

Dan, The Pioneer of Israel

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The Tribe of Dan by its enterprise and vigour has made itself one of the most conspicuous branches of Jacob's family. Its ancestor was the son of one of the concubines, and was the firstborn of Rachel's household. "*God hath judged me,*" said Rachel, and she called his name "*Dan,*" which means to *judge*, to *rule*. This word, while perhaps on that occasion first started as a surname, has been perpetuated as a title in the Gothic, Anglo-Saxon, and English. In these languages Din, Dun, Don, and Dan, signify *ruler*, *master*. The expression is repeatedly used by Shakespeare, Spenser, Chaucer, Prior, and others. The Spanish, too, from close contact for ages with the Hebrew, have engrafted it in their title of Don. It is in use in our universities to designate a professor or university official.¹¹¹

How often do we see in the Bible that the name of an individual foreshadows the character and career. Dan's name given by Rachel implies authority and vigour, and Jacob, when bestowing his blessings (Gen. 49:16), repeats and confirms it. "*Dan shall judge his people,*" said the venerable patriarch, and proceeded to name other characteristics implying great wisdom and astuteness. The serpent is the Scripture symbol of wisdom. (Gen. 3:1; Matt. 10:16) In dealing with foes his plans would be laid with wisdom and secrecy, and his action would be unlooked for and rapid.

"*I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord,*" is the ejaculation of Jacob as he concluded his blessing to Dan. What was in the patriarch's mind? Did a vision of Dan's future career pass in review before him? Did he see the pioneers of Israel by land and sea carrying on their enterprise and explorations, trading among the Grecian Islands into the Black Sea, up the various rivers, crossing Asia Minor, exploring Europe, scouring the Mediterranean, on into the broad Atlantic, meeting the overland parties at the Baltic, settling in Denmark, and making a secret secure little hiding-place and sanctuary for centuries in Ireland, and other settlements in England and Scotland? And did the patriarch still see this Tribe in the van leading back to the Land of Promise to take up their first place, the most Northerly, in the day when the Lord shall beat off "*from the channel of the river of Egypt*"? in that day when the Lord shall "*bind up the breach of His people, and heal the stroke of their wound.*"

Shortly after the Israelites left Egypt, the Tribe of Dan numbered of fighting men alone, *"from twenty years old and upwards all that were able to go forth to war, 62,700"* (Num. 1:38, 39); and their very lot that fell to them in the Promised Land was calculated to stir up the inherent spirit. Their lot was on the coast from Ashkelon to Joppa, and it was in the purposes of God *"too little for them"* (Josh. 19:40-47), B.C. 1443. So in a very few years (Judges 18), 600 of them with their families and baggage marched off northward to the spurs of Hermon and conquered a corner of Bashan. With a sort of *esprit de corps* and veneration for their ancestor, which marked the whole career of this Tribe, they called the name of their new conquest *"Dan, after the name of Dan their father."* (ver. 29) It bears the impress of their determination to assert themselves, and to verify their name to *rule* and be *masters*.

Much was probably done in the following years, but the Scriptures were written with one object, and hence, matter irrelevant to that object finds no place. Yet it came within the purpose of God to tell us that about B.C. 1285 (Judges 5:17) Dan had ships and got on board them when an invasion threatened; and, as for many years previous to this, Israel had been for long intervals under the yoke of Jabin, King of Canaan, of the King of Moab, the King of Mesopotamia, and of the Philistines. Dan must have been paying some attention to nautical matters, and the love of enterprise and freedom had probably considerably reduced the numbers left behind, who, unable then to cope with their enemies, finally thought it more prudent to follow. Certain it is that the Tribe of Dan entirely disappeared from Palestine. In I Chron. 4-6, which were written after the Babylonish captivity, Dan, as well as Zebulun and Asher, also coast Tribes, are omitted from the genealogies. Alford, on Rev. 7, quotes several writers as believing that Dan became *"as good as extinct."* Grotius quotes a Jewish tradition that this Tribe was early reduced to one family, named Huss, which is known to have perished in the wars before the time of Ezra. Eldad, a Jewish writer in the 14th or 9th century, writing to the Spanish Jews, saying that "in Jeroboam's time (B.C. 975) the Tribe of Dan, being unwilling to shed their brethren's blood, took a resolution of leaving their country."^[1]

Whatever became of them, therefore, they disappeared from Palestine entirely. But, that it was not an *extinction*, we know from the fact that it is recorded in Ezek. 48, that in the final division of the land, which has not yet taken place, Dan comes in for his share at the head of the list.

