

The 12 Tribes of Israel

By Pastor Russell Roberts

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The 12 Tribes of Israel - Reuben

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“Reuben, you are my firstborn; My might and the beginning of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. “Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father’s bed; Then you defiled it—he went up to my couch.” - Genesis 49:3-4

This morning we are embarking on a new series of sermons titled “The 12 Tribes of Israel”. During these messages we’ll consider the origin of each tribe, learn some interesting facts about each tribe, and personally apply the spiritual truths we encounter from our study of each tribe. The 12 Tribes of Israel play a prominent role in Jewish history, as well as in future events foretold in the book of Revelation. It is important for Christians to have a general knowledge of these tribes in order to more fully understand Scripture.

The 12 tribes of Israel are the descendants of the 12 sons of Jacob. In the book of Genesis (chapters 29, 30, and 35) we read that Jacob, the grandson of Abraham and the son of Isaac, had 12 sons. These boys were birthed by 4 different women - Leah had 6 sons, Bilhah had 2 sons, Zilpah had 2 sons, and Rachel had 2 sons. We also read that God changed Jacob’s name to Israel and declared that the promise He’d originally made to Abraham would be carried out through Jacob’s family. The descendants of Jacob were God’s chosen people and would become a great nation who would dwell in a land given to them directly by God himself.

The 12 sons of Jacob, listed from oldest to youngest, were named Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. For varying reasons all 12 of these men and their families, along with their aging father Jacob, moved from Canaan to Egypt. They settled in a region named Goshen and collectively became known as the Hebrews. Over time they were enslaved by the Egyptians. For 400 years they were held in captivity and severely oppressed. Still God blessed this family abundantly, and from one generation to the next their numbers grew dramatically. In this manner, the 12 sons of Jacob evolved into the 12 tribes of Israel.

We will begin today with a brief study of Jacob’s first-born son Reuben and the tribe that emerged from his posterity.

I. REUBEN - THE SON OF JACOB

Reuben was the first-born son of Jacob. His mother was Leah. His name means "Behold, a son!" which speaks to Leah's hopefulness that Jacob would love her more deeply after she'd born him this child (Genesis 29:32). There are only a few passages in the Bible that actually mention Reuben and the things that he did and said. When he was a young boy, his mother sent him out to gather mandrakes (Genesis 30:14). This plant was believed in ancient times to possess properties that increased fertility, something that both Leah and Rachel desired.

Sometime later Reuben committed a terrible sin. He became attracted to Bilhah, who was one of his father Jacob's concubine. She was actually the mother of 2 of Reuben's brothers - Dan and Naphtali. Nevertheless, Reuben was infatuated with Bilhah. The Bible does not give any details about the nature of their relationship, but it clearly states that they slept together and Jacob subsequently found out about it (Genesis 35:22). As a result, Reuben lost his preferred status as the first-born son and Jacob never fully forgave him for this act of treachery.

On the other hand, Reuben also acted to protect his younger brother Joseph when all of the other brothers wanted to kill him (Genesis 37:18-36). All of Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, because their father Jacob loved him the most, and they conspired together to murder him. Though Reuben also resented Joseph, he urged the brothers not to harm him but rather to throw him into a pit. Reuben had a selfish motivation for his actions, but nevertheless his intervention may have saved Joseph's life.

On another notable occasion which occurred many years later, Reuben expressed an intention to protect his youngest brother Benjamin during their second journey to Egypt (Genesis 42:37). On their first visit, the brothers were accused of being spies and were requested to return with Benjamin as proof of their truthfulness. Jacob did not want Benjamin to go back with them for fear something might happen to him, but Reuben pledged to personally look out for him. Again, Reuben showed a willingness to defend his family.

II. REUBEN - THE TRIBE OF ISRAEL

The descendants of Reuben were considered to be one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Toward the beginning of the Exodus, Moses took a census of the Children of Israel while they were camped at Mt. Sinai. At that time, the population of the fighting men from the tribe of Reuben was numbered at 46,500 (Numbers 1:21). Some 40 years later, near the end of the exodus, Moses recounted the Children of Israel while they

dwelt on the plains of Moab. By then the population had decreased slightly to 43,370 (Numbers 26:7).

