

Fundamental Issues in the Study of *Tanakh*
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Shiur #03d:

Later Verses in the Torah: The Phenomenon and Its Ramifications (continued)

In the previous *shiur* we raised the question of how certain places mentioned in the Torah are called by names that are only given to them many years after the death of Moshe. The specific example we chose was Avraham's battle against the five kings, in which he is described as pursuing them until Dan ([Bereishit 14:14](#)). Yet the area near Damascus described in *Bereishit* only becomes known as Dan in the days of the Judges, when the tribe of Dan settle there after having failed to conquer the territory in the central coastal region that was allotted to them ([Shoftim 18](#)). Until that point, the city had been called Layish or Leshem.

Spinoza claimed that such examples indicated that the Torah as a whole was written at a much later date than is traditionally assumed. We saw Radak's suggestion that the Torah calls it "Dan" due to prophetic foresight. Many commentators rejected Radak's position and suggested other possibilities for explaining the appearance of the name "Dan," and it is these suggestions that we shall review in this *shiur*. We will understand them as both important methodological considerations for the study of *Tanakh* in their own right, as well as providing compelling alternatives to the conclusions drawn by Spinoza.

1) Radak himself proposed a different possibility: "Or perhaps there was another place which, in those days, was called 'Dan.'"^[1] Indeed, despite the general geographic proximity of the north-eastern region, we have no way of identifying exactly which place is referred to by 'Dan' in the days of Avraham. It is quite possible that the Torah is talking about some place other than the one called 'Dan' during the period of the Judges. It is quite common for different places in Israel to be known by the same name.^[2]

2) Ibn Ezra addresses this problem as part of a discussion that includes other verses as well. In the story of the spies we read, "And they came as far as Wadi Eshkol, and they cut down from there a branch with a cluster of grapes... That place was called Wadi Eshkol on account of the cluster of grapes which Bnei Yisrael cut from there" ([Bamidbar 13:23-24](#)). This seems paradoxical: at first it appears that the spies arrive at a place which is already called "Wadi Eshkol," while afterwards the text seems to indicate that it is only in the wake of their visit, and the grapes that they take from there, that the place is given its name. Ibn Ezra suggests two possible ways of understanding these verses. As a first possibility, he writes, "[these are] the words of Moshe" – meaning that the verse is written from the later perspective of Moshe, while at the point in time when the spies arrived at this place, it did not yet have this name. More important for the purposes of our present discussion is Ibn Ezra's second suggestion: "Perhaps the same possibility exists here as in the verse, 'And he pursued up until Dan'

– as though another name.” The plain meaning of Ibn Ezra’s alternative seems to be that the place (Wadi Eshkol/Dan) had been called by the same name in the past, for a different reason, and the name given as a result of the events recounted in the text simply provide further reason to call the place by that name.^[3]

This, too, is a common occurrence: the names given to places or people in *Tanakh* are not the original reasons for their names, but rather are provided as “*midrash shemot*,” providing new meaning for names that had already existed previously.^[4] Ibn Ezra’s innovation, with regard to our present discussion, is that the name of the city of Dan actually underwent three different stages: at first it was called ‘Dan;’ later the name was changed to ‘Layish’/‘Leshem’, and the descendants of Dan eventually restored the original name, naming the city in memory of their ancestor.^[5]

3) Although Ibn Ezra’s explanation seems quite clear, some commentaries understood from his words cited above that he included this verse, too, within the “secret of the twelve,” and concluded that it, too, represents a later addition to the Torah. In one of the early commentaries written on Ibn Ezra, known as *Ot Nefesh*, the author incorrectly understands Ibn Ezra as suggesting that the verse “he pursued them up until Dan” (as well as the verse concerning Wadi Eshkol) is a later addition, “from the time of the Judges.”

Why does Ibn Ezra himself suggest no such thing, despite the fact that he does in principle recognize the phenomenon of later additions? Once again, it seems that Ibn Ezra is willing to acknowledge later additions only when it comes to fragments that look like digressions, while “he pursued as far as Dan” is integral to the story itself. Nevertheless, one could argue that this verse, too, could have been a later addition, since a close look at the text reveals that, surprisingly enough, the pursuit is actually mentioned twice: “And Avraham heard that his brother had been taken captive... And he pursued as far as Dan. And he divided himself against them by night, he and his servants, and he smote them and pursued them as far as Chova, which is on the left side of Damascus.” The place referred to as “Chova,” to the north (“left”) of Damascus, is mentioned nowhere else in *Tanakh*,^[6] and it is therefore possible that at some later stage an explanatory note was added, indicating that at some stage the pursuit continued as far as Dan – a more familiar location.

