

Joshua 19:40-48, Dan

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Patriarchial

Birth

Gen 30:6, first son of Rachel by Bilhah. Rachel defends his birth as God's vindication of her, and her methods are approved by the culture of the day, but we must still recognize it as contrary to God's pattern from Eden.

Jacob's Blessing

Gen 49:16 Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.¹⁷ Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.

Two prophecies:

1. Dan will serve as judge, as will most of the tribes; fulfilled in Samson, to whom 4 chapters in Judges are dedicated, more than any other judge (3 for Gideon, 2 each for Deborah/Barak and Jephthah).
2. Dan will be treacherous, striking out at others subtly.

Note his comment about his own trust in v. 18: "I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD." In contrast to Dan's self-serving methods, he has learned the need to rest in the Lord.

Moses' Blessing

Deut 33:22 And of Dan he said, Dan [is] a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan.

This follows Jacob's second prophecy, Dan's aggressive, strong-willed independent spirit.

Territory

Originally, toward the seashore, 19:40-46: Philistine territory (Ekron, 43, being one of the chief Philistine cities). Judg 1:34, forced by the Amorites up into the hill country; the Amorites themselves were probably under pressure from the Philistines.

Later, 19:47, Judg 18, moved to the very north of the country.

- Thus the common phrase, "from Dan (extreme north) to Beersheba (extreme south).
- Together with Bethel, became site for one of Jeroboam's golden calves, 1 Kings 12:28-30.

People and Events

One associated with each region of the territory.

Judg 13-16, Samson

Judg 13:2, the tribe of Samson, who fulfills the prophecy of Dan as judge, and fits well the images concerning Dan's rapacity.

Judg 17-18, the Migration to Laish (Leshem)

Ch. 17, Micah's Idolatrous Sanctuary

Sets the stage for ch. 18, the migration of Dan. Two paragraphs, each closing with reference to "no king in Israel" (the second in 18:1a, but should probably close second paragraph of ch. 17). Each paragraph thus highlights something wrong with the practice of man-made religion.

17:1-6, The Origin of the House Sanctuary

A certain woman in Mt. Ephraim had 1100 shekels. Possible link to 16:5, the price of Samson's betrayal? No reference to her husband; is this woman Delilah, and Micah Samson's son?

Her son "borrowed" these; she proclaimed a curse on the thief in his hearing, and he was shocked into confessing. Her explanation in v.3 probably relates to this curse; she had dedicated the \$\$ to the Lord, and so he would risk the Lord's disfavor by taking it for himself.

Her sense of dedicating them to the Lord is clearly defective: she enables her son to furnish an idolatrous sanctuary, including

- Graven image
- Molten image (some confusion; may be same or different; word is used elsewhere almost exclusively for the bulls of Sinai and Jeroboam, and may suggest that here as well)
- Ephod (ceremonial garment)
- Teraphim (household gods, what Rachel stole from Laban)
- One of Micah's sons as priest.

Application: People feel a strong need for religion, and are likely to set it up themselves if they refuse God's standard. The association of God's name (YHWH) with it, as here, is no guarantee that it is orthodox!

17:7-13, "Calling a Pastor"

This is the first instance in Scripture of a church's calling a pastor! Notice:

- Emphasis on external qualifications for the clergy (Levite, although under the OT this is appropriate)
- Not satisfied with his original station in Bethlehem in Judah. In fact, what was he doing in Bethlehem, since that was not a Levitical city? We'll see later that he has probably wandered around a good deal.
- Explicit salary part of the arrangement.
- Micah's implicit trust in the designated official.

In both cases, the sanctuary and the priesthood, we are reminded that "there was no king in Israel," and these actions were irregular and ought to have been stopped.

Ch. 18, the Migration of Dan

1-7, Mission of the Spies

Dan sends out five spies to find a better place to settle. These spies discover two things of potential use to their sponsors:

3-6, they find Micah's sanctuary with the Levite. Note that they seem to know him; fits image of his wanderlust from 17:8. Their questions are explicitly commercial. Note the pairing with answers:

- Who brought you here? "Micah dealeth with me"
- What do you make ["what are you doing"]? "I am his priest"
- What have you here [what's in it for you]? "Micah hath hired me."

7, they find the people of Laish, careless, without defenses. A target well suited to Dan, the "serpent in the way," the "adder in the path," the lurking lion's whelp.

8-14, Report of the Spies

Comes in two pieces.

8-10, concerning the city of Laish: results in sending out an army to secure the city for eventual migration, 11-13.

13, concerning the sanctuary in the house of Micah. The spies clearly think this deserves attention.

15-26, Theft of Micah's Sanctuary and Priest

16, show of force to deter any resistance

17-18, theft of the sanctuary

19-20, theft of the priest (he "felt the Lord's leading to move on to a larger flock")

21, defensive posture to guard their rearward.

22-26, they bully down Micah when he objects. Not even an invitation for him to join them; they just rob him outright.

27-28, Conquest of Laish

Hardly the "army of God" bringing judgment on the idolatrous people of the land. Here Dan with its stolen idols invades a peaceful people and takes their territory.

29-31, Epilog

Finally we learn the name of the Levite: Jonathan, Son of Gershom, Son of Manasseh.

- Manasseh is written in a peculiar fashion in Hebrew. The "N" is elevated above the line.
- Without it, the consonants are those of the name "Moses." And compare Exod 2:22, Gershom is indeed the son of Moses.

- Jewish tradition is that the “N” is elevated because it was added by later scribes, torn between their reverence for the received text (which plainly names Moses) and respect for the honored lawgiver (desiring to avoid the slander associated with having a grandson in such a position).

31, this sanctuary persisted even while the tabernacle was in Shiloh. Thus when Jeroboam set up his golden calves in Bethel and Dan, he was simply continuing the tradition of idolatry in the northern city, and even using the same local corrupt priesthood.

Epilog

Back to Gen 49:16-18. Dan’s capacity for treachery is not unlike Jacob’s, or ours in our natural state. We all need to come to the point to which God brought Jacob, to wait for God’s salvation.