

THE “DAN PROBLEM” וירדף עד דן

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I INTRODUCTION OF THE PROBLEM

The Avrahamic narrative, which begins in our Parashah and follows Avraham to K'na'an, Egypt, and back to K'na'an, is interrupted by a story in which the central actors are other than Avraham and his family. Chapter 14 details an alliance of four Mesopotamian kings who subdue and enslave five K'na'ani city-states (the “five cities of S'dom”) for 12 years. The city-states finally rebel and the overlords come to crush them - and succeed. Among those taken captive is Lot and his household; at this point, we'll let the text take over:

And there came one who had escaped, and told Avram the Ivri; for he lived in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshkol, and brother of Aner; and these were confederate with Avram. And when Avram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them to Dan. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and defeated them, and pursued them to Hovah, which is on the left side of Damascus. (vv. 13-15).

Subsequently, Avraham is involved in a powerful entente involving the king of S'dom and the mysterious Malkizedek. We have, in earlier shiurim, dealt with this interaction and its significance. (see, inter alia, the recent analysis of Psalm 47, posted for Rosh haShanah). This year, we will turn our attention to a small geographic note in the narrative of the war itself. This phrase is the cause of much consternation for those of us who maintain our belief in the unity and divinity of the text of the Torah - and the source of much “banner-waving” among those who would challenge our tradition.

According to the report here, which, according to our tradition, was given to Mosheh at Har Sinai a full forty-seven years before the conquest of Eretz Yisra'el, the northern town near Damascus which marked the end of the first leg of Avraham's pursuit of the four kings, was named Dan. We, the modern readers, find no difficulty with the use of this landmark. We know all about the northern town of Dan, which, during the early years of the first Commonwealth, was considered our northern border (see I Melakhim 5:5). We also hear about its

being designated as the northern worship-site by Yerov'am ben N'vat (ibid. 12:29). It should not be surprising, then, that the Torah uses Dan as a marker to identify a point along Avraham's path.

Things are, alas, not so simple.

Eretz Yisra'el was divided up, subsequent to the Yehoshuan wars, by Yehoshua and Elazar haKohen. The details of each tribe's borders and the major towns which fell to each tribe are detailed in chapters 15-19 of the book of Yehoshua. (Ch. 15 details the holding of Yehudah; 16-17 are the land of the House of Yoseph, including Menasheh and Ephraim, 18 presents the boundaries and towns of Binyamin and chapter 19 completes the list for Shim'on, Zevulun, Yissachar, Asher, Naphtali and Dan; we will yet attend to the “2.5 tribes” of the East Bank of the Jordan).

The territory apportioned to Dan was nowhere near Damascus:

And the seventh lot came out for the tribe of Dan according to their families. And the border of their inheritance was Zorah, and Eshtaol, and Ir-Shemesh, And Shaalabbin, and Ayalon, and Jethlah, And Elon, and Thimnathah, and Ekron, And Eltekeh, and Gibbethon, and Baalath, And Yehud, and Bnei-Barak, and Gath-Rimmon, And Mejarkon, and Rakkon, with the border before Jaffa...This is the inheritance of the tribe of Dan according to their families, these cities with their villages. (19:40-48)

In other words, the area allotted to Dan was in and around the hub of modern Israel - Tel Aviv. (Indeed, all Israelis are familiar with the designation of Greater Tel-Aviv as “Gush Dan” - the local bus company is even named “Dan”). How did a northern town get associated with Dan?

The complete story is found in Shoftim 18 - but begins at the end of the first chapter of Shoftim. The first chapter details each tribe's success - or lack thereof - in conquering the land allotted them. The sequence of the chapter is quite clear - it begins with the perfectly successful Yehudah and spirals down to the utter failure of Dan:

And the Amorites forced the sons of Dan into the mountain; for

they would not let them come down to the valley; And the Amorites continued to live in Mount Heres in Ayalon, and in Shaalbim; yet the hand of the house of Yoseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries. (1:34-35)

All other tribes conquered all or most of their designated territory; Dan was unsuccessful in conquering any of their allotment.

