

Judges Chapter 18 Part 2

This narrative concerning Micah and Dan started in chapter 17 with Micah, the son, dishonoring his mother by stealing from her. Then he hired an impostor priest to be his priest and “father.” In all those actions, he disregarded the Mosaic Law, all the while professing worship of Yahweh.

Now, starting in chapter 18, a recon team from the tribe of Dan shows up at his estate on its way to scoping out territory that was not given to them by God so that an armed force can attack and take it over.

From Gary Kukis (concerning Judges chapter 18):

“Again, this chapter, as those around it, are not a depiction of God’s will for the tribe of Dan. The book of Judges chronicles what the Israelites did, not what God necessarily wanted them to do. Particularly in the end few chapters, Israel behaves despicably. This information is recorded so that we have a complete and full understanding of the nation Israel in its inception.”

“We have a tendency to want to figure out who is the good guy and who is the bad. We want to see things in terms of black and white, right and wrong. In this chapter, we have no such thing going on. Micah is wrong for having all these idols and hiring a priest; the priest is wrong for allowing himself to be a priest for hire. The people of Israel in general are wrong for not paying the Levites enough money to survive on. The Danites here are wrong to steal the idol and the priest from Micah; they are wrong to have these things in the first place, they are wrong to steal them from Micah; and they are wrong that they do not execute Micah, as per the Law. In other words, there are no good guys in this chapter; there is no one who will wear a white hat and come into town and clean things

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up. The book of Judges covers a time of great degeneracy. For some of us, that will make it all the more interesting.”

Robby Dean emphasizes this concerning the sons of Dan:

“They were forced into the area up in the hill country. They didn't take the territory or the area that was more fertile and available for agriculture, and this is where we find the cities of Timnah, Zora and Eshtaol where Samson lived. So they failed to take the land, they were just restricted to a small portion of what God had given them, and what they are going to do in chapter 18 is send out some spies and look for some land that they can take. In carnality the believer says he is not willing to trust God and apply the principles and promises and procedures that God has given him because that's too difficult, so he looks for some other methodology to get some kind of prosperity and blessing in life. The believer in carnality is always looking for a quick fix, some magic solution, some easy ritual of procedure to get involved in: "If I just say it the right way or do it the right way that somehow God is going to automatically bless me and prosper me. I'm not going to have to stay in fellowship, I'm not going to have to spend my time on Sunday morning and Wednesday night studying the Word of God, I'm not going to have to think, I'm not going to have to learn to evaluate my own thinking to root out the human viewpoint and exchange it for divine viewpoint, I'm not going to have to self-critique in terms of the written Word of God, I'm just going to find something that will give me spiritual blessing and then I will have everything God wants me to have." We recast God in our image rather than letting God define the issue for us. So Dan is going to leave their allotment and head north and look for some land that they can just take from somebody. They were looking for something that they could take from somebody else without having to go through the tough procedure of having to submit themselves to the

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authority of God and living life on God's terms. They were completely out of the will of God.”

Last week I speculated that Micah might be a guy of some importance.

From Gary Kukis: “Barnes suggests that there were at least three houses—one for the Levite, one for worship, and then Micah’s residence. If there were three houses, there were probably several others, all which surrounded a court and were accessed by means of one gate. The entire layout was probably called Beth-Micah (or, the house of Micah).”

Judges 18:7 Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were in it living in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure; for there was no ruler humiliating them for anything in the land, and they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone.

Laish. From Bibleatlas.org

“A city in the upper Jordan valley, apparently colonized by the Sidonians, which was captured by the Danites and called DAN (which see) (Judges 18:7, etc.; Isaiah 10:30 the King James Version). In Joshua 19:47 the name appears as "Leshem."”

In the map below, “Dan” is the location of the city of Laish. It is at the uppermost part of Israel. Once the tribe of Dan conquered it, they renamed it “Dan.” It was subsequently used in descriptions of the area of Israel, “From Dan to Beersheba.” As Wikipedia says, “From Dan to Beersheba is a biblical phrase used nine times in the Hebrew Bible to refer to the settled areas of the Tribes of Israel between Dan in the North and Beersheba in the South.”