The tribes camped in a particular arrangement around the tabernacle and marched in a prescribed order. The tribe of Reuben was one of three stationed on the south side of the tabernacle, along with Simeon and Gad. The Reubenites were the designated leaders of this camp which was the second in the order of Israel's marching procession (Number's 2:10-16).

The High Priest wore a breastplate that displayed 12 stones representing the 12 tribes of Israel. The exact correlation between the tribes and stones is uncertain, but some have suggested that the stones appear on the breastplate in the same order that the tribes camped around the tabernacle. If so, the gem representing the tribe of Reuben might be the turquoise (or emerald). Thus, the color associated with this tribe could be greenish-blue.

Between Moses and Joshua, the Promised Land and surrounding area was divided into several allotments and dispersed among the 12 tribes. The sons of Reuben chose not to accept land within the borders of Israel, but instead took possession of an area of rich farmland to the east which they deemed more suitable for their large herds and flocks (Numbers 32:1). This region spanned from the central to the northernmost shoreline of the Dead Sea and included the prominent site of Mt. Nebo. Their geographic location separated them from the other tribes of Israel, and increasingly the Reubenites became more disconnected and less influential. None of the judges, kings, prophets or other major characters named in the Bible came from this tribe.

The tribe of Reuben assisted the other tribes in the conquest of Israel, but afterward returned to the land east of the Jordan River (Joshua 1:12-18). Years later, during the period of the Judges, the tribe of Reuben apparently choose not to aide their brethren during a battle led by Deborah and Barak (Judges 5:15-16). Their historical allegiance to the nation of Israel was often undependable. Some other the Reubenites participated in Korah's Rebellion during the Exodus (Numbers 16:1). The tribe of Reuben was taken into exile by the Assyrians around 730 BC.

III. THE LESSON FROM REUBEN

There were moments when Reuben, the son of Jacob, stood up for his family and other occasions when he betrayed them. Likewise, there were situations in which the tribe of Reuben fought alongside their brethren and others when they sit idly by and did nothing

to help. Their behavior showed a wavering inconsistency and instability.

The symbol for the tribe of Reuben is a wave or torrent of water. Before his death, Jacob blessed his 12 sons. He described Reuben as “uncontrolled water”. Though he had the tremendous power and potential to do good, at times he acted without any discipline or restraint. Just as water can be used in many ways that are greatly beneficial, if it floods from its banks it can cause tremendous damage.

The lesson of Reuben is that instability, particularly as it relates to our moral virtues and devotion to Jesus, can lead to loss and obscurity. God doesn't call us to a life of occasional or sporadic obedience and service, but rather to consistent allegiance to His will and commands. We shouldn't be for Him one day and against Him the next. Stability is imperative in order to become the people that God desires us to be. And when we do sin, invariably it depletes our influence and damages our credibility.

CONCLUSION

As will be the case with each of the tribes we study during this series, there are many more things we could say about Reuben. However, our goal today was simply to provide an overview of the man and the tribe that he fathered. Most importantly, I urge us to remember from the legacy of Reuben that consistency, dependability, and restraint all matter when it comes to serving Christ, his Church, and one another.

The 12 Tribes of Israel - Simeon

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“Simeon and Levi are brothers; Their swords are implements of violence. “Let my soul not enter into their council; Let not my glory be united with their assembly; because in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will they lamed oxen. “Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel. I will disperse them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.” - Genesis 49:5-7

This morning we continue our new sermon series called “The 12 Tribes of Israel”. During these messages, we’ll briefly consider each of the sons and tribes of Israel. There are several lessons that can be learned from this study, so I urge you to attend faithfully and listen carefully over the coming weeks. I believe God has many things to teach us through this series.

