

JUDGES 17-21 DAN'S OTHER TERRITORY; BATTLE WITH BENJAMITES

With this study, we finish analyzing the book of Judges. Samson was the last judge, and now, before ending the book, the author, probably the prophet Samuel, gives us a glimpse of the moral decay in Israel because of the lack of a central authority to rule and protect them. We also learn what happened to Samson's tribe of Dan, and how some of it ended up in the extreme northern part of the country.

The Believer's Bible Commentary explains, "This last section of Judges is almost like an appendix to the book. As far as *time* is concerned, chapters 17–21 do not advance the narrative. Rather, they give frightening glimpses of the low religious, moral, and political state to which Israel had sunk during the period of the judges. The little book of Ruth [which follows] likewise does not advance the history of the judges in time but, by way of contrast, does give a charming glimpse of the godly remnant during this dark era in Hebrew history."

Judges 17:6 describes the situation of not having any organized rule, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." *The JFB Commentary* states, "From want of a settled government, there was no one to call anyone to account. No punishment followed any crime."

Chapters 17 and 18 deal with the religious corruption in Israel and the migrations of the tribe of Dan to the north. It begins with Micah, an Ephramite, who builds a religious shrine with idols and names his son as a priest—both acts contrary to God's law. Then he also hires a Levite to take care of his shrine.

Meanwhile, the Danites are searching for a larger territory to live. "In those days, the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them" (Judges 18:1).

Why had this happened? *The JFB Commentary* explains, "The Danites had a territory assigned to them as well as the other tribes. But either through indolence, or a lack of energy, they did not acquire the full possession of their allotment, but suffered a considerable portion of it to be wrested out of their hands by the encroachments of their powerful neighbors, the Philistines. In consequence, being pressed for room, a considerable number resolved on trying to establish a new and additional settlement in a remote part of the land."

So they sent five men to search for a more spacious land. As they headed north, they stayed at Micah's home and received a blessing from the Levite. Then they headed far north and found a suitable place. The Bible says, "So the five men departed and went to Laish. They saw the people who were there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. There were no rulers in the land who might put them to shame for anything. They were far from the Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone."

Then, the five men return to their land and muster up a force of 600 men to invade that territory. On their way north, they visit Micah and entice the Levite to become their priest. They also steal the costly idols in the shrine. They then conquer this Canaanite bastion and bring many of their Danite relatives to settle down. From now on the tribe of Dan would be situated in two places. As was characteristic of the tribe of Dan, they changed the name of the place to Dan—and it is no coincidence.

We read in Mr. Herbert Armstrong's *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*, "In Genesis 49:17, Jacob, foretelling what should befall each of the tribes, says: 'Dan shall be a serpent by the way.' [*J.P. Green's Literal Translation of the Bible*] says the original Hebrew is: 'Dan shall be a serpent's trail.' It is a significant fact that the tribe of Dan, one of the Ten Tribes, named every place they went after their father Dan.

"The tribe of Dan originally occupied a strip of coast country on the Mediterranean, west of Jerusalem. 'And the coast of the children of Dan,' we read in Joshua 19:47, 'went out too little for them: therefore the children of Dan went up to fight against Leshem, and took it...and called Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their father.' "In Judges 18:11-12, it is recorded that Danites took Kirjath-jearim, and 'called that place Mananeh-Dan unto this day.' A little later the same company of 600 armed Danites came to Laish, captured it, and 'they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father' (verse 29). So notice how these Danites left their 'serpent's trail' by the way—set up waymarks by which they may be traced today.

"In the Hebrew, vowels were not written...Thus the word 'Dan' in its English equivalent could be spelled, simply, 'Dn.' It might be pronounced as

‘Dan,’ or ‘Den,’ or ‘Din,’ or ‘Don,’ or ‘Dun’—and still could be the same original Hebrew name.

“The tribe of Dan occupied two different districts in the Holy Land before the Assyrian captivity. One colony lived on the seacoast of Palestine. They were principally seamen, and it is recorded Dan abode in ships (Judges 5:17). When Assyria captured Israel, these Danites struck out in their ships and sailed west through the Mediterranean and north to Ireland. Just before his death, Moses prophesied of Dan: ‘Dan is a lion’s whelp: he shall leap from Bashan’ (Deut. 33:22). Along the shores of the Mediterranean they left their trail in ‘Den,’ ‘Don,’ and ‘Din.’

“Irish annals and history show that the new settlers of Ireland, at just this time, were the ‘Tuatha de Danaans,’ which means, translated, ‘Tribe of Dan.’...And in Ireland we find they left these ‘waymarks’: *Dans*-Laugh, *Dan*-Sower, *Dun*-dalk, *Dun*-gloe, *Din*-gle, *Dunsmor* (meaning ‘more Dans’). Moreover, the name Dunn in the Irish language means the same as Dan in the Hebrew: judge.

“But the northern colony of Danites was taken to Assyria in the captivity, and thence with the rest of the Ten Tribes they traveled from Assyria by the overland route. “After leaving Assyrian captivity, they inhabited for some time the land just west of the Black Sea. There we find the rivers *Dnieper*, *Dniester*, and the *Don*. Then, in either ancient or later geography, we find these waymarks: *Dan*-au, the *Dan*-inn, the *Dan*-aster, the *Dan*-dari, the *Dan*-ez, the *Dan*, and the *U-don*; the *Eri-don*, down to the *Danes*. *Denmark* means ‘Dan’s mark.’

“When they came to the British Isles, they set up the ‘waymark’ names of *Dun*-dee, *Dun*-raven; in Scotland the ‘Dans,’ ‘Dons’ and ‘Duns’ are as prolific as in Ireland. And so the ‘serpent’s trail’ of Dan sets up waymarks that lead directly to the British Isles!” (1980, pp. 97-99).

