



Pesach in Dan and Naftali

Visiting a string of Israel's Northern Kingdom cities on and off the beaten track on a Pesach day will leave you with newfound respect for our ancestors, and make Tanach come alive amidst heady springtime nature. Ready?

In the days of King Pekach of Israel, King Tiglat-Pileser of Assyria came and captured Iyon, Avel-Bet-Ma'acha, Yanoach, Kedesh, Chatzor – Gilead, Galilee, the entire region of Naftali; and he deported the inhabitants to Assyria (Kings II 15:29).

Tiglat Pileser III started the Assyrian exile tactic – uproot nations, scatter them over vast distances, no rebellions.

Iyon/Marjiyun lies a 15-minute walk from Misgav Am on the Lebanese border. Next time...

Avel Bet Ma'acha hosts dramatic excavations by the Hebrew University and partners. It was also the site of a breathtaking chase – Yoav pursuing Sheva ben Bichri, who had turned against David. For today, open your Tanach at Shmuel Bet 20, and relive the drama by putting one person on top as the wise woman (Serach bat Asher), and “Yoav” below. Yell the *pesukim* (16–22) at each other, and toss out a ball or some other object to represent Sheva ben Bichri's head. Unforgettable!

Yanoach has no sure identification; Yanoach-Jat is west of our drive – next time...

Kedesh of Naftali was powerful in Biblical and in Second Temple times. The parking lot adjoins Second Temple Kedesh, with clear signage, wheelchair-accessible walkways and impressive Roman remains. Cross the road to climb Biblical Kedesh – a slight effort, with excavated ruins all around. The view reveals its strength; the plain and

ridges around it serve as its protective buffer zone. The nearby British Taggart fort, *Metzudat Koach*, commands the Hula Valley directly below. Visit its small, impactful museum about the tragic, brave, 1948 battle that took place there.

Chatzor – as excavator Amnon Bentor says, there is Chatzor, and then all the others. Chatzor is the largest ancient city in modern Israel, appearing throughout Tanach. Yehoshua burns it, Sisera represents it, Shlomo fortifies it. It's a Northern Kingdom stronghold. Powerful Biblical gates, a massive burnt structure, and an awesome secret underground water system no besieging enemy would ever find. Chatzor is the first 1950s proving-ground for home-grown Israeli archaeologists; the Hebrew University continues its annual dig here. Nearby Ayelet HaShachar offers a museum displaying its finds.

Another regional story: King Asa of Yehuda bribes Ben-Hadad of Damascus to turn against their mutual neighbor Ba'asha, king of Yisrael (Kings I 15:20): “...he captured Iyon, Dan, Avel-Bet-Ma'acha...”

Dan's Tanach roots stretch back to Avraham's chase of the four kings, his strength sapped, sensing his offspring's idol worship (Bereishit 14:4). The excavated *bama*, high place, seems to have been reused throughout history – perhaps here was *pesel Micha* and Yerova'am's golden calf. An arched mudbrick gate from Avraham's time, mighty gates of the kings of Yisrael, and the site of perhaps the most spectacular Biblical find ever – the Tel Dan stele mentioning “Beit David.” Learn about it and the region's nature in the nearby Beit Ussishkin Museum. The Dan River sources spring out here; there is a natural wading pool for children and adults.

Overlooking the rushing water and walking over the spring rivulets under a massive forest mesmerizes young and old alike. Top it off with a local fresh fish lunch.

Banias Park is situated nearby. *Yarden* (the Jordan River) means *yored miDan*, descending from Dan indeed. The glorious Banias waterfalls also offer forest hiking trails.

Here, where the Hatzbani and Banias combine with the Dan to form the Upper Jordan, are many picnic spots; wet-hiking, kayaking and even white-water options in season, and the Hula Valley nature reserve. Bed-and-breakfast “tzimmers” – developed by locals with government support – are plentiful here, e.g., in Beit Hillel.

From here it is an easy drive up to the Golan or Mount Hermon. And everywhere you go, enjoy the lush spring flowers of Israel!

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