There are some slight differences between the listings of the 12 sons of Jacob and the 12 tribes of Israel. This can be a cause of confusion for those unfamiliar with the disparity. As stated last week, the 12 sons of Jacob are Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. However, the 12 tribes of Israel are often listed as Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin. For now we’ll just point out this difference, but as the series progresses we’ll discover the reasons for it.

In our first message last week, we talked about Jacob’s eldest son Reuben. We saw how Reuben’s behaviors were often inconsistent and unreliable. On certain occasions he defended his brothers, notably Joseph and Benjamin, yet he also betrayed his father Jacob by sleeping with one of his concubine, Bilhah. The descendants of Reuben also proved to be inconsistent and undependable. They fought alongside the other tribes in the conquest of the Promised Land, but revolted against Moses during the Exodus and even refused to assist their brethren in battle during the era of the judges. As Christians today, we can learn from Reuben the importance of being consistent and unwavering in our commitment and service to the LORD.

Today we will focus upon another of Jacob’s sons - Simeon. This was a common name in Biblical times and there are at least 3 other men named Simeon mentioned in the Bible. The elderly man who saw and blessed the baby Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2), a leading teacher at the church of Antioch during the days of Paul (Acts

13/15), and an ancestor listed in the genealogy of Jesus' father Joseph (Luke 3) were all also named Simeon. Let's be careful not to confuse them with Reuben's younger brother...

I. SIMEON - THE SON OF JACOB

Simeon was the second-born son of Jacob. His name means "Hearing" or "God has heard!". His mother Leah named him this stating that God had heard her cries and knew that she was unloved (Genesis 29:33). There are not many details in the Bible about Simeon's life, but in the few that are present he is regularly mentioned along with his younger brother Levi. This leads some to believe that these 2 siblings were very close friends and did a lot together.

Simeon had a sister named Dinah. While she was visiting the daughters of the land a man named Shechem, the prince of the Hivites, saw her, took her and raped her. Shechem then approached his father Hamor and asked him to arrange for Dinah to become his wife. But when Simeon and Levi heard of this they became enraged and devised a plan to avenge their sister. Jacob worked out an agreement. In exchange for Dinah being given to Shechem in marriage, the Hivites all agreed to be circumcised. But while they were in pain from the procedure, Simeon and Levi attacked the city and killed every male among them. They also looted the city and stole their animals. Jacob was not pleased by the extent of their cruelty (Genesis 34).

Many years later, due to a severe famine in the land of Canaan, 10 of Jacob's sons journeyed to Egypt hoping to buy grain. Unbeknownst to them, their younger brother Joseph had risen to a position of great power in Egypt. When they appeared before him, Joseph accused them of being spies and directed them to go get Benjamin and bring him back as proof of their truthfulness. To ensure that they'd return, Joseph had Simeon bound and held (Genesis 42-43).

II. SIMEON - THE TRIBE OF ISRAEL

The descendants of Simeon were considered to be the weakest of the 12 tribes of Israel. As mentioned in last week's message, Moses took a census of the fighting men among the Children of Israel near the beginning of the exodus and again at the end. During this time, the population of the tribe of Simeon decreased from 59,300 (Numbers 1:23) to 22,200 (Numbers 26:14). This is a drastic reduction of over 60%. Of all the tribes, Simeon's numbers fell the most by far. Apparently the Simeonites were severely affected by the various judgments and plagues that occurred during the exodus. When

Moses pronounced a blessing on the tribes just before his death, he did not even mention the tribe of Simeon (Deuteronomy 33) perhaps because it had become so small and inconsequential.

The 12 tribes camped in a particular arrangement around the tabernacle and marched in a prescribed order. The tribe of Simeon was one of three tribes stationed on the south side of the tabernacle, along with Reuben and Gad. When the children of Israel broke camp the Simeonites followed the Reubenites, and were the 5th tribe in the order of Israel's marching procession (Number's 2:10-16).

The High Priest wore a breastplate that displayed 12 stones representing the 12 tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:15-21). The exact correlation between the tribes and stones is uncertain, but some have suggested that the stones appear on the breastplate in the same order that the tribes camped around the tabernacle. If so, the gem representing the tribe of Simeon might be the sapphire (or lapis lazuli). Thus, the color associated with this tribe could be blue.