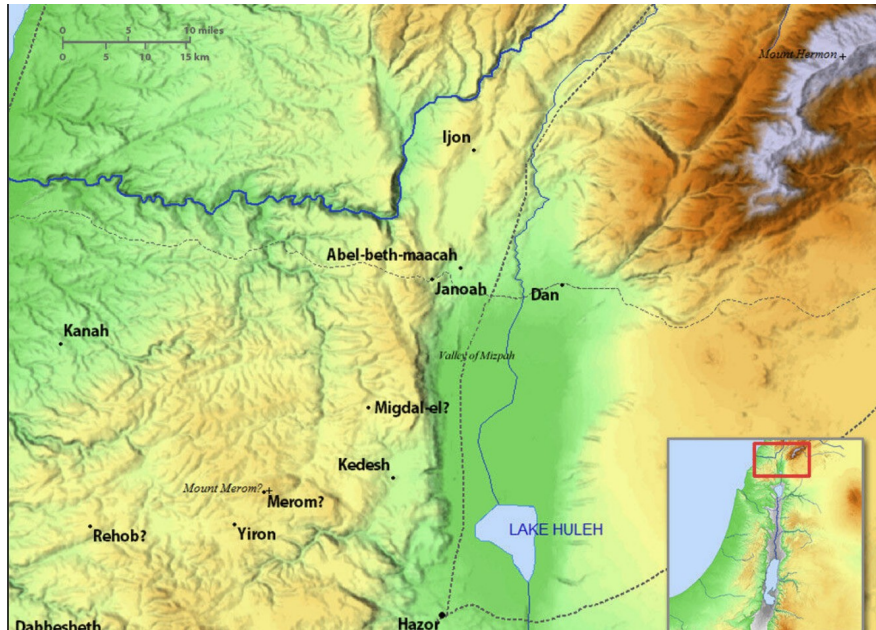
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Laish. The meaning of the name is “lion.”



From Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribe_of_Dan)

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From FreeBibleImages.org

Why did the Danite recon team go so far north away from their designated territory? Let me speculate a little:

1. It is likely they didn't want to pick a fight with another Israelite tribe. That means the territory of Israel proper was out of the question.
2. Land in the south was desert land. Not something you want to farm in.
3. Israel's land extended to the sea. Not going west. The Amorites are there. They already defeated us once. We don't want to duplicate that failure. And at some point the Philistines came into the land. They had iron weapons and chariots. Nope. Not going west.
4. Fierce enemies were in the east. Just ask Jephthah.
5. So north it is.
6. So then, why travel to Ephraim to get north? Roads.

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7. In Jesus time, there were two main roads north from Jerusalem. The Jordan Valley and roads through the middle of Israel through Shechem.
8. So it is possible that both the young priest that Micah had hired as well as the Danite recon team were traveling on roads or at least paths connecting the mountains of Dan to the mountains of Ephraim.
9. Once on their way north, they needed to bypass all the Israelite settlements until they got to the very north. Traveling on roads helps with that.
10. Then they needed to find an unarmed community with no connections to the rest of the world. In other words, no allies that would defend them. Seems like from the description, Laish fits the bill.

Gary Kukis quotes others when he says, “Barnes places this near the sources of the Jordan River, about four miles from Panium, or Caesarea-Philippi. It is thought to possibly be where the village Tell-el-Kadi now stands ZPEB agrees: Laish, the modern Tell el-Qâdi, was a large city in a fertile valley, with an assured water supply. Its secluded nature, shielded as it was by the Lebanon range and Mt. Hermon, had lulled its inhabitants into a false state of security. The spies recognized a situation that offered rich rewards at minimum cost, and so the remnant of the tribe of Dan moved northward.”

There is a blessing/prophecy in the book of Deuteronomy given by Moses that may connect to this passage.

Deuteronomy 33:22 Of Dan he said, “Dan is a lion’s whelp, That leaps forth from Bashan.”

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The word for lion in Deuteronomy is a different word than what is used here.

Leaps: from Gesenius “Used especially of animals which, when they prepare to take a leap, draw their feet together in order to spring with greater force.” And this verb is an intensive form (piel).

Bashan. Interesting that Dan’s territory is in central Israel on the seacoast, but Bashan is up north adjacent to the territory of Laish. So, was this prophecy fulfilled literally when Dan attacked Laish? My guess is that they could have attacked from Bashan, but commentators are adamant that Dan did not attack Laish from Bashan. But why are they quick to dismiss that possibility? Do they not think that prophecy is possible?

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from: <https://beginningandend.com/wars-of-the-nephilim-kings/>

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Saw. The point of their recon is to see. In this case, not just to see but to evaluate as a potential target. This verse is from the perspective of the recon team.

In the manner of. This means in the manner of or judgments. It is from this same root that the word for judge in the book of Judges comes from. It alludes to a standard.

Who were the Sidonians?

From Wikipedia:

“The Hebrew Bible describes Sidon (צִידוֹן) in several passages:

- It received its name from the "first-born" of Canaan, the grandson of Noah (Genesis 10:15, 19).
- The Tribe of Zebulun has a frontier on Sidon (Genesis 49:13)
- It was the first home of the Phoenicians on the coast of Canaan, and from its extensive commercial relations became a "great" city (Joshua 11:8, 19:28).
- It was the mother city of Tyre. It lay within the lot of the tribe of Asher, but was never subdued (Judges 1:31).
- The Sidonians long oppressed Israel (Judges 10:12).