4) Rabbi Barukh Epstein, in his *Torah Temima*, raises the possibility that this verse represents an example of a phenomenon that is prevalent elsewhere: “In many places, the manner of the language is such that a letter which occurs at the end of a word also serves as the first letter of the following word, where the word should start with that same letter.”^[7] Here, the text should read, “He pursued up until Dedan” (*va-yirdof ad Dedan*), with Dedan representing the name of the place, named for one of the descendants of Cham, son of Noach ([Bereishit 10:7](#)). Dedan is mentioned in several places in *Tanakh*, such as in the prophecy of [Yirmiyahu \(49:8\)](#) – “Dwell in the depths, O inhabitants of Dedan;” or in the words of [Yechezkel \(27:15\)](#) to the city of Tyre: “The men of Dedan were your merchants.”^[8]

Grintz accepts the identification of the place as Dedan,^[9] but rejects R. Epstein's suggestion that it be identified with the children of Cham, since Dedan is mentioned in several places in juxtaposition with Sheva (for instance, [Yechezkel 38:13](#)), which is in the south. Instead, Grintz proposes viewing Dedan as one of the children of Ketura ([Bereishit 25:3](#)), concerning whom we read (ibid., 6), "And to the children of Avraham's concubines, Avraham gave gifts and sent them away from Yitzchak, his son, while he himself was still alive, eastward, to the land of Kedem." The land of Kedem ("East") is in the region of the Euphrates, as we know *inter alia* from the story of Yaakov's journey to Charan, where we read, "Yaakov lifted his legs and went to the land of the children of the East" (ibid. 29:1), and this place was known from ancient inscriptions, as noted there. Grintz's conclusion is, "In this instance it is clear that Avram and his allies pursued the kings up until the border of the Euphrates; Dedan is therefore the outermost limit of the pursuit. The next verse tells that he fell upon them to return the spoils, but for the sake of the literary flow, the text described first what happened later."

This suggestion is certainly original, but it is somewhat forced, and also requires that we assume that the phenomenon of omission of a letter where it is adjacent to another word starting with the same letter, occurs at least twice more in *Tanakh*.

5) In later generations, additional suggestions were offered,^[10] but it seems that a full solution to this question has been proposed by Yehuda Elitzur.^[11] He bases his explanation on two central points.

First, it is possible to prove that the general division of the land among the tribes was known from the most ancient times – from the time of Yaakov – and would therefore have been known to Moshe as well when he wrote the Torah. In Yaakov's blessings to his sons prior to his death, he mentions geographical areas in relation to some of the tribes. To Zevulun, he says, "Zevulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea, and he shall be a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon" ([Bereishit 49:13](#)). His blessing to Yehuda mentions an inheritance that provides an abundance of wine (ibid., 10). Similarly, Moshe's blessings to the tribes before his death are also partly related to geographical areas recognized for their landmarks, agriculture, etc. For example, "To Binyamin he said, God's beloved shall dwell in safety by Him, He shall cover him all the day long, and He shall dwell between his shoulders" ([Devarim 33:12](#));^[12] "And to Yosef he said, Blessed of God is his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew and for the deep that couches beneath... and from the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the primordial hills" (ibid. 13-15).

Moreover, the Torah talks about the son of Makhir, son of Menashe – "the sons of Yosef by their families: Menashe and Efraim. The children of Menashe: to Makhir – the Makhiri family, and Makhir bore Gil'ad; to Gil'ad – the Gil'adi family" ([Bamidbar 26:28-29](#)). It is difficult to argue that there is no connection between the fact that Menashe's grandson is called Gil'ad, and the fact that the tribe of Menashe ultimately receives their inheritance in the region of Gil'ad: "And Moshe gave the Gil'ad to Makhir, son of Menashe, and he dwelled in it" ([Bamidbar 32:40](#)).^[13] Other

descendants of the family of Menashe were also given names of places which ultimately correspond with places that became part of that tribe's inheritance. Among the sons of Gil'ad we find the following names: "These are the sons of Gil'ad: l'ezer – the l'ezri family... And Shekhem, the Shikhmi family... and Chefer, the Chefri family" ([Bamidbar 26:30-32](#)). "Shekhem" and "Chefer" are names of well-known ancient cities in Eretz Yisrael; the border between Menashe and Efraim ran through Shekhem ([Yehoshua 17:7](#)), and "Chefer" is usually identified (on the basis of [Yehoshua 12:17-18](#)) with the region of Menashe.^[14]