In Chapter 18 (which happened towards the beginning of the Shoftim period - see v. 30), we are told that the Danites were encamped in Yehudah's territory, such that their settlement was called **בִּצְרַתָּה רָן**. Several representatives went out to scout land for conquest and, eventually, found the town of **לַיִשׁ** in a northern valley. The text describes what the scouts found:

[They] saw the people who were there, how they lived in safety, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure; and there was no one in the land that put them to shame in any thing, such a hereditary ruler; and they were far from the Sidonians, and had no business with any man. (v. 7).

They subsequently returned to the Danite camp, reported what they found and returned with an army of 600 men, who massacred the town and renamed it as Dan, in honor of their eponymous father.

This story is summed up in Sefer Yehoshua in one sentence (the ellipsis above):

And the borders of the sons of Dan were too small for them; therefore the sons of Dan went up to fight against Leshem, and took it, and struck it with the edge of the sword, and possessed it, and lived in it, and called Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their father. (v. 47 - "Layish" here is called "Leshem".)

Our question on B'resheet 14 is clear - how can the Torah refer to Avraham's pursuit to "Dan" when, at the time of Sinai, Dan's territory was to be on the south-central coast of Israel?

The immediate response that springs to mind is "prophecy" - doesn't Hashem know where Dan is going to end up? Why can't the identification of the locus be a prophetic statement? (see, e.g. Rashi ad loc.)

This answer is easily dismissed without encroaching on our well-held belief in prophecy. Whereas prophecies, such as the poetry of Bil'am (Bamidbar 23-24) and Mosheh (D'varim 32), certainly are presented in oblique fashion, such that a proper understanding of the words and ideas may only happen - if at all - over time. This must be said for all "distant" prophecies,

such as any apocalyptic or eschatological vision.

Keep in mind, however, that B'resheet 14 is a narrative; the narrative only has meaning if its primary audience can understand it. What would be the point of presenting a detail in this narrative that makes no sense to the readership?

It is easy to see how the "Bible critics" (we assayed their fundamental position in this year's essay on Parashat B'resheet) take this phrase as proof positive that the Torah could not have been given at Sinai or any earlier than the Danite conquest of the north. Truth to tell, by the middle of the 19th century the *axia* of the critics had been so widely accepted that this became a mere footnote

(John Skinner, in 1910, [ICC Genesis p. 267] noted, in reference to our passage:

It is singular that such a prolepsis should occur in a document elsewhere so careful of the appearance of antiquity.)

Nonetheless, it is challenges such as the one posed by the "Dan-problem" that form part of the theories which are the foundations of the "School of Higher Biblical Criticism". This school's gospel plays a central role in the development of approaches such as that publicized in our own city several months ago which caused so much anxiety and confusion and to which this series is a response.

Professor Yehuda Kil, in his commentary on B'resheet published within the Da'at Mikra series, argues that the referent "Dan" in our verse cannot mean the same town captured and renamed by the Danites in the Shof'tim period. He suggests that the T'nakh refers to changed place-names by their older - along with the new - name. For instance:

And [Ya'akov] called the name of that place Beit-El; but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. (B'resheet 28:19)

Therefore, concludes Kil, our text should have said and he chased them until Dan, which is Layish or something of that sort. (see B'resheet 14:17 for an example of this formula).

Kil suggests that the "Dan" referred to here is not the (yet-to-be-named) town, rather the whole area, named Dan on account of the Yarden which flows through there. Alternatively, he takes a cue from R. Baruch Epstein in his Torah Temimah (followed by Y.M. Grintz in his seminal work **יִירוּשָׁלַיִם וְקוֹמָתוֹ שֶׁל סֵפֶר בְּרֵאשִׁית**) and suggests that **רָן** here may be **רֹדֵן**, one of the children of K'turah who Avraham sent east (B'resheet 25:6). In defense of

this somewhat extravagant suggestion, he notes that there are places where doubled letters are elided when preceded by another instance of the letter - ער דון. To support this, he cites B'resheet 30:16 - בלילה הזה.

Kil's observations are interesting but not compelling. He has no textual support for the area to be referred to as דן - certainly not before the Danite conquest - and the דון connection is weak. As to the דון suggestion, it suffers on two counts: The example he brings loses much less by eliding the middle ה; here, it leads to a misidentification of the location. In addition, Avraham sent them east, to the land of the east - which is never assumed to be in or near the Golan. It is usually understood as Mesopotamia or beyond.

