

Tel Dan — Historical and Archaeological Overview (Merged Recording)

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SITE OVERVIEW

Location: Tel Dan (ancient name: Laish, later renamed Dan) — northern Israel

Date of Visit: Not explicitly stated; content creation date is 2026-02-25

Biblical References:

- 2 Samuel 20:1, 6
- 2 Samuel 18:4
- 2 Kings 23:8
- Judges 3:15
- Judges 19:15
- Judges 20:16

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Dan marks the northernmost boundary of classical Israel, with Beersheba serving as the southernmost boundary (“from Dan to Beersheba”), as referenced in 2 Samuel 20:1, 6

Sequence of key rulers and events:

- Solomon (10th century B.C.) extends Israel’s boundaries beyond the classical limits
- Upon Solomon’s death, Rehoboam succeeds him; Jeroboam (previously exiled to Egypt) returns and requests to serve under Rehoboam
- Rehoboam refuses acceptable terms; Jeroboam leads the ten northern tribes to break away, forming the northern kingdom of Israel separate from the southern kingdom of Judah (capital: Jerusalem, under Rehoboam)
- To prevent northern Israelites from traveling to Jerusalem for worship, Jeroboam establishes two cultic worship sites: one at Dan (northern extreme) and one at Bethel (southern extreme of his kingdom, bordering Judah)
- Jeroboam installs golden calves at both sites as thrones for Yahweh’s presence, reorganizes the priesthood (removing the high priest role), and creates an alternative religious calendar

- By the 8th century B.C., the site transitions to the era of Omri and Ahab; the city gate visible at the site is attributed to this period

The tribe of Dan was originally allotted the Mediterranean coastal territory but was unable to defeat the Philistines and their chariots; they migrated north, conquered the city of Laish, and renamed it Dan (Dr. Schilling notes this location was not the territory originally designated by God for the tribe)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

City gate at the site is dated to the 8th century B.C. (era of Omri and Ahab)

Gate structure includes:

- Four post-holders for a canopy/tent covering
- A throne seat area (Ahab's throne seat identified at this location)
- An outer plaza/patio area measuring 65 feet by 32.5 feet, referenced against Judges 19:15 ("the square of the city gate")

1993 excavations uncovered the Tel Dan Stele — a stone inscription reading "The House of David, King of Israel", providing extra-biblical confirmation of the historical existence of King David

Prior to this discovery, some scholars had argued David was a legendary, mythological figure invented by the Jewish people — the stele directly refuted this position (Dr. Schilling draws a parallel to the discovery of Pontius Pilate's name on a stone at Caesarea, similarly silencing skeptics)

Golden calves: No physical golden calf has been discovered at Dan (likely looted, possibly by the Syrians); however, a brass calf figurine from Ashkelon, standing 4.5 inches tall, is housed in a museum and will be viewed later — suggests Jeroboam's calves were likely small in scale, not life-size as depicted in films such as *The Ten Commandments* (size interpretation flagged as speculative by Dr. Schilling)

Gate construction design: City gates were intentionally engineered so that approaching soldiers were forced to expose their right side to defenders above — a key military-architectural observation

DR. SCHILLING'S KEY POINTS

Jeroboam's worship sites at Dan and Bethel are described as "cultic" in the technical sense — unauthorized or non-sanctioned sites outside the prescribed worship center of Jerusalem, not permitted under Mosaic law

The golden calves were not objects of worship themselves but were understood as thrones or pedestals upon which Yahweh would be present — a theological parallel to the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem

Jeroboam's religious reforms were politically motivated: the restructuring of priesthood, calendar, and worship sites were designed to sever the northern kingdom's cultural and religious ties to Jerusalem and consolidate royal power

Benjamin's left-handed warriors (Judges 3:15; 20:16): Dr. Schilling proposes that the 700 left-handed Benjaminite soldiers were likely the product of intentional military training (deliberately restricting use of the right hand) rather than genetic predisposition — enabling them to hold shields in the right hand while attacking with the left, thereby negating the defensive advantage of right-hand-biased city gate designs

Noted wordplay: “Benjamin” means “son of the right hand,” yet his tribe produced left-handed warriors (interpretation flagged as Dr. Schilling's own inference)

Correction of common misconception: The golden calf was not life-sized as popularly depicted in film; archaeological analogues suggest it was likely a small figurine

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Dan is the northernmost point of the classical Israelite territory (“from Dan to Beersheba”)

Beersheba (southern boundary) will be visited on the second day at the Dead Sea

Bethel served as the southern boundary of Jeroboam's northern kingdom; once past Bethel, one entered Judah's territory

The original tribal allotment for Dan was along the Mediterranean coast (Philistine territory); the tribe's inability to displace Philistine chariot forces prompted their northern migration to Laish

City gate approach path: the city wall runs to the right of the ascending path; visitors will pass through triple gates, then a second set of gates before transitioning from cobblestone to an earthen path (potentially muddy at time of visit)

Tel Dan is strategically positioned at the northern frontier, making it a natural military and administrative stronghold

QUOTABLE MOMENTS

“So Dan is a, dare I say, hybrid location. It's not the original place that God had planned.”

“The Bible wins again.” — [Speaker 2], upon learning of the Tel Dan Stele discovery confirming David's historicity

“He actually created a different calendar so there wasn't competition between his kingdom and the southern kingdom.”

“Benjamin potentially created left-handers — 700 of them, we're told.”

PERSONAL NOTES

Follow-up: Locate and review the brass calf figurine from Ashkelon at the museum visit — confirm its dimensions and provenance

Follow-up: Research the Tel Dan Stele (discovered 1993) further; confirm scholarly consensus on its authenticity and implications

Question: Dr. Schilling mentions Solomon extending boundaries beyond “Dan to Beersheba” — what were the outer limits of Solomon’s kingdom, and which biblical texts describe this?

Question: What became of Jeroboam’s alternative calendar? Is it documented in extra-biblical sources?

Note: Dr. Schilling’s interpretation of Benjamin’s left-handedness as intentional military training rather than genetics is his own reading — worth cross-referencing with other scholarly literature on this passage