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There is another point that needs to be emphasized. The information provided in the text of this verse is from the perspective of the recon team. They did not have a divine perspective. Remember, there are several perspectives expressed in this narrative. The divine perspective is not provided but is easily obtained from the earlier chapters of the book of Judges, Joshua and the Torah. These were Canaanites. Sidon was Canaan's first borne.

Genesis 10:15 Canaan became the father of Sidon, his firstborn, and Heth

Per Merrill Unger:

“So in Judg. 18:7 we find them described as living “quiet and secure,” devoted, no doubt, to the cultivation of their lands, and not engaged in trade, having “no business with any man.” The language of the text indicates this “careless,” “quiet and secure” life was the usual “manner of the Zidonians.” The Zidonians adored, as tutelary god and goddess, Baal (whence the name of the king Ethbaal, I Kings 16:31) and Ashtoreth (I Kings 11:5, 33; II Kings 23:13).

They may not have been actively infecting Israel with their religious practices which included child sacrifice, but they had been the enemy early on. But now they were an isolated community. So when you ask why did God allow this isolated community that wasn't hurting anyone else be attacked and destroyed, you must consider the divine perspective. That is perhaps why God permitted this slaughter that is about to happen.

Quiet and secure. Secure is the participle from the same root as the previous word for “security.” So that thought is duplicated.

Had no dealings with anyone. Dealings is from the word for “word.” Dealings is not a bad translation. The idea is there is no communication

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with anyone outside of the area. From a military perspective, this means there are no allies who would come to their defense in case of an attack.

It appears the tribe of Dan learned their military lessons well from Moses and Joshua. Militarily, they did everything right. They appear to have done this in a right way. But what they did was wrong. God gave them territory. That was their “inheritance.” So they are doing a wrong thing in a right way. It still makes it wrong. This made for a spirited conversation in the old Rabbi’s teenage class. Human perspective versus divine perspective.

This is a near perfect target. But from the reader’s perspective, this is ghastly.

Judges 18:8 When they came back to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers said to them, “What do you report?”

Brothers. Interesting vocabulary. This appears to be a description from the writer’s perspective to emphasize that the tribe of Dan is close knit. They are acting in unison.

What do you report? That is OK for a translation but it is not literal. The Hebrew is an idiom, “What – you?”

Judges 18:9 They said, “Arise, and let us go up against them; for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. And will you sit still? Do not delay to go, to enter, to possess the land.

These attitudes are commendable but the target is wrong. If only the sons of Israel had this attitude when Moses sent out the spies into the land.

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Instead they were concerned about the giants in the land. But here, there are no giants. Easy pickings.

Very Good. Similar to Joshua and Caleb's "good" description of the land. "Good" is the same word used here. It is apparent the Danites are using lessons learned from Moses era. Unfortunately, they should have used that against the territory that God gave them by lot.

Possess the land. This is what Dan was supposed to have done way back in Judges chapter 1. But they were unable due to unbelief (Hebrews 4:1-2).

Judges 18:10 When you enter, you will come to a secure people with a spacious land; for God has given it into your hand, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth."

Again, shades of Moses preparing the people to enter the land.

God has given it into your hand. No and Yes. No, they did not consult with God because He already gave them land and they found it too difficult to take because they didn't make the effort to learn Torah and apply faith. They were listening to a tele-evangelist or something. Yes, they take this land. That was the permissive will of God.

Judges 18:11 Then from the family of the Danites, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, six hundred men armed with weapons of war set out.

Six hundred men. Why this number. There was a balancing act. Put together a larger force and they risk drawing too much attention. Other cities and tribes might fear they are going to attack them. Too small, and

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they risk being unable to take over the area and keep it secured after the conquest. There might also have been a financial consideration also. It takes money to outfit a small army.

Armed with weapons of war. OK translation. Literally, “girded with objects/weapons of war/battle.” Stop for a moment and think about this. When the various judges gathered an army, it was I have been calling a “farmer army.” These men are no farmer army. They are apparently trained and well-equipped. Again, they have done well with the military perspective. They have learned about war. And again, they are attacking the wrong target.

Judges 18:12 They went up and camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. Therefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim.

They went up. Again, we have the going up and going down in the Hebrew which parallels the physical walk up and down the mountains.

Camped. Military camp.

In Judah. Why did they camp in Judah? Perhaps this puts them on the road north which leads to Ephraim and eventually Laish.

Judges 18:13 They passed from there to the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.

Again, they are probably traveling on some kind of established path or road. Micah’s house must have been near this road or thoroughfare. And they had an advanced team, the recon team, that had scoped out the place.