Between Moses and Joshua, the Promised Land and surrounding area was divided into several allotments and apportioned among the 12 tribes. Based upon a careful comparison of the cities of Simeon and those of Judah, it appears that the Simeonites were dispersed among the inheritance of Judah. Though they had a distinct small enclave all to their own, the descendants of Simeon were scattered among the larger tribe of Judah and blended somewhat into them over time (Joshua 19:1-9). The location of their inheritance was in southern Israel, and included the city of Beersheba.

The descendants of Simeon were shepherds who migrated frequently in search of good pasturelands for their flocks. As such they were dispersed among the Israelites, particularly in Judah, just as Jacob's blessing had foretold. Having been, in effect, absorbed by the tribe of Judah the Simeonites became a part of the Southern Kingdom after the nation of Israel split. They were among those taken into captivity when Judah fell to the Babylonians in and around 586 BC. There are no notable Bible characters from the tribe of Simeon.

III. THE LESSON FROM SIMEON

The symbol for the tribe of Simeon is a city gate - representing the gates of Shechem. Before his death, Jacob blessed his 12 sons. On this occasion, he gave a combined blessing to Simeon and Levi. He cited their violence, anger, wrath, and cruelty as it related to the incident with Dinah. Though Simeon had every right to be angry at

Shechem for violating his sister, his response was far too extreme. Simeon killed every male in the city, even those who were innocent and likely had no knowledge of what had happened. He allowed rage to dictate and control his behavior.

From Simeon we learn that unrestrained anger often leads to great acts of sin. While there are certainly legitimate causes for anger, we should never act with cruelty or wrath. We must learn to deal with anger by other more peaceable and acceptable means. Also, we should not heed the counsel or advice of angry people nor should we associate closely with them. This too is a recipe for destruction as it will invariably lead to sinful conduct.

In Ephesians 4:26-27 the apostle Paul speaks about anger. He tells Christians that it is okay to be angry, but it isn't okay to sin. We must not allow our anger to boil over into sinful behavior. Also we must not allow it to linger and fester, but rather deal with it each day before the sun goes down. When we allow anger to remain unchecked in our lives, it will grow and will almost certainly result in untold damage to ourselves and others.

CONCLUSION

There are many other things we could say about Simeon and his descendants. This morning we have simply summarized some of the major facts and details regarding him. But the main idea of today's message is this - anger often results in sinful behavior. We must be disciplined enough to control it. We must not be so quick-tempered, but rather be slow to anger. May Simeon serve as a reminder to us all - God's children should not be characterized by anger. Anger will hamper our ability to love others as we should.

The 12 Tribes of Israel - Levi

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“Of Levi he said, ‘Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man, whom You proved at Massah, with whom You contended at the waters of Meribah; Who said of his father and his mother, ‘I did not consider them’; and he did not acknowledge his brothers, nor did he regard his own sons, for they observed Your word, and kept Your covenant. They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, and Your law to Israel. They shall put incense before You, and whole burnt offerings on Your altar. O Lord, bless his substance, and accept the work of his hands; Shatter the loins of those who rise up against him, and those who hate him, so that they will not rise again.’” - Deuteronomy 33:8-11

We have started this new year with a sermon series titled “The 12 Tribes of Israel”. These messages are intended to increase our knowledge of and familiarity with the sons of Jacob and the families that they fathered. The Bible refers to these tribes frequently and each plays an important role in Scripture. In addition, there are spiritual lessons we can learn from these sons and tribes to improve our personal relationships with Jesus.

In the 2 previous messages, we talked about Jacob’s oldest sons - Reuben and Simeon. Reuben forfeited his privileged status as Jacob’s firstborn son because he slept with Bilhah, his father’s concubine. Both he and the Reubenites that followed were inconsistent and undependable in their faith. This led to their relative obscurity. Simeon, Jacob’s second son, along with his brother, attacked and killed all of the men of an entire city while they were unable to defend themselves - all because of the sins of one man. His anger was excessively vicious and cruel, and thus the tribe of Simeon suffered greatly and became weak and inconsequential.

