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Dan Will be a Serpent by the Roadside, A Viper Along the Path

49: 16-18

Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path DIG: What does Dan's name mean? How will there be a double fulfillment? What judge was an example of their early glory? What was the gulf between Dan's calling and his achievement? Why did the tribe of Dan move away from the southern kingdom Judah to the northern kingdom of Isra'el? How did the tribe of Dan turn to idolatry? What were the results of their judgment?

REFLECT: Can you move away from your problems? Is it more important where you live or how you live? What kind of person you are? What does it mean to you personally, that Dan is given territory in the messianic Kingdom? Are you waiting and looking for the blessed hope - the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13)? What happens when people believe the evening news more than they believe the Word of God?



Dan will judge his people as one of the tribes of Isra'el. Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path that bites the horse's heels so its rider falls off backward. I wait for Your deliverance, ADONAI (49:16-18 CJB).

The sons of Leah are followed by the four sons of the two maidservants,

arranged, not according to their mothers or their ages, but according to the blessing pronounced upon them, so that the two warlike tribes come first (to see link click [Hj](#) - Rachel's Servant Bilhah Bore Jacob a Son and Rachel Named Him Dan). The name **Dan** means *to judge*, and **Jacob** prophesied that **Dan will judge his people as one of the tribes of Isra'el (49:16 CJB)**. This is a play on words in Hebrew because here we learn that **Dan will judge his people**. The name **Dan** comes from the Hebrew verb *din*. So *yadin* here means *he will judge his people*. Interestingly enough, **he** will not only **judge**, but **the tribe of Dan itself** would *be judged*.

Just because **his** birth-mother was a concubine did not mean **he** was some sort of second class **son**. **He** was very important to the nation and history of **Isra'el**. The fact that **he** would **provide justice** was fulfilled by Samson, but the prophecy associated with **Dan** had nothing to do with territory (**Judges Chapters 13-16**).⁷⁸² **The tribe of Dan** would provide many of the key **judges** in the book of **Judges**, with Samson being the most famous of that era. **He** had **his** ups and downs for sure, but in **his** grand finale **he** did the right thing and brought down the house. Samson was not always walking with **ADONAI**, but that's probably why **he** is in the TaNaKh. Like us, **he** was not sinless, but gave **his** life for the redemption of **Isra'el**. **He** is like that **snake** of **Dan**, biting at **the heels** of the enemy.

Dan battled the Philistines in the cities of Gaza. So it seems the more things change the more they stay the same. The modern Palestinians are not the Philistines, but ironically, we are still battling Gaza today. The Philistines wanted to destroy **Isra'el** during the time of the judges, and the Palestinians want to push **Isra'el** into the sea today. They do not recognize **God's** covenant with **Isra'el** and are sworn to **her** destruction?

Jacob resorts to a metaphor to make **his** second point. **Dan will be a judge** in a surprising way. **He will be a snake by the roadside** of the enemies of **Isra'el**, **a viper along the path that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward**. The imagery here seems to suggest that **Dan**, although small, will be quite capable of holding **his** own. **His** strength will be greater than **his** size. As small as **he** is, **he** will be able to strike panic into an animal as large as a **horse**.⁷⁸³ We see much of this fulfilled in the exploits of Samson. After an impressive opening by **Dan**, however, we see the same gulf between the calling and the results that was seen in Reuben's disgrace.⁷⁸⁴

As **the Israelites** came into the land of Canaan, 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 what 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 Isra'el; everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Judges 18:1-31** 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. **They** took things into **their** own hands and wiped **them** out so that **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. There **they** established **their** main city and called it **Dan**.

It was there that **Dan** introduced idolatry into the nation of **Isra'el**. In **Judges 17:5** we learn that one of the Levite priests named **Micah, had a shrine, and he made an ephod** possibly an object of worship. The nature of **the ephod** is not clear. It could have been patterned after the short outer garment worn by the high priest (see my commentary on **Exodus Fz - Make the Ephod of Gold, Blue, Purple and Scarlet Yarn**). But instead of being worn as a garment, it was apparently fashioned out of gold to serve as **an idol (Judges 8:24-26)**. In addition, **he made some household idols and installed one of his sons as his priest** to conduct worship to this shrine (**Judges 17:5**).