Professor Yehuda Elitzur z"l presented an approach to the problem within the context of a larger issue. His oral presentation was given approximately twenty years ago, but only published posthumously in the prestigious journal of Biblical Studies Al Atar in 1999 (vol. 4-5, pp. 243-249). We will utilize his approach to solve the "Dan-problem", along with several other enigmas in T'nakh - but, first a few more questions.

II A FEW MORE QUESTIONS

The final scene in the Torah posits Mosheh atop Har Nevo as G-d shows him the entire land:

And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to the Mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is opposite Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead, to Dan, And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, as far as the utmost sea...(D'varim 34:1-2)

Following the sweep of vision described, Mosheh's eyes follow from north (Gil'ad) around the northeast (Naphtali), moving south and west until reaching the sea. If Dan's land is supposed to be on the south-central coast, the panoramic view of Mosheh is anything but smooth - why describe it in such a herky-jerky fashion?

Just before that farewell scene, Mosheh blesses nearly all of the tribes (see our shiur on this blessing in **V'shinantam** 4/51). His blessing to Dan reads:

And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's cub; he shall leap from Bashan. (33:22).

(As to why Dan is suddenly described as a lion - traditionally associated with Yehudah - we will devote a shiur to that later in the year when assaying the career of Shimshon).

The land of כוש is in the Golan (see, inter alia, D'varim 4:43). Why is Mosheh blessing Dan in association with this place, so far from their intended territory?

Besides these two questions about Dan, there are several passages in the Torah where we are given names of the 3rd and 4th generations from Ya'akov and their names. Some of these names are curious, as they are name-places in K'na'an:

1. Makhir, Menasheh's eldest, names his first son גלעד. גלעד is the name of the mountain range on the East Bank of the Jordan and, generically, ארץ הגלעד refers to the land north of the Yabbok river. The name גלעד is well known from B'resheet, as that is the place where Ya'akov and Lavan have their fateful meeting and covenant ceremony (31:21,23,47-53 - note Ya'akov's clever pun in v. 47).
2. Another of Menasheh's sons is named עיס (Yehoshua 17:2).
3. Another of Menasheh's sons is named חפר (ibid.) - חפר is the name of one of the thirty-one city states conquered by Yehoshua (Yehoshua 12:17)
4. This same חפר has a granddaughter named תרצה (Bamidbar 26:33) - yet another of the city-states conquered in the Yehoshuan wars (Yehoshua 12:24).
5. Yissachar names one of his sons שמרון (B'resheet 46:13) - Shimron is one more city-state (Yehoshua 11:1).

The mystery deepens once we realize that these children - all born on Egyptian soil - carry names of locations that ended up in the territory conquered by their tribe. The "eastern half" of Menasheh basically settled the land of Gil'ad. The city of עיס falls in Ephraim's territory, very close to the border with Menasheh. חפר and תרצה are both city-states that fall within Menasheh's land. שמרון ends up in Zevulun's territory, just inside the border with Yissachar.

How are we to understand these odd phenomena? We cannot posit that the towns were named after the people, since both textual evidence and, in some cases, extra-textual evidence, indicates that the names used predated the conquest - and, most likely, the birth of these children.

Why did Menasheh's family members give these names to their descendants? Why did Yissachar name his son - born still in K'na'an before the famine - Shimron, a city that would fall a few kilometers outside of his boundaries?

III TWO TRIBES - OR TWO AND A HALF?

We have one more Parashah to peruse; our analysis takes us next to Bamidbar 32. In that chapter, recording the events which took place after B'nei Yisra'el soundly defeated Sichon and Og, the two Emorite chieftains on the East Bank. Subsequent to that victory, there is an intense and detailed negotiation between Mosheh and the two and a half tribes who wish to remain in ג'ליעד. Except that that is not exactly the case - only Re'uven and Gad approach Mosheh, although half of Menasheh is included, later on, in the story. Note these selection, all from Bamidbar 32:

And the sons of Reuven and the sons of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle; and...the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuven came and spoke to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and to the princes of the congregation, saying...if we have found grace in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession, and bring us not over the Yarden. And Moses said to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuven, Shall your brothers go to war, and shall you sit here? (vv. 1-6)