This morning we continue our series with a discussion about Levi. Before we begin, It is important to note that there is another prominent character in the Bible named Levi besides the son of Jacob. Matthew, who was one of Jesus’ apostles, was actually named Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Moreover, there were 2 other men named Levi mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (Luke 3:24,29). These other men named Levi are not the subject of today’s message.

I. LEVI - THE SON OF JACOB

Jacob's third son was named Levi. His mother was Leah. Believing that Jacob would become more closely attached to her since she had now borne him three sons (Genesis 29:34), Leah named the child Levi which means means "attached". There is only one reference in Scripture to an event in Levi's life where he is specifically named. It is the vengeful retaliation that he and his brother Simeon took upon the Hivites after Shechem had raped their sister Dinah (Genesis 34). We discussed this story in detail last last week. Though not expressly mentioned, Levi was present with his brothers when they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites (Genesis 37:12:28) and later during their journeys to Egypt (Genesis 42-45). When Jacob and his entire family moved from Canaan to Egypt to live in the fertile Nile River valley, Levi brought along with him 3 sons named Gershon, Kohath, Merari (Genesis 46:11).

II. LEVI - THE TRIBE OF ISRAEL

The descendants of Levi are not generally considered to be one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Instead, the Levites were chosen by God (in lieu of the firstborn) to serve as priests and ministers in the tabernacle (Numbers 3:5-13) and later in the temple (1 Chronicles 23). As such, they were counted separately during the first and second census of Moses because they were not considered "fighting men" (Numbers 1:47-54). Nevertheless, the Levites numbered 22,000 during the early part of the exodus (Numbers 3:39) and 23,000 near its end (Numbers 26:62).

While the 12 tribes of Israel camped some distance from and around the tabernacle, the sons of Levi camped in the center right next to it. The descendants of Levi's 3 sons were stationed on each side (Numbers 3:23,29,35,38) - the Gershonites on the west, the Kohathites on the south, and the Merarites on the north. Moses and Aaron and his sons were positioned on the east side. Whenever the Israelites marched in procession, the Levites were in the center carrying the tabernacle and its articles with 6 tribes going in front of them and the other 6 tribes behind them (Numbers 2:17).

During the days of the tabernacle and temple, the high priest wore a breastplate that displayed 12 gemstones which represented the 12 tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:15-21). Because the Levites are not typically considered to be one of these 12 tribes, it is possible that none of the stones represent them. That said, the person wearing the breastplate would himself be a descendant of Levi. In the absence of a specific stone, the colors of the tabernacle (gold, purple, blue, and red) are often associated with the tribe of Levi.

Unlike the 12 tribes who were each given a particular region of land in which to settle,

the sons of Levi were assigned to 48 cities that were scattered throughout Israel (Joshua 21). From these cities the Levites were to serve and to administer the Law of God among the various tribes. Thus, the sons of Levi were spread about in the midst of their brothers, just as Jacob had prophesied when he blessed his sons (Genesis 49:5-7).

Some have wondered why God selected the tribe of Levi to be the priests and ministers for Israel. One possible explanation might be their willingness to stand up for the LORD following the Golden Calf incident at Mt. Sinai. While Moses was up on the mountaintop, Aaron and the people below fashioned an idol and worshipped it. When Moses discovered their horrible sin, only the sons of Levi seemed appalled by it enough to carry out God's judgment (Exodus 32:25-29). Perhaps this endeared them in God's sight.

Following the reign of the judges and the united kingship of Israel under Saul, David, and Solomon, the nation separated into 2 distinct kingdoms. This left the Levites divided for a short time, as their cities were split between both places. However when the northern kingdom of Israel chose to abandon God and worship idols instead, the Levites moved en masse to the southern kingdom of Judah - especially to its capital city Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 11:13-17).