The Old Testament, having put us in this position, gives us one clue where to look for the lost, and then leaves it. The New Testament, to my mind, furnishes another clue as to their whereabouts at a later period, by omitting the Tribe altogether from the sealing of the 144,000. (Rev. 7)

The Old Testament clue is as follows: Ezekiel (27:17-19), writing circ. B.C. 588 against Tyre and pronouncing her doom, says, "*Judah and the land of Israel*" (not the Israelites themselves *who were then in captivity*, but such inhabitants as were there) "*were thy merchants. ... Dan also and Javan going to and fro occupied in thy fairs.*" Now in three places in Daniel, where Alexander the Great is distinctly indicated, and one in Zechariah, Javan is translated "*Greece*"; Josephus also (i. Vi. 1) mentions Javan as being *Greece*. Hence Dan is indicated as in company with *Greece* trading with Tyre.

The Danites and the men of Tyre were naturally on very intimate terms. It was a very remarkable privilege to be accorded to a foreign nation – if foreign – to be allowed to help in building Solomon's Temple. The Danites and the people of Tyre intermarried; the cunning craftsman especially sent by Hiram to superintend the work of the Temple was the son of a man of Tyre, and his mother was of the daughters of Dan. (II Chron. 2:14)

Now it is necessary to bear in mind this intimate connection recorded in the Bible of the Phoenicians with Israel, especially with Dan. We must remember the numerical strength of this Tribe alone, 62,700 fighting men (*i.e.* neither old men nor boys), shortly after their leaving Egypt. (Num. 2:25, 26) We must consider the schooling they had had with the then most advanced nation in the world in literature and science. Moses "*was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians*" (Acts 7:22); and, beyond all this, we must remember God's promises concerning Israel. The seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would not be likely to collapse and wither when in contact with other races! We must bear all this in mind because we find Grecian, Irish, Scandinavian, and English histories teeming with notices of a certain race called Danai, or Dannaans, or Dannonii, who are either called Phoenicians, or mentioned in company with Phoenicians. Almost wherever Phoenicians are said to have traded, there we either hear of these Danai, or we find a river or district

stamped with the name of Dan according to the early custom recorded of that Tribe in the Scriptures.

In a lecture delivered to Jewish working men and their families at the Jews' Infant School on May 23rd, 1875, the Rev. A. L. Green stated as follows (*Jewish Chronicle*, May 28th, 1875):

"Our forefathers in their happiest times, in the golden age of the nation's glory, were indeed the public carriers of their day, travellers for commercial enterprise to all the then known countries near and far. The ships of Solomon rivalled the Phoenician navy. The ports of Elath and Sziongeber were filled with the ships of Tarshish, which sailed down the Elanitic Gulf of the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, to Ophir, to Sheba, to Arabia Felix, to India and Ceylon, and through the Pillars of Hercules; brought home copper from Cyprus and tin from Spain, possibly from Cornwall. The Talmud is filled with special regulations bearing on the exceptional wants springing from these various avocations. Synagogues were from earliest times attached to special centres of industry and frequented by special traders, and a workman's ritual was specially arranged to suit the artisan, the landsman, and the sefarer. The pursuits of commerce, in its various ramifications, were covered by an admirable code of international law. The laws of agency and insurance and hypothecation were codified. Promissory notes and bills of exchange were formulated even in Mishnaic times."

We may here pause to ask, What has become of this spirit of enterprise and love of adventure, this active, roving, restless spirit? It surely does not exist in the Jews of the present day. What has become of the commercial sailor race which this learned Jewish lecturer describes when speaking of Israel "*in the golden age of the nation's glory*"? It assuredly does not describe the Jews of the present day, but all must admit that it is an admirable description of ourselves!

