

Joshua 15:49

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Dannah, and Kirjath-sannah, which is Debir,

Analysis

And Dannah, and Kirjath-sannah, which is Debir,

Dannah (דַּנָּה, dannah) possibly means "judgment," sharing the root with Dan (דָּן) and the verb din (דִּין, "to judge"). This brief mention preserves an otherwise unknown city's name, demonstrating Scripture's comprehensive documentation of tribal inheritances. The judicial connotations remind us that covenant land comes with covenant responsibility—God's people must establish justice throughout their territories.

Kirjath-sannah (קִרְיַת־סַנְחָה, qiryat-sannah) means "city of instruction" or possibly "city of the palm branch," providing an alternative name for **Debir**. The explanatory phrase "which is Debir" (הִיא דְּבִיר, hi devir) indicates these names referred to the same city, with Kirjath-sannah being the older Canaanite designation and Debir the Israelite name. This pattern of dual naming appears frequently in Joshua, authenticating the text's historical character.

Debir (דְּבִיר, devir) means "sanctuary" or "innermost room," the same term used for the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle/temple. The city was formerly called Kirjath-sepher (קִרְיַת־סֵפֶר, "city of the book," 15:15), suggesting it was a Canaanite scribal or religious center. Joshua conquered Debir (10:38-39), and Othniel son of Kenaz recaptured it, receiving Caleb's daughter Achsah as wife (15:15-19; Judges 1:11-15). The city became a Levitical city (21:15), transforming a pagan sanctuary into a center of Yahwistic worship and biblical instruction.

Historical Context

Debir (Khirbet Rabud or Tel Beit Mirsim, debated) occupied a strategic position in Judah's southern hill country. The name Kirjath-sepher ("city of the book/scroll") may indicate a scribal school or library, as ancient Near Eastern cities sometimes specialized in education and archives. Egyptian execration texts and the Amarna Letters don't mention Debir, suggesting it gained prominence during Israel's period. The city's transformation from Kirjath-sepher (pagan learning center) to Debir (sanctuary for Yahweh) and designation as Levitical city demonstrates redemptive transformation—pagan institutions converted to biblical purposes. Archaeological excavations at proposed Debir sites show Late Bronze Age destruction followed by Iron Age Israelite occupation, consistent with conquest narratives.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does Debir's transformation from pagan scribal center to Levitical city of biblical instruction inspire Christian engagement with secular education and learning?
2. What pagan 'sanctuaries' or cultural institutions in your sphere of influence need gospel transformation from serving false gods to serving the true God?
3. Why do you think God preserved multiple names for the same city—what does this teach about respecting historical complexity rather than oversimplifying biblical texts?

Interlinear Text

וְדָנָה	וְקִרְיַת	סֶפֶר	הָ יָא	דְּבִיר:
And Dannah	H0	and Kirjathsannah	H1931	which is Debir
H1837		H7158		H1688

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 15:15 (Parallel theme): And he went up thence to the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjath-sepher.

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