Around 586 BC the kingdom of Judah fell to Nebuchadnezzar and the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. Many years later, after the Babylonian exile, the temple was rebuilt and a priest named Ezra sought to return and restore proper worship there. He sent a delegation to summon some of the Levites to join him as they journeyed back to Jerusalem to revive the faith (Ezra 8:15-36).

Priests were chosen from the tribe of Levi, but not every member of the tribe became a priest. Those who were not priests still served in some capacity in the ministry of the tabernacle or temple as Levites. The priests and Levites are referred to numerous places throughout the Bible. Some of the most notable descendants of Levi were Moses, Aaron (the very first high priest), Miriam, Ezra, Ezekiel, John the Baptist, and Barnabas.

III. THE LESSON FROM LEVI

Last we we read that Levi participated with his brother Simeon in the violent attack on Shechem. The tribe of Simeon suffered greatly as a result. On the contrary, the sons of Levi turned back to God and showed tremendous loyalty and devotion to Him at Mt.

Sinai. Because of their repentance, the Levites prospered, whereas the Simeonites didn't. The distinction is important - both Simeon and Levi had together committed a grave sin, but their sons experienced very different outcomes. In similar fashion, all people begin as sinners before God. Those who continue in sin will suffer, but those who confess their sins and repent will be forgiven and restored. The tribe of Levi is a powerful testimony of restoration.

The symbol for the Levites is the breastplate of the high priest. For centuries the nation of Israel only had access to God through the priest. However, when Jesus died on the cross and rose again He became the final and eternal High Priest. Christians now have direct access to God through Jesus Christ and are in no need of a human priest. This was symbolized at the moment of Jesus' death by the tearing of the curtain that shielded the Holy of Holies (Matthew 27:51). As such, the Levitical priesthood is no more. That said, in a sense all believers are like the Levites - they are the ministers of God, a chosen and royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).

CONCLUSION

The tribe of Levi is not usually included in a listing of "The 12 Tribes of Israel". It was uniquely chosen by God and set apart from the others. Personally, I informally consider it to be the unnamed 13th tribe. The fact is that the Levites were always there scattered among the other 12 tribes. They faithfully served God and sought to teach His law to all of their brethren. Today, Christians have this same role. We are the Levites of this generation, and have been chosen by God to proclaim His word and wonders to the lost world around us. Our inheritance is not of this world, but awaits us in the next. Our acclaim is not here, but rather it is in Heaven. No one needs to know our name, but may we never cease to proclaim the LORD's name and make it great!

The 12 Tribes of Israel - Judah

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“Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father’s sons shall bow down to you. Judah is a lion’s whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. He ties his foal to the vine, and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, and his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are dull from wine, and his teeth white from milk.” - Genesis 49:8-12

Over the next several weeks we will be discussing “The 12 Tribes of Israel”. We are seeking to familiarize ourselves with the origin, history, and importance of each of these tribes. In so doing, we hope to broaden our understanding and appreciation of Scripture. Because the 12 tribes are such a central part of the Biblical narrative, it is important for all Christians to have some basic knowledge about them.

Already in this series we have seen the dangers of being inconsistent and undependable in our faith and practice. We’ve been warned about the damaging and far-reaching effects of unrestrained anger. Fortunately, we’ve also learned that repentant sinners can find restoration and forgiveness. We’ve discovered that God chooses those who are devoted to Him to be His ministers and messengers in all the world. All of these lessons have had a direct implication on our lives.

Today’s message focuses on Judah. There are actually 7 references to different men in the Old Testament by this name, but 6 of them are pretty obscure. The only major character in the Bible named Judah is in fact the son of Jacob. The tribe that he fathered is the third in our study so far, seeing that the Levites are formally not counted as one of the 12.

I. JUDAH - THE SON OF JACOB

Jacob and Leah came together again, she conceived, and bore him a fourth son. She named him Judah, which means “Praise”. When her previous sons were born Leah had lamented over her lackluster marriage to Jacob, but after Judah’s birth she simply wanted to praise God (Genesis 29:35). As a young man, Judah persuaded his brothers not to kill their younger sibling Joseph but rather to sell him to the Ishmaelites (Genesis

37:26-27). Apparently, they respected and willingly consented to his leadership.