In the *Manual of Ancient History* (p. 214) I read as follows:

"From the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the fourteenth century B.C., several colonies from Egypt, Phoenicia, and Phrygia settled in

different parts of Greece, bringing with them the improvements in the arts and sciences that had been made in their respective countries. A Phoenician colony under Cadmus settled in Boeotia; he was the first who introduced the use of letters into Greece ... Phoenicians were at this period the *undisputed masters* of the Aegean.” . 86 – “Cyprus was not only a colony, but a province of the Tyrians. ... From Cyprus they extended their settlements to Crete, thence they proceeded to Africa, Sicily, and Sardinia. ... The Spanish peninsula – called in Scripture Tarshish – was the country with which the Tyrians had the most lucrative trade; and the colonies they established soon became independent States. Colonies were also planted beyond the Straits of Gibraltar. Trade was extended to the British Islands and to the coasts of the North Sea. It is known that the Phoenicians preceded the Greeks in forming commercial establishments along the coasts of Asia Minor and the shores of the Black Sea. ... In the Eastern seas they had establishments on the Persian and Arabian Gulfs.”

Now let us track Dan’s footprints by this Phoenician light, and we shall find that almost wherever the Phoenicians have been, there, or in close proximity, on the name of some place, river, or province, the name of Dan is imprinted, as they did in their earliest independent conquest in Palestine. We have, then, on the Red Sea, *Don-gola*; ^[iii] in Greece, *Caly-don*, a river of Attica (*Strabo*), the *Eri-dan*; *Make-don*; the *Danube*, *Danastris* (now Dniester), *Danapris* (now Dnieper) og *Don*.

Before speaking of the people of Greece, and of the Colchians in the eastern corner of the Black Sea, we will take the probable route of an exploring overland party up the Danube to its source in the mountains of Switzerland, and there pick up another river, the *Rho-dan* (now the Rhone), down to the sea to the ancient so-called Phoenician town of Massilia, now Marseilles, and thence across to *Sar-din-ia*. Back again into Switzerland we pick up the *Eri-dan* (now the Po), flowing eastward through Venetia to the Adriatic. While in Venetia I would call to your attention to the following: We may infer from Ezek. 28:12-16, that Tyre had as one of her symbols or cognizances some cherubic device. The King of Tyre, in apparently a taunting message, is called “*the anointed cherub,*” and “*the covering cherub,*” and we find a winged lion the cognizance of Venice. Again, Tyre, the capital of *Phoenicia*, was the

proud merchant city of ancient times, and Venice, the capital of *Venetia*, held the same grand position in the middle ages. Is there not in addition some clear connection between *Venetia* and *Phoenicia*?

From *Venetia* we will return to the *Dan-astris* (*Dniester*), follow it to its source, where we pick up the *Vistula*, at the mouth of which is *Dan-zig* on the shores of the *Co-dan* Gulf (now the *Baltic*), across to *Dannemora*, opposite the Gulf of Finland, down the *Baltic* to *Dannemerk*, the country of our beloved Princess; across the North Sea to the *Humber*, where we find the river *Don*, and go south to *Don-caster*. Then we find a whole country *Dannonia*, now *Devonshire*, and from thence we may cross to that undisputed head-quarters of the *Dannaans*, the North of Ireland, anciently called *Scotia*, where we find an immense percentage not only of the names of places, but of the popular surnames with the prefix *Don*: *Dundalk*, *Donegal* and *Donaghadee*. This last place, if not the earliest, is one of the earliest reputed settlements of the *Tuath de Dannan*: it had a sound remarkably Hebrew, and transliterated becomes **דנהגד** *Danhaghedee*, "Dan my witness." From ancient *Scotia* we pass over to modern *Scotia*, or *Cale-don-ia*, whose namesake we had in Greece. Here, among a host of others, we have *Dumfries*, *Dumbarton* (in these the letter *n* becomes *m* before the labial), *Dundee*, and *Aberdeen* (mouth of the *Don*), and the river *Don*.