

Dan is identified with Tell Qadi at the foot of Mt. Hermon in the far north. Dan was known as Laish in the Canaanite period. It received its later name of Dan from the tribe that conquered it (Judges 18:29). Excavations show that Laish was already a prosperous Canaanite city by the end of Early Bronze II (2650 B.C.E.). The name Laish appears in the Egyptian execration texts (curses) and in the Mari documents of the 18th century B.C.E. A huge rampart surrounded the city in the Middle Bronze II B period (1750-1550 B.C.E.). A rich tomb of the 14th century B.C.E. with Mycenaean wares establishes the importance of the city in this period. Pharaoh Thutmosis III listed the city among his conquests in 1468 B.C.E. Towards the end of the 12th century B.C.E., the tribe of Dan occupied the city. In spite of the large, reused ramparts, the city was devastated in an intense conflagration in the middle of the 11th century by unknown attackers. Even so, Dan became an important religious and administrative center from the time of Jeroboam I (921-910 B.C.E.), who set up a golden calf at Dan (1 Kings 12:28-30; 2 Chronicles 11:15).

One of the most arresting architectural features ever unearthed in ancient Israel is this High Place, possibly associated with Jeroboam and certainly with Ahab. This was unearthed by the excavations of Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem under the direction of Avraham Biran. The High Place, measuring 62 by 62 feet, is surrounded by an earthen-floor courtyard and a high wall. Steps are visible that lead south and up to the top of the High Place. Associated finds included incense stands, faience figurines and large jugs with snake decorations. The High Place is not far from the spring of Dan, which wells up within the ancient city walls and is one of the two principal sources of the Jordan River.