and re-named, it became the most northerly of Israelite settlements; [2 Samuel 24:6](http://biblehub.com/2_samuel/24-6.htm), [Jeremiah 4:15](http://biblehub.com/jeremiah/4-15.htm), and the expression ‘from Dan to Beer-sheba’ [Jdg 20:1](http://biblehub.com/judges/20-1.htm), [1 Samuel 3:20](http://biblehub.com/1_samuel/3-20.htm) etc” (Cambridge Bible, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“Laish was about a hundred miles north of the original Danite settlement. The Anchor Bible suggest that ‘secure’ in this verse probably means **‘without defenses’**; excavations have shown that the city had no walls.

“*after the manner of the Zidonians*] **of Zidonians**; the civilization was Phoenician in character. Apparently Laish was a dependency of Zidon. Though remote from the suzerain city, the inhabitants felt secure enough, and never suspected attack from outside” (Cambridge Bible, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“The five men departed, and came to Laish—or, "Leshem" supposed to have been peopled by a colony of Zidonians. The place was very secluded—the soil rich in the abundance and variety of its produce, and the inhabitants, following the peaceful pursuits of agriculture, lived in their fertile and sequestered valley, according to the Zidonian style of ease and security, happy among themselves, and maintaining little or no communication with the rest of the world. The discovery of this northern paradise seemed, to the delight of the Danite spies, an accomplishment of the priest's prediction. They hastened back to inform their brethren in the south both of the value of their prize, and how easily it could be made their prey” (Jamieson-Fausset Brown, www.biblehub.com).

8And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brethren said unto them, What *say* ye?

“And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol,.... After they had well viewed the city, and made their remarks on the inhabitants of it, the condition and circumstances in which they were, and took notice of the goodness of the land about it, they returned to their brethren that sent them, particularly those that dwelt at the two places mentioned: and their brethren said unto them, what say ye? what tidings do you bring? what account of the place and country where you have been?” (Gill’s Exposition, www.biblehub.com).

9And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them:

“And they said, arise, that me may go up against them,.... That is, prepare for war, and go up in an hostile manner against the present possessors of the land, not doubting of being masters of it easily:

“for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good. It was very good pasture land, and fertile, abounding with fruits of all kinds; and the same is attested by Josephus” (Gill’s Exposition, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

26And the children of Dan went their way:

“Went on their way, would not stay to have any further talk with him, as being an impertinent man, and unworthy of their regard, bidding him defiance, and do his worst, having nothing to fear from him” (Gill’s Exposition, www.biblehub.com).

27And they took *the things* which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people *that were* at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire.

 “*And burned the city with fire —*Not wholly, but in a great measure, to make their conquest more easy. *They built a city —*Or, rather, repaired and enlarged that which they found there. *After the name of Dan —*That it might be manifest they belonged to the tribe of Dan, though they were settled at a great distance from them in the most northerly part of the land; whereas the lot of their tribe was in the southern part of Canaan” (Benson Commentary, www.biblehub.com).

“and came unto Laish, unto a people that were quiet and secure; ***having no sentinels placed at any distance to give them warning of an enemy, nor any watchmen on their walls to discover one; and perhaps their gates not shut, nor any guard at any of their passes and avenues, having no apprehension at all of being visited by an enemy,*** especially from Israel, not being apprized that they had any pretensions to their city, and the land about it:

“and they smote them with the edge of the sword; entered their city, and fell on them suddenly, and cut them to pieces:

“and burnt the city with fire; to strike terror to all about; or it may be only they set fire to some part of it, as they entered, only to frighten the inhabitants, and throw them into the greater confusion, that they might become a more easy prey to them; for their intention was to inhabit it, and it seems to be the same city still, though they rebuilt it, and called it by another name” (Gill’s Exposition, www.biblehub.com).

28And *there was* no deliverer, because it *was* far from Zidon, and they had no business with *any* man;