Likewise, it seems to be no coincidence that when Yehuda goes down from his brothers, he wanders about in the Timna region ([Bereishit 38:12](#)), which ultimately became part of his inheritance ([Yehoshua 14:57](#)). Similarly, it is difficult to ignore the connection between Yaakov's words to Yosef – "I have given you one portion (*shekhem echad*) more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Emori, with my sword and with my bow" ([Bereishit 48:22](#)), and the fact that the city of Shekhem ends up within the inheritance of Yosef, between the portions of Menashe and Efraim, as stated above.^[15] It therefore seems clear that the brothers (Yaakov's sons) were themselves aware of the division of the land which their descendants were supposed to carry out.^[16]

Second, this assumption, in and of itself, is not sufficient to answer our question concerning 'Dan,' since it would seem to suggest that the original inheritance of the tribe of Dan was supposed to be in the north when, as mentioned previously, we know that Dan had been supposed to take their portion in the south ([Shoftim 1:34](#)). However, Elitzur argues that the reality was exactly the opposite: the original inheritance of Dan was indeed supposed to be in the north. This may be proved on the basis of two main sources. First, it seems to be hinted to in Moshe's blessing to the tribe of Dan: "Dan is a lion's cub that leaps from Bashan" ([Devarim 33:22](#)), where Moshe speaks to the tribe of Dan as though its inheritance lies in the Bashan area (in the north).^[17] Second, the same conclusion may be arrived at on the basis of the structure of the Israelite camp, as described in *Bamidbar* (chapter 2): according to the layout described in the Torah, the tribes of Yehuda, Yissakhar and Zevulun encamp in the east; Reuven, Shimon and Gad in the south; Efraim, Menashe and Binyamin in the west, and finally – Dan, Asher and Naftali in the north. As we can see,^[18] the layout of the "banners" essentially mirrors the structure of settlement of the land by the tribes:^[19] the tribes whose banners are in the east and the west, are located in the center of the country, while those whose banners are in the south and the north do in fact inherit the land in these respective areas. The tribes of Dan, Asher and Naftali settle in the north, just as their banner in the wilderness was on the northern side of the camp. This, too, serves as an indication that the location of the tribe of Dan in the north was known prior to the inheritance of the land.

Why, then, did Dan not inherit their portion in the north at the outset? It seems that this was the result of certain changes that had occurred since the original plan for the division of the land, as expressed early on, in the words of Moshe, after the tribes of Reuven and Gad relinquish their portion on the western side of the Jordan, requesting instead the land on the eastern side. This helps us understand why ultimately the

inheritance of the land did not reach as far as “the approach to Chamat” ([Bamidbar 34:8](#)): the land was expanded eastward, and therefore there were some northernmost parts that were not conquered and settled. The most prominent amendment to the original plan concerns the portion of Zevulun, which was originally meant to be “at the shore of the sea... and his border at Sidon,” but is ultimately limited to the lower Galilee (see *Yehoshua* 19:10-16, 34). In the wake of these alterations, the tribe of Dan receives its inheritance in the central region – which may originally have been meant for the tribe of Reuven or Gad. However, after the tribe of Dan failed to conquer this region, they moved northward and conquered the original inheritance which had been intended for them since the time of Yaakov and his sons.

In light of this approach, well supported by the plain meaning of the text, there is no room to support an argument for a later authorship of the Torah on the basis of verses such as, “He pursued as far as Dan.” The Torah hints again and again to the fact that the division of the land – including the northern inheritance of the tribe of Dan – existed and was known in general form from ancient times. Therefore, the familiarity of the writer of the Torah with the division of the land, which would only occur later on, cannot serve as proof of later authorship of the Torah, since the division of the land is frequently presented as ancient knowledge.

D. Summary

Over the previous *shiurim* we have seen the following: on the basis of their analysis of the text, *Chazal* discuss the possibility of some verses having been added to the Torah after the death of Moshe. Their discussion concerns the final eight verses of the Torah, but some of the medieval sages – especially Ibn Ezra – continue their line of argument and point to some other verses whose plain meaning raises the possibility that they, too, were added to the Torah after Moshe’s time, by one of the prophets.

