



"AL HAPEREK"

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Shoftim Perakim 17-18

The story of Micha and his mother, the story of the young Levite, and the men from the tribe of Dan seeking a new inheritance all meet at the new temple of foreign worship located in the city of Dan.

General Overview < "וַיִּקְרְאוּ בְּסֵפֶר בְּתוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים"

Perek 17

- ❶ The pasuk *"In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes"* is repeated four times in perakim 17-21 (17:6, 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). How does each location of this expression link these various stories together? How does the repetition contribute to the overall understanding of these stories?
- ❷ In pesukim 2-3, there is a dialogue between Micha and his mother. Some of the verses refer to events that happened in the past (a flashback), while others describe present events. Try to recreate the sequence of events. How does the wording of the pesukim reflect the complicated relationship between this mother and son?
- ❸ The collapse of the leadership in the period of the judges brings about anarchy and a confusion of roles. How is this process demonstrated in pesukim 7-13?

Perek 18

- 4 In pesukim 9-10, the five men describe the area of Laish. Compare their words to those in Yehoshua 18:1-5 and 9-10. How does the comparison of the stories highlight the contrast between them?
- 5 How do the stories of Micha's graven image and the conquest of Laish intersect with one another? How is Micha's sin against his mother redressed by the men of Dan?
- 6 "So they set them up Micah's graven image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh" (18:31). What comparison is implied in this pasuk regarding the two centers of worship?

In-depth Study < "מִפְּרָשׁ וְשׁוֹם שְׁכָל" >

- 7 The question of the time frame of the stories of Micha, the conquest of Laish, and the concubine of Givah ("pilegish ba-Givah") is discussed by various commentators. Rashi, for example, explains that "even though two of these events — that of Micha and that of the concubine of Givah — appear at the end of the book, they occurred at the beginning of the period of the judges, in the days of Otniel ben Kenaz" (commentary on 17:1, "Now there was a man of the hill-country of Ephraim"). On what is this explanation based? What interpretive advantages does it offer?
- 8 "'Do you know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image . . .'" (18:14). Study Shmot 20:3-4 and 32:3-4. Why did the text choose in perakim 17-18 to use the terms "graven image" (פסל) and "molten image" (מסכה)? What criticism is implied about the people in this period?

Appendix < "וַיִּבְנוּ בְּמִקְרָא"

The Bible does not often identify places, not even in the few cases where the ancient name is given. But in describing the conquests of the tribe of Dan, not only does Scripture provide the new name of the place, but it also relates the story behind the changing of the name, explaining why the city name was changed from Laish to Dan: *"They called the city Dan, after the name of Dan their ancestor, who was born in Israel, but Laish was the name of the city first"* (18:29). The name Laish is also known from other sources. For example, Laish is mentioned, among other cities in northern Israel, in the ancient Egyptian Execration texts from the 18th century BCE. In the Canaanite period, Laish was surrounded by a huge embankment that encompassed the entire community. Between the 13th and 14th centuries BCE, the people of Laish had close ties with the cities on the Mediterranean coast. This was probably was a period of peace and economic prosperity, when the five spies from the tribe of Dan found a peaceful country, as it is written: *"They went to Laish and saw there a people who were living securely, after the manner of the Sidonians, peaceful and secure, without anyone in the land to put them to shame in anything"* (18:7).

During this period, the settlement was concentrated within a fortified compound. The great embankments must have filled the residents' hearts with excessive confidence, a confidence that worked to their detriment when the tribe of Dan rose against them. The conquest of the city must have been a daring and surprising military operation. A discovered level of ash may indicate the destruction of the city and confirm the words of Scripture *"They came on Laish, upon a quiet and secure people, and they struck them down by the sword, and burned the city"*(18:27). On the ruins of Laish, the people of Dan built a new city. This is the city referred to as Dan and the settlement in which the graven image of Micha was made. Apparently, this settlement did not last long, as it says, *"They accepted upon themselves Micha's graven image that he had made, all the days that the House of God was in Shiloh"* (18:31), meaning, the city of Dan and the graven image that was in it were established only until the destruction of the House of God in Shiloh. We do not know if Dan was destroyed at the same time as Shiloh, but the archaeological findings indicate that there was a fire leading to the destruction of the city in the middle of the 11th century BCE, around the time of the destruction of Shiloh. We can't tell how long the city remained in ruins, but it is clear that over time it had been rebuilt: In the biblical writings that talk about the days of David and Solomon, the city is mentioned several times, and in the days of Yeravam ben Navat, it became a primary city. Yeravam ben Navat placed in Dan one of the two golden calves that he made, changing the city to a central site for ritual worship. An altar framed by stones made in the Israelite period was found on this site. There is reason to believe that this place had already been used for worship in earlier periods.

(Excerpt from an article by Dr. Avraham Biran, archeologist at Tel Dan, **"Laish / Dan - Canaanite City and Israelite City"**, Kadmoniyot 4, volume 13, 1975 p. 2-10.)

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