And Mosheh said to them, If the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuven will pass with you over Yarden, every man armed to battle...then you shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession; but if they will not pass over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of K'na'an. And the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuven answered, saying...We will pass over armed before Hashem into the land of K'na'an, that the possession of our inheritance on this side of the Yarden may be ours. And Mosheh gave to them, to the sons of Gad, and to the sons of Reuven, and to half the tribe of Menasheh the son of Yoseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with its cities in the borders, even the cities of the country around. (vv. 29-33)

How did the tribe of Menasheh get involved here? They made no request of Mosheh or the elders; they were not accused by Mosheh nor did they negotiate with him regarding their status as vanguards.

IV THE EARLY DIVISION

As we pointed out in an earlier essa, the B'rit Bein haB'tarim of which we read this week is ambiguous on several fronts, including the timing of its fulfillment.

Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik, זצ"ל, offers this insight into Ya'akov's sojourn in Aram:

Avraham was promised that his

seed would be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and they will be servants and oppressed for four hundred years. And the nation which they serve will I judge, and after they will leave with great possessions...and the fourth generation will return here... (Beresheet 15:13-16)

Upon examination of the terms of this promise, we find that they all fit with Ya'akov's exile in Aram. He was:

- 1) a stranger in a foreign land (Aram);
- 2) he was worked and oppressed for a long time (Beresheet 31:6-8; 38-41), which is Biblically expressed as four hundred years (see Sarna: Understanding Genesis, p. 83, note 17; even in the eventual realization of this promise, the four-hundred-years oppression was not realized);
- 3) Ya'akov returned with great wealth, as can be seen from the gift he sent to Esav (Beresheet 32:14-15), and
- 4) the return of the fourth generation is eerily mirrored by Ya'akov's response to the birth of Yosef: *And when Rachel gave birth to Yosef, Ya'akov said to Lavan: Send me, that I may go to my place and my land. (Beresheet 30:25)*

Ya'akov's reaction indicates that he thought that his mission in Aram was achieved with the birth of a son to Rachel, his beloved; and that son was the fourth generation to Avraham. Following Rabbi Solovetichik's explanation, Ya'akov would have thought that the exile/return condition of the covenant had been fulfilled; no further exile need occur.

That being the case, it stands to reason that the children of Ya'akov, once they had returned to the Land, began dividing it up (once they reached maturity). In an earlier shiur, I supported this thesis by pointing to the brothers' shepherding of father Ya'akov's flock about 60 miles away from his home in Hevron, Re'uven's disappearance from the brothers during the discussions about Yoseph and Yehudah's development of business relations in Timnah (all of this is found in chapters 37-38 of B'eresheet).

Before going further, we can provide a clear and reasonable explanation to the enigmatic and troubling verse in Devarim (2:12):

Moreover, the Horim had formerly inhabited Se'ir, but the descendants of Esav dispossessed them, destroying them and settling in their place, as Yisra'el has done in the land that Hashem gave them as a possession. (note the mention of Esav, Ya'akov's brother).

This verse, like B'eresheet 14:14, is one of those "banner-verses" with which the critics bolster their theory of late composition - after all, how is Mosheh illustrating Esav's conquest of Se'ir by

comparing it to an as-yet uncompleted conquest?

The first conquest of the Land which G-d gave us was initiated not by Yisra'el the Nation - but by Yisra'el the man (Ya'akov). During the life of Ya'akov, he and his children began purchasing and/or conquering land in Eretz K'na'an in order to fulfill the promise given to their family. Moshe's illustration is indeed one from a familiar past - and is therefore instructive and enlightening.

The brothers began dividing up the land - and, at least in the case of Yehudah, they were settling into their future territory (Timnah, the location of Yehudah's interaction, is included among the cities of Yehudah [Yehoshua 15:57]). It stands to reason, then, that the brothers, knowing full well that G-d would eventually grant them (or their children) the land, divided it up along general lines.

V

THE IDEAL APPORTIONMENT

Before putting all of this information together, a quick look at Ya'akov's death-bed scenes (including the blessing to Yoseph in the presence of Menasheh and Ephraim) will give us an additional perspective on the argument.