We have demonstrated that the thesis of the Bible critics, from Spinoza’s time onwards, which seeks to argue on the basis of individual, exceptional verses that the entire Torah was written later is unproven, and is based on a simplification and misrepresentation of the concept of later additions to the Torah. We have also addressed at length the argument for later authorship based on the mention of places in the Torah whose names were given only after Moshe’s time, and we have offered various possibilities for explaining this phenomenon.

Hence, our analysis of the verses themselves does not support an argument for the later authorship of the Torah.

In the next chapters we will address further claims pertaining to this subject.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

^[1] Y.M. Grintz, *Yichudo ve-Kadmuto shel Sefer Bereishit*, Jerusalem 5743, pp. 69-70, finds support for this possibility in the fact that had the text been speaking about the same place, it should have read, “Dan, which is Layish/Leshem,” in the same way that we find reference, in the same chapter, to other places known by more than one name: “The king of Bela, which is Tzo’ar” (14:2); “the valley of Sidim, which is the Salt Sea” (ibid. 3); “And they returned and they came to Ein Mishpat, which is Kadesh” (ibid. 7); “to the valley of Shaveh, which is the king’s valley” (ibid., 17).

^[2] For example, “Chatzor” is not only the name of a major city in the Galilee ([Yehoshua 11:10](#)), but also the name of a city in the southern part of the inheritance of Yehuda (ibid. 15:25), as well as a place in the northern part of Jerusalem, mentioned in the list of cities of Binyamin in the days of Nechemia (*Nechemia* 11:33). Similarly, the name “Afek” belongs to at least three different cities (mentioned in [Shmuel I 4:1](#) – in the region of Shilo; in [Shoftim 1:31](#) – in the inheritance of Asher; and in *Melakhim I* 20:26 – in the area of the Golan).

^[3] Ibn Ezra offers the same suggestion in a different context where the same sort of textual difficulty arises. Moshe describes for the Children of Israel the location of the mountains of Eval and Gerizim: “Facing Gilgal, which is by Elonei Mamrei” ([Devarim 11:30](#)). How could Moshe call the place Gilgal, if it was given this name only during the time of Yehoshua – “And God said to Yehoshua, This day I have rolled (*galoti*) the reproach of Egypt from upon you. And he called the name of that place Gilgal, to this day” ([Yehoshua 5:9](#))? Once again, Ibn Ezra proposes, “Similar to, ‘And he pursued up until Dan’ – either through prophecy, or as two names.” In other words, the place had been called “Gilgal” previously, and the only new aspect of the name was the new meaning reflected in it.

^[4] We shall suffice here with a well-known example: following the covenant and oath between Avraham and Avimelekh, we read: “Therefore he called that place Be’er Sheva, for there the two of them swore (*nishbe’u*)” ([Bereishit 21:31](#)). However, in Yitzchak’s time a completely different explanation is given for the name: “And it was on that day that the servants of Yitzchak came and told him about the well which they had dug, and they told him, We have found water. And he called it Shiv’a; therefore, the name of the city is Be’er Sheva, to this day” (ibid. 26:32-33). In other words, the place had been known by the same name previously, and the “renaming” was simply a matter of imbuing the existing name with new significance.

^[5] This interpretation is adopted by A. Weiser, in his commentary *Tanakh Meforash on Sefer Bereishit*, Jerusalem 5741. He adds that it was perhaps the fact that the city had originally borne that name, that drew the descendants of Dan to conquer it.

^[6] *Chazal* noted the difficulty of identifying “Chova.” As Rashi comments here, “There is no place that is named ‘Chova.’ Rather, Dan is called Chova (literally, ‘liability’) as an allusion to the idolatrous practices that would be maintained there in the future.” Of course, this explanation brings a whole new difficulty, since the city of Dan lies south-west of Damascus, rather than to the north of it.

^[7] This phenomenon will be discussed at length in the chapter discussing the letter-text (*nusach*) of *Tanakh*.

[8] This exact possibility was suggested by Rabbi Reuven Margalio (1889-1971) in his work *Ha-Mikra ve-ha-Massoret*, Jerusalem 5749, p. 66, noting many other verses which, to his view, reflect the same phenomenon.

[9] See Grintz (above, n. 1), p. 70.

