

Tel Dan and the Jordan River

The Consequences of Disobedience Until Faith Overcomes Fear

A few days ago, we considered the disobedience of the tribe of Dan. As God assigned allotments in the Promised Land to the 12 tribes of Israel, Dan was granted seaside real estate on the Mediterranean Sea. However, perceived to be surrounded by more powerful tribes, they complained about their allotment and in disobedience to God, exchanged the territory they were given for what they believed were greener pastures in northern Israel. Today, Tel Dan is a testament to disobedience and the destruction that followed.

Beautiful territory, graced with abundant waters of the Dan Spring flowing from the melted snowcaps of Mt Hermon, it is believed that David may have penned these words along the banks of the Dan:

*42 As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:1-2)*

Unfortunately, the souls of the people of Dan did not pant for God. Instead, out of fear that his people would turn back to Rehoboam (King of Judah, in the south), King Jeroboam (King of Israel in the north) built altars at Bethel and Dan.



30 Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. 31 He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. (1 King 12:30-31)

Fear leads to disobedience, and disobedience to sin. We see evidence of this in places such as Tel Dan, Caesarea Philippi and even Megiddo, where we recently saw an altar of false worship. These acts of disobedience and idolatry ultimately led to destruction and captivity at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BC.

Patterns of disobedience creep into our lives as well. Being a holy sacrifice to God means we avoid conforming to false gods the world has to offer. Instead, we offer ourselves a living sacrifice to the One who created us and knows us best.

12 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)



But let's widen the picture a bit. The Dan is only one of three streams that converge to form the Jordan River. The name *Jordan* means "descending from Dan." The largest of the three, the Dan is joined by the Snir and the Hermon (Baniyas), which we will see at Caesarea Philippi. Other tributaries feed into the Jordan River as it winds its way down from Mt Hermon, into the Sea of Galilee, and finally, into the Dead Sea. There, the Jordan River finds its end, as nothing flows out of the Dead Sea.

Near the southern end of the Jordan River (before it flows into the Dead Sea), we come to the place where John baptized Jesus. Much different than the beauty of the nature preserve surrounding Tel Dan, the southern part of the Jordan River Valley is dry and desolate. The clear streams of Dan, Snir and Banias give way to muddy brown water in the midst of desert landscape. Yet it was here that, as a voice crying in the wilderness, John the Baptist quoted the prophet Isaiah, saying "Prepare the way of the Lord," then boldly announced, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:23, 29)

This is also where Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Camped on the eastern shore, near Mt Nebo where Moses got only a glimpse of the Promised Land before his death, Joshua was given the mantle and was commanded to cross the swollen Jordan River.

¹⁴ So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), ¹⁶ that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam. (Joshua 3:14-16)

At this very place in which the Savior of the world would one day be baptized as a symbol of what we are to do in obedience to Him, He required obedience of a different kind. Can you imagine being a priest, carrying the all-important Ark of the Covenant, and being told to step off into a wide river at flood stage? In contrast to the disobedience of the tribe of Dan, we now see obedience and courage (lack of fear) because of the leadership of Joshua! (No wonder he tells us over and over, "Do not fear!")

By the way, consider the symbolic articles of Israel in the Ark of Covenant:

- Two stone tablets containing the 10 commandments, given because of the sinful nature of people.
- A jar of manna representing the complaining of the Israelites who wanted to return to slavery in Egypt rather than eat what was provided to them during their wilderness escape.
- The budding staff of Aaron, symbolic of the signs and wonders to assure God's people of His faithfulness.

Those articles represented lack of obedience, lack of thankfulness, and lack of faith (fear), but we also see the lengths God will go to redeem us all! Those articles accompanied the Israelites into the Promised Land. So now, let's return to Jesus' baptism in the Jordan.

As John called out, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," the Jewish mind would automatically think of the Passover lamb. In the Jewish sacrificial system, a perfect lamb must be slain, and the blood applied to the doorpost so the angel of death would pass over. So, while Egyptians mourned the death of their first-born, Jewish families who obediently applied the blood of the lamb ultimately escaped bondage and entered the Promised Land. Easy to see why Jesus is our Passover Lamb!

But to begin His ministry, Jesus stepped foot into the Jordan in response to His Father's command. (John 5:19, 30; John 14:31) Jesus was sinless. There was no repentance necessary from Him, and He did not need to be baptized. He was baptized out of obedience to His Father, to be the example for us! In doing so, there is an amazing display of the Godhead.

¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon

Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:16-17)

Indeed, as the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove as God the Father spoke to Jesus, His Son! The Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) made Himself known at that place, in that moment, to empower us all to elevate faith and obedience over fear and disobedience!

From Tel Dan to the lower reaches of the Jordan River, we see contrasts between faith and fear, obedience and disobedience. Joshua, the priests and Jesus Himself demonstrated faith and obedience. The tribe of Dan, not so much!

Where are you today in your walk of faith? As baptized believers in Jesus, we have inherited the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, symbolized by baptism. But in honesty, don't we all have our "tribe of Dan" moments when fear and disobedience threaten to rob us of life itself? Even so, Jesus' example to us confirms that our Father always watches over us and the Holy Spirit renews us with power when we seek it! Our "baptism" is ongoing as we plug into the power of the Holy Spirit!

If power seems lost, leave bondage, fear, slavery and disobedience behind and cross your Jordan! Walk in faith of every promise God has made, and enter your Promised Land!