Therefore, **Micah** set up a cult in the northern part of the country and took down **the tribe of Dan** with **him**. It was therefore in **Dan** that King Jeroboam, who led the rebellion that culminated in the divided kingdom, set up one of his two golden calves in the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**. We learn in **First Kings 12:25-33** that Jeroboam was afraid that those who lived in his kingdom in the north would still go down to the southern kingdom of Judah 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 the northern kingdom of **Isra'el** to worship. He established worship in the south at Bethel and in the north at **Dan**. He built a golden calf at each location, and instituted special days and feasts where people would meet. Sadly, this man-made worship at **Dan** has been one of its lasting legacies.

The LORD doesn't look too kindly upon idolatry. Earlier, Moses had said: **So let there not be among you a man, woman, family or tribe whose heart turns away today from ADONAI our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Let there not be among you a root bearing such bitter poison and wormwood. ADONAI will single him out from all the tribes of Isra'el to experience what is bad in all the curses of the covenant written in this book of the Torah (Deuteronomy 29:18 and 21 CJB). Dan was the judge, but he was also to be judged.** And because of **the tribe of Dan's** idolatry **they** were set aside for generations and lost many blessings along the way.

*This is an interesting illustration of our own lives. If you are truly saved (see my commentary on [The Life of Christ Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith](#)), you are **His** child. Jew or Gentile - you belong to **Him (Ephesians 2:11-13)**. Through sin and rebellion, we can lose many of our blessings along the ways also. In the last analysis, we are still saved (see my commentary on [The Life of Christ Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer](#)), but the question becomes: what kind of child are we? Are we walking in our own inheritance? There is no doubt about it, we will also be judged (see my commentary on [Revelation Cc - We Must All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ](#)).*

The tribe of Dan is not listed among the twelve tribes in the book of **Revelation** during the Great Tribulation (see my commentary on [Revelation Cr - Then I Heard the Number of Those Who Were Sealed](#)), because the world at that time will be drowning in idolatry.⁷⁸⁵ **The tribe of Levi**, who did not have an inheritance, will be substituted for **Dan** during that **time of trouble for Jacob (Jeremiah 30:7)**. **But God's gifts and His calling [to all the tribes of Isra'el] are irrevocable (Romans 11:29)**. Thus, by the grace of **ADONAI**, in the **far eschatological future**, **Dan** will be included in the twelve tribes of the Messianic Kingdom. Despite leading the nation of **Isra'el** into idol worship, **the LORD** will not cast him out. **These are the tribes, listed by name: at the northern frontier, Dan will have one portion (Ezeki'el 48:1-2 and 32)**.

At first glance, **Jacob's** final line of praise seems out of place. **He** blurted out: **I look for your yeshu'ah or for your salvation, ADONAI (49:18 CJB)**. This is the first mention of **salvation** in the Torah. It is not a coincidence that this is not merely the concept of redemption, but the name of redemption - the name of our **Redeemer**.

The rabbis interpret these words as messianic. The later Targum reads,

“Not for the deliverance of Gideon, the son of Joash, does my soul wait, for that is temporary; and not for the redemption of Samson, for that is transitory; but for the redemption of the Messiah, the Son of David, which your word has promised to bring to your people, the children of Isra’el: For *this* my soul waits.” Jacob was looking forward to **the Messiah**, who is the source of **salvation**. When **Christ** was presented in the Temple on the eighth day, a man called Simeon was waiting for **Him**. When he saw **Jesus**, he said: **Now, ADONAI, according to Your word, Your servant is at peace as You let him go; for I have seen with my own eyes your yeshu’ah** (because **Yeshua** means *salvation*), **which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples - a light that will bring revelation to the Goyim and glory to your people Isra’el (Luke 2:29-32 CJB)**. We have a lot to learn from **the tribe of Dan**.

Once **Ya’akov** finished prophesying to **Dan**, **he** then turned to **his** next **son, Gad**, whose mother is was **Zilpah**, maidservant of **Leah**.