

# DAN

The city of Tel Dan, or Tel al-Qadi (“Mound of the Judge”) as it is known in Arabic, was located at the northern border of the ancient kingdom of Israel. This was at the foot of Mount Hermon, about twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Dan Spring was also there, serving as a source of water for the Jordan River.



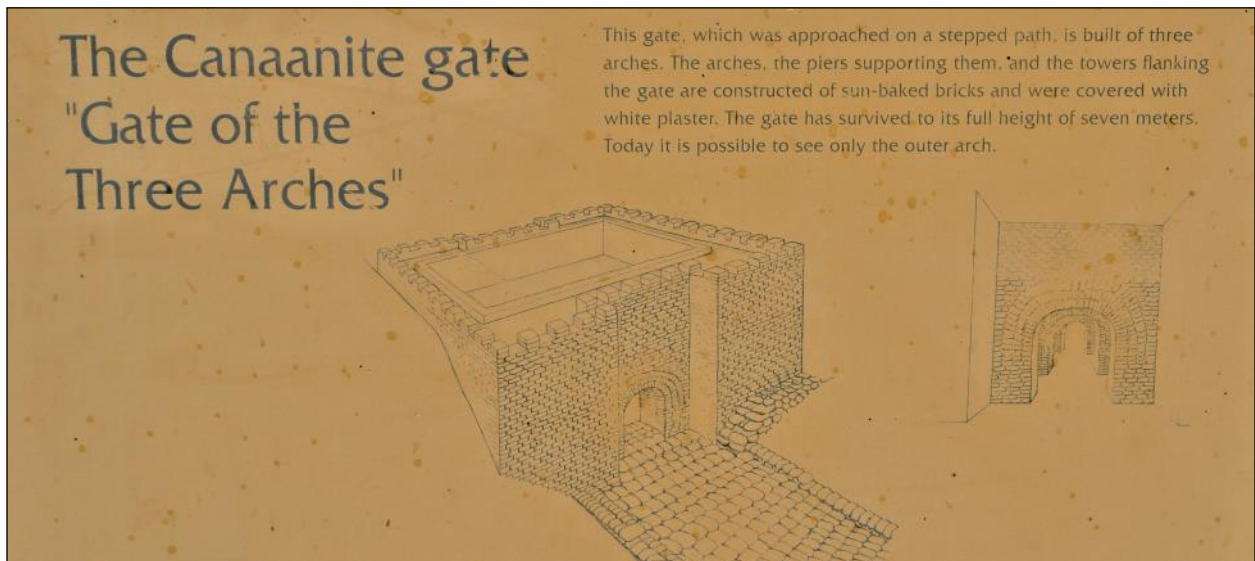
Dan River (Headwater of the Jordan River)



Beautiful Flowers Along the Path Leading to the Gate of Dan



When the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan (1400 B.C.), a city was already located in this place by the name of Leshem or Laish (Josh. 19:47; Judg. 18:29). The naming of the city as Dan in Genesis 14:14 (in a narrative that involves Abraham) is most likely an example of "Post-Mosaica"—scribal updating after the time of Moses using the more familiar, newer name of the city. Archaeologists have discovered a Canaanite gate at this location dating back to 1800 B.C., the days of the patriarchs.

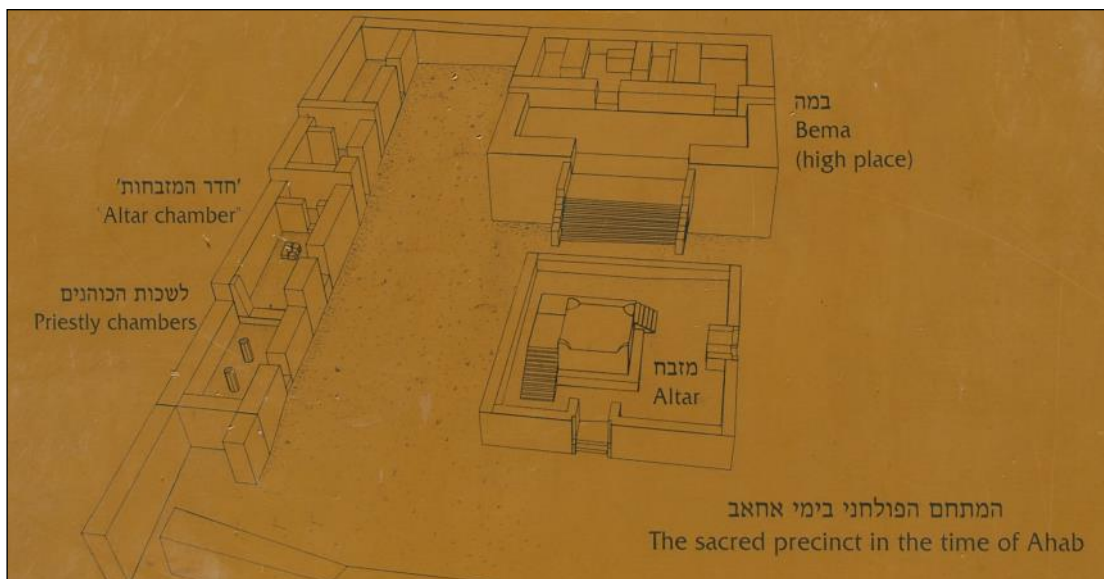


Following the conquest, the tribe of Dan could not defeat the Canaanites living along the coast in their tribal allotment, so some of them migrated north and conquered this unsuspecting city. They renamed the place Dan after their ancestor. They also stole the idols and priest belonging to an Israelite named Micah and established a shrine there (Josh. 19:47; Judg. 1:34; 18:1-31). One could say that the Israelite city of Dan was corrupt from its very inception.