[10] Y. Kiel, in *Da'at Mikra on Sefer Bereishit*, Jerusalem 5757, raises the possibility that the text is referring not to a city called 'Dan' but rather to a region – “the land of Dan” – so called because of its proximity to the sources of the Jordan, and as we find in [Tehillim 42:7](#) – “For I remember You from the land of the Jordan and from the Hermonim.” See Y. Bin-Nun, *Eretz ha-Moriah*, Alon Shevut 5766, p. 17.

[11] In a lecture he delivered in 5741, published in *Al Atar* 4-5, Nissan 5749, pp. 243-249. The essence of the explanation below is based on his words, with slight changes and some additions.

[12] Aside from the allusion to Binyamin's portion as the intended dwelling place for the Divine Presence, the mere mention of “shoulders” in other areas of *Tanakh* already indicates the portion of Binyamin, where “shoulders,” a euphemism for mountains, are prominent in the description of the inheritance and its boundaries – and this term does not appear in relation to the other tribes (other than Yehuda, obviously, in the description of the shared border with Binyamin): “And the border went up to the shoulder of Yericho, to the north... And from there the border shall pass to Luz, to the southern shoulder of Luz, which is Beit El... and the border came down to the end of the mountain that lies before the valley of Ben-Hinnom, to the slope of the Yevusi on the south... and it passed over towards the shoulder that faces the Arava, northward... And the border passed along the shoulder of Beit Chogla, northward” ([Yehoshua 18:12-19](#)).

[13] As Elitzur notes, although in its narrow sense “Gil'ad” refers to the region on the eastern side of the Jordan, to the south of Yarmuk, in the above verse (as in other instances) the expression “Gil'ad” is used to refer to the entire eastern side of the Jordan where much of the tribe of Menashe would eventually settle.

[14] Concerning this connection see B. Mazar, “Chefer,” *Encyclopedia Mikrait* 3, Jerusalem 5725, columns 252-253: “There is certainly a close connection between the city of Chefer and its ‘region,’ and the extensive family of Chefer, descended from the tribe of Menashe.”

[15] Similarly, Yissakhar calls one of his sons “Shimron” ([Bereishit 46:13](#)), and there is a city by this name that is located in the portion of Zevulun ([Yehoshua 19:15](#)), which is adjacent to the portion of Yissakhar.

[16] In keeping with this approach, Elitzur argues that the casting of the lots for the inheritance of the land, at God's command ([Bamidbar 26:52-56](#); 33:54), and its implementation over the course of *Sefer Yehoshua* (14:2; 15:1; 16:1, and elsewhere), is not meant to establish a division *ex nihilo*; instead, it merely confirms the general division that is already known, defining the boundaries more accurately. Support for Elitzur's argument may be found in the fact that the command in the Torah is already formulated in a way which indicates a combination between human agency and the intentions of God. On the one hand, Israel is commanded to divide the land in a just and fair manner: “For a bigger [tribe] you shall give a bigger inheritance, while to a smaller [tribe] you shall give a smaller inheritance; each in accordance with his census shall be given his inheritance” ([Bamidbar 26:54](#)). However, immediately thereafter we find: “But by lot shall the land be divided, according to the names of the tribes of their fathers shall

they inherit” (ibid. 55-56). These verses appear to be in tension with each other: the second part of the command seems to indicate that the lot is decided by God, and has nothing to do with the relative size of each tribe. If the division of the land is ultimately carried out on the basis of a lot that depends on fate, then what is the point of the command to divide the land fairly? It would therefore seem that the basic division does indeed rest in human hands, and must be carried out in a just way; the casting of the lot represents solely God’s confirmation of the division. There are other instances in *Tanakh* of this sort of phenomenon, where the result is known before a selection is made. An example is the story of the appointment of Shaul as king (*Shmuel* I 10:17-27); another is the discovery of Yonatan as the person who has violated the oath of Shaul, his father: from the way in which the lot is carried out it is clear that Shaul is well aware that it is Yonatan who violated the oath (ibid. 14:40-42).

[17] There is certainly room to contemplate the allusion in the expression “a lion’s cub” (*gur aryeh*), with regard to the city called “Layish”! (See M. Garsiel, *Midrashei Shemot ba-Mikra*, Ramat Gan 5748, pp. 48-49.)

[18] See the *Da’at Mikra* commentary on *Bamidbar*, Jerusalem 5748, pp. 16, n. 2.

[19] Except for an obvious deviation concerning the tribes of Reuven and Gad. The visual parallel suggests that their portion was originally meant to be in the southern region. Ultimately, the portion that Reuven receives *is* in the south – but on the other side of the Jordan.