Now, back to the final three chapters of Judges. This is the account of how the tribe of Benjamin was decimated by a civil war. It all had to do with a town of Benjamin, Gibeah, that had become so corrupt it was allowing rampant homosexuality.

A Levite from the land of Ephraim had a concubine who left him after she had committed adultery. She had fled to the Judean town of Bethlehem where her parents lived. After four months, the Levite missed her and went after her. He was warmly received at her parent’s home. After five days of excessive hospitality, he was desperate to

leave but left late in the afternoon. “When the time comes for a guest to depart,” says Fred Wight, “a host will do his best to delay the departure. He will beg him to stay for one more meal, or to wait until the morrow before he leaves. In Judges 19 is the finest example in the Bible of this custom of delaying the guest” (*Manners and Customs of the Bible Land*).

As they neared Jerusalem, then called Jebus since it was still in Canaanite hands, his servant asked if they could stay there. The Levite refused and said they would go north to Gibeah, a Benjamite city. Although it was dark, they waited in the town square for someone to invite them to their home. Finally, an old man originally from Ephraim did take them in.

The Bible says, “So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank” (Judges 19:21).

Next, something occurs similar to what Lot and the two angels suffered in Sodom. “As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, ‘Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!’ But the man...went out to them and said to them, ‘No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage. Look, here is my virgin daughter and the man’s concubine: let me bring them out now. Humble them, and do with them as you please; but to this man do not do such a vile thing!’ But the men would not heed him. So the man took his concubine and brought her out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until morning; and when the day began to break, they let her go” (19:22-25).

Why did the old man prefer to offer up his virgin daughter and the Levite, his concubine? *The KJB Commentary* explains, “There can be no doubt in the comparison between this incident and that of Genesis 19 that homosexuality was considered the worst possible sin of sexual violation. That the Levite and his host would sexually offer the women to the men in place of a homosexual relationship was certainly not a godly choice. Either sexual sin is equally wrong; however, the reaction of these spiritually impoverished people shows that even in a time when sexual immorality was prevalent, homosexuality was still regarded as the worst possible form of sexual abuse!” Also, one has to understand the customs in those days about the sacredness of hospitality.

Fred Wight explains, “An Eastern proverb says: ‘The guest while in the house is its lord.’ This is a true statement of the spirit of the hospitality of the East...and this is the same attitude between host and guest in the days of Lot. *The host was considered to be a servant, and the guest was lord.* Thus Lot spoke of himself and his guests: “Behold now, *my lords*, turn in, I pray you, into your *servant's* house” (Gen. 19:2)... In the lands of the East, when a host accepts a man to be his guest he thereby agrees *at whatever the cost* to defend his guest from all possible enemies during the time of his entertainment.”

Unfortunately, the concubine died afterwards from the abuse, and the Levite was so outraged at the perversity going on, he cut her up in 12 pieces and sent them to all the 12 tribes. *Nelson's Bible Manners and Customs* explains, “It is hard for us to understand all this and to excuse the Levite, but the point here at the moment is to comment on the inviolability of hospitality and to explain how the civil war erupted in Israel when the people of Gibeah refused to surrender the murderers. The whole tribe of Benjamin actually went to war to defend the ‘sons of Belial [the Devil]’ of Gibeah in a day when ‘every man did that which was right in his own eyes.’”

The Bible continues, “And so it was that all who saw it said, ‘No such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, confer, and speak up!’ So all the children of Israel came out from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, and the congregation gathered together as one man before the Lord at Mizpah” (19:30-31).

There, they heard the Levite's testimony of what happened and the perversity of some of the men from Gibeah of Benjamin. They then determined to punish these perverts and sent envoys to Benjamin.

The Bible mentions, “Then the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, ‘What is this wickedness that has occurred among you? Now therefore, deliver up the men, the perverted men who are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove the evil from Israel!’ But the children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren, the children of Israel. Instead, *the children of Benjamin* gathered together from their cities to Gibeah, to go to battle against the children of Israel” (Judges 20:12-13).

The battle seemed very unequal. Benjamin only mustered a force of 26,700 men against the rest of

Israel, who had 400,000. That is an Israelite advantage of 15 to one! Yet, the Bible says the Benjamites had an elite fighting force of 700 sharpshooters with slings. “Seven hundred select men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss” (Judges 20:16). These lefties, as in baseball, had an advantage since their shots would come from unaccustomed angles.

This sling was the same weapon David would later use to slay Goliath. The *Tyndale OT Commentary* says, “The sling, which was employed with a left-handed motion...was a formidable weapon of war used in the Assyrian, Egyptian and Babylonian armies as well as in Israel.... It has been estimated that stones weighing up to one pound could be projected with uncanny accuracy at speeds up to 90 m.p.h.!” They were accurate up to 200 yards.

With such marksmen, the Benjamites actually won the first two battles, slaying 40,000 Israelites. But with God's backing, in the next battle, the Israelites used an ambush and virtually wiped out the Benjamites, leaving only 600 alive. Later, they deeply regretted the situation when then realized one of the tribes of Israel was about to become extinct.

Since they had vowed not to give the surviving Benjamites any of their daughters, they found out those of Jabesh Gilead had not come to help them, and as punishment, they attacked the city and left 400 virgins alive so they could be given to the Benjamites. They still needed 200 virgins and thus allowed the 200 Benjamites to rapture them at a harvest festival. In this way, the tribe of Benjamin survived and multiplied. That is very fortunate, because from this tribe came the first king of Israel, Saul, and later, the illustrious apostle Paul.

The book of Judges ends with the ominous words, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” This is a lesson for those who think they can live independently, without any organized rule—whether as a nation, or as a church.