During the Judges and United Kingdom periods, biblical writers combined the northern location of Dan with the southern location of Beersheba to encompass all the land of Israel, using the phrase “from Dan to Beersheba” (Judg. 20:1; 1 Sam. 3:20; 2 Sam. 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1 Kings 4:25).

When the kingdom of Israel divided, Solomon’s son Rehoboam reigned over Judah in the south, whereas Jeroboam ruled Israel in the north. To prevent his subjects from returning to Jerusalem for the annual feasts and holy days, Jeroboam set up two worship centers—one at Bethel on the southern border of Israel and the other at Dan on the northern border. At each place, he also erected an idolatrous golden calf for the people to worship. Jeroboam built altars at these sites and installed priests, even though they were neither descendants of Aaron nor from the tribe of Levi (1 Kings 12:28-33).

Archaeologists have discovered the high place at Dan. There had been a four-horned altar where sacrifices were made. It has been estimated that the altar was nearly ten feet tall; it was accessed by stairs at two opposite corners. The bema (high place) behind the altar is likely where Jeroboam set up the calf idol. Many believe that this area was constructed with a roof. To the side of the altar and bema were the priestly chambers for sacrificing incense. In one of the priestly chambers, iron incense shovels, a bronze bowl, and a small altar have been found. A small stone altar with four horns was also discovered at the complex.







Approaching the Worship Site



A Side View of the Worship Site





Water Reservoir for Priests



Outline of Four-Horned Altar with Steps on Opposite Corners



High Place Where Golden Calf Likely Rested





Incense Shovels Found at Dan (Israel Museum, Jerusalem)



Priestly Chambers for Burning Incense and Other Functions





Since Dan was on the northern frontier of Israel, the city was well fortified with a strong wall and gate—which archaeologists have discovered (Iron Age). The outer gate area had a high place (see 2 Kings 23:8). The middle gate area had a podium where either a ruler or an idol sat (see 2 Sam. 18:4; 19:9; 2 Kings 23:8), along with a bench for elders or officials. Five standing stones (*masseboth*) were also found there. The inner gate area had four rooms.



↑  
City Wall

← Outer Gate Area

High Place of the Outer Gate







Entrance into the Middle Gate Area



A Ruler at the Middle Gate Area for Judging



MIDDLE GATE AREA  
(Two Angles)

Low Bench  
for Officials or Elders

Podium  
for a Ruler or Idol

Four Bases Used to  
Support the Poles  
of a Canopy



Inner Gate Chamber



Reconstruction of Gate Complex



At times, the Arameans fought with Israel for control of Dan, since Aram's border lay just north of the city (see 1 Kings 15:9-20). The Tel Dan Stela, discovered in 1993, mentions "the king of Israel" and "the house of David." Dating from the ninth century B.C., it indicates that Aram got the upper hand over Israel and Judah for a while. In fact, the Arameans made this monument to commemorate their victory. However, when Israel regained control of Dan, the inscription was broken and reused in a wall of the outer gate area. Perhaps this took place during the reign of Omri (885-874 B.C.) or Ahab (874-853 B.C.). The Tel Dan Stela was made from basalt. The inscription confirms that King David was a real figure in history. It may be the earliest mention of "the house of David" from archaeological findings. However, some believe that this phrase also appears in line 31 of the Moabite Stone, which also dates to the ninth century B.C.



TEL DAN STELA (Israel Museum)

- (1) ...
- (2) ... my father went up
- (3) ... and my father died, and went to (his fate ... ls-)
- (4) rael formerly in my father's land ...
- (5) I (fought against Israel?) and Hadad went in front of me ...
- (6) ... my king. And I slew of (them X footmen, Y cha-)
- (7) riots and two thousand horsemen ...
- (8) the king of Israel. And (I) slew (. . . the kin-)
- (9) g of the House of David. And I put ...
- (10) their land ...
- (11) other ... (. . . ru-)
- (12) led over ls(rael ...)
- (13) siege upon ... (BAR [Mar/Apr 1994]: 38)

The Assyrians attacked northern Israel in 732 B.C., near the end of the Syro-Ephraimitic War (2 Kings 15:29), and Dan was likely leveled. King Tiglath-Pileser III took many captives at that time and apparently took the golden calf idol too. Later, after the rest of Israel was taken captive in 722 B.C., Sargon II settled other peoples in Israel and had the priests teach them about Yahweh (2 Kings 17:24-27).

The identification of this city as Dan is further confirmed by an inscription from the late third or early second century B.C. The limestone tablet, measuring six by ten inches, was written in both Greek and Aramaic. It reads, "To the god who is in Dan, Zoilos made a vow." (See photo in *BAR* [Mar/Apr 1994]: 31.)

Beit Ussishkin museum at nearby Kibbutz Dan contains many of the finds from the site of Dan that have surfaced for more than thirty years of excavation.