

# TRIBE OF DAN

---

## CULTURAL INSIGHT

The tribe of Dan was the Israelite tribe that claimed descent from Jacob through Dan, the son of Bilhah, who was Rachel's slave. The name Dan means "judge" (see Genesis 30:6). In the book of Joshua, the tribe of Dan's original land inheritance was next to that of Judah and Ephraim on the border of the Philistine territories (see Joshua 19:40–46). However, according to the Bible, this inheritance was not sufficiently large (perhaps because it was close to the territory of the aggressive Philistines), so the tribe conquered a territory in the far north end of the Holy Land (see Joshua 19:47; Judges 18). Generally speaking, when the Bible refers to the lands of Dan, it refers to this site in the north.

Although it was not a major tribe like Judah or Ephraim, the tribe of Dan produced a number of individuals who are prominent in the biblical narrative. Aholiab, one of the lead artisans in the production of the tent shrine (called the tabernacle in the King James Version) came from the tribe of Dan (Exodus 31:6). Samson, the Israelite judge famous for his long hair and wild ways, also came from the tribe of Dan (Judges 13:2). Samson was from Zorah (Judges 13:2), which was a city on the border of the inheritance of Judah and the original inheritance of Dan.

Jacob's blessing to Dan in Genesis 49:16–17 contains a wordplay on Dan's name, characterizing him as a judge. This judgment seems to be associated with swift and silent justice: the blessing describes Dan as a poisonous snake who attacks along the road. Perhaps similarly, he is described as a lion cub in Moses's blessing on the tribes in Deuteronomy 33:22. In biblical interpretation, Dan is associated with swift justice for the enemies of Israel, especially as exemplified by Samson. This may be why in the early days of the Latter-day Saint restoration, Sampson Avard's paramilitary group, which Avard formed in response to the Missouri persecution, was known as the Danites.

According to later Jewish interpretive tradition, the stones in the high priest's breastplate each represented a tribe. This was then connected with a flag that had a specific color and symbol. The stone associated with the tribe of Dan was jacinth. The flag was a sapphire blue, and the device was a snake, deriving from Genesis 49:16.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Related verses***

Genesis 49:16–17

Exodus 1:4

Exodus 31:6

Exodus 35:34

Leviticus 24:11

Numbers 2:25

Numbers 10:25

Deuteronomy 33:22

Joshua 19:40–48

Judges 1:34

Judges 13:2

Judges 18

2 Chronicles 2:14

Ezekiel 48:32

### **Credits**

***Author:*** Avram R. Shannon

***General Editor:*** Taylor Halverson

***Associate Editor:*** Morgan Tanner

***Senior Editor:*** Sarah Whitney Johnson

***Assistant Editor:*** Verlanne Johnson

***ScripturePlus Design:*** Jasmin Gimenez Rappleeye

---

<sup>1</sup> Numbers Rabbah 2:7, in Judah J. Slotki, *Numbers Rabbah I* (London, England: Soncino Press, 1939), 29.