In blessing Yoseph, Ya'akov concludes with an odd phrase:

*And I have given to you one **עֵסֶב** above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow. (48:22).*

However we may translate **עֵסֶב** (the conventional understanding is "portion", referring to the extra portion given to Yoseph as the **בְּכוֹר**), the use of this word is a clear allusion to the city of **עֵסֶב** - which is not only to be Yoseph's burial site, but also sits right at the border of the territory of his two sons.

In his blessing to Yehudah, Ya'akov states:

...Binding his foal to the vine, and his ass's colt to the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes; his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk. (49:11-12)

In his blessing to Zevulun, Ya'akov says:

Zevulun shall live at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be to Sidon. (v. 13)

Regarding Asher, the blessing is:

Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dain-

ties. (v. 20)

These blessings refer to (at least by allusion) geographic areas. The finest area for vineyards in the Land is in the mountains of Hebron, in the middle of Yehudah's territory. Zevulun is given land by the sea and Asher is blessed with rich and royal produce, belonging to the northern coast.

In sum, not only did the sons divide up the land, their father affirmed their division in his final words.

[Regarding the "lottery" via which the land was divided, it is quite clear both from the relevant passages in Yehoshua and from the tradition of Haza"l that the purpose of the lottery was not to determine the location of each tribe's territory but to provide Divine affirmation for that apportionment. Cf. BT Bava Batra 122a]

VI

NAMES AND PLACES

We now understand why Menasheh's son, born (2nd generation) in Egypt, named his first-born **גִּלְעָד**. Those beautiful mountains were always intended to be given to Yoseph's two sons; evidently they divided his broad territory while in Egypt and Menasheh received **גִּלְעָד**. This explains why names such as **עֵסֶב**, **חֶסֶר**, **תְּרֵזָה** and **עֵסֶב** are given in the Menashite family - and why Yissachar names a son **עֵסֶב**. These were all ancient city-states that existed at the time of Ya'akov's years of fatherhood in the land - places which were destined to belong to the respective tribe.

We also understand the anomaly in Bamidbar 32, in which Re'uvben and Gad approach and negotiate with Mosheh, who then gives them land along with half of Menasheh. That half of Menasheh was always destined to inherit that part of the land - which extends deep into the Golan (see Bamidbar 34:11). They were given the land along with Re'uvben and Gad because it was as a result of the wars with Sichon and Og that any of the East Bank became apportionable - but, unlike the request of the two tribes, that half of Menasheh did not desire anything outside of the territory always intended for them.

VII

RETURN TO DAN

We have solved some of our ancillary problems - but, from the theory presented so far, we haven't yet explained the Dan phenomenon. According to what we've presented so far, we would expect there to be Danites with names like **יִפְתָּח** and **יִפְתָּח** (which we don't find).

Professor Elitzur suggests that at this point we have to rethink the implications of Bamidbar 32. Since Re'uven and Gad requested land on the East Bank - land to which they were not rightfully entitled - that means that they had some land waiting for them on the West Bank. Once they completed their settlement with Mosheh, that land had to be redivided. We have no idea where they were meant to settle, but it is reasonable to posit that as a result of their new territory, Dan (one of the few tribes about whom we have no geographical hints in Ya'akov's blessing) was moved to the south-central coast.

When Dan was unsuccessful in conquering their "new" territory, their next move was to scout out their old home, up in the north. When they found that Naphtali (or Menasheh) had not conquered this town, they took it themselves and (re)named it Dan. In other words, the city had always been known as Dan within the family - but now that they conquered it, they gave it the formal name in honor of their eponymous father. This is alluded to in Mosheh's blessing:

And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's cub; he shall leap from Bashan.

Dan is compared to a lion - and **לִישׁ**, the (temporary) name of that town, is another word for lion. Mosheh is blessing Dan that they should somehow return to their ancestral home.

Once we understand that the northern town had always been known as Dan within the nation - even if it didn't have that formal name (much as we always referred to Palestine as "Eretz Yisra'el" even when that wasn't the internationally recognized name for our Land) - the reference to Dan as a landmark in Avraham's pursuit is most reasonable and to be expected. Standing at Sinai, we all knew exactly where the town "Dan" had been for generations and it made perfect sense to us.