The most developed passage in the Bible about a scene in Judah's life involves his daughter-in-law Tamar (Genesis 38). Judah's eldest son Er married her, but he died before having a son. Thus, Tamar was remarried to Judah's second-born son Onan, but he dishonored his deceased brother by refusing to give him an heir. As a result, Onan also died. So Judah promised Tamar that his third-born son Shelah, who was quite young at the time, would marry her when he got older. Together they could continue the family name. But as the years passed by, Judah never made good on this promise and Tamar grew impatient. Sometime after Judah's wife had died, Tamar disguised herself as a harlot, slept with her father-in-law, became pregnant, and had twins by him. When Judah later realized what had happened, he confessed his wrongdoing, apologized for not keeping his promise, and forgave Tamar for deceiving him.

During the worldwide famine, Judah travelled back and forth from Canaan to Egypt with his brothers (Genesis 42-45). On their second trip, Jacob entrusted his youngest son Benjamin into Judah's care (Genesis 43:8-9). When Benjamin was accused of stealing a silver cup, Judah passionately offered to receive the punishment himself in place of his brother (Genesis 44:32-33). Later, when the entire family of Jacob moved to Goshen, Judah led the way (Genesis 46:28). Though not the oldest, Judah was clearly the leader and most highly esteemed among the sons of Jacob.

II. JUDAH - THE TRIBE OF ISRAEL

In the years of the Egyptian captivity, the descendants of Judah multiplied greatly and became the most prominent of the 12 tribes of Israel. During the first census of Moses taken at Mt. Sinai the population of Judah was numbered at 74,600 (Numbers 1:27). By the second census of Moses taken in Moab, the tribe had grown slightly to 76,500 (Numbers 26:22). To put this in perspective, they were larger than the Reubenites and Simeonites combined.

The tribe of Judah camped on the eastern side of the tabernacle. This was the most notable position because the tabernacle opened to the east toward the sunrise. They also served as the leader of the eastern camp, which included the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun. Judah was the first tribe to set out whenever the Israelites broke camp, and thus they were the leaders of the entire procession (Numbers 2:3-8).

During the days of the tabernacle and temple, the high priest wore a breastplate that displayed 12 gemstones which represented the 12 tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:15-21).

Though the exact correlation between the stones and the tribes is disputed, some believe that the ruby (or carnelian) represented Judah. If so, the color of the tribe of Judah is red.

After the conquest, the conquered Promised Land was divided among the 12 tribes. The descendants of Judah were given an unusually large section of land which covered most of southern Canaan (Joshua 15). Their inheritance was larger than the others. It included several important cities such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Gaza.

For the next 350 years various regional judges ruled over the respective tribes of Israel. Eventually they all united to form a single nation, but after the reign of King Solomon the young nation split into 2 kingdoms. The southern kingdom, which consisted almost entirely of land once assigned to the tribe of Judah, simply reinstated its tribal name. Thus, the nation of Judah was formed. Several kings and prophets served in Judah from the time of its creation in 930 BC until its fall to the Babylonians in 586 BC. A remnant of exiles later returned to Judah after the Babylonian exile. By the time of the New Testament, the region was known by its Greco-Roman name Judea. It had become a province of the Roman Empire.

Many notable people in the Bible belonged to the tribe of Judah. These included great leaders and kings such as Caleb, David, and Zerubbabel as well as mighty prophets such as Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and Zephaniah. However, the most important descendant of Judah is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:2-3). Scripture refers to Him as the Lion of Judah, a title which cites His ancestral lineage. Jesus is both a Prophet and a King.

III. THE LESSON FROM JUDAH

The symbol for the tribe of Judah is a lion. This image comes from Jacob's blessing (Genesis 49:8-12), in which he compares his son Judah to a lion because of his strength, courage, and leadership skills. Jacob prophesied that Judah would rule over his brothers like a lion reigning as "the king of the beasts". This blessing also foretold that Judah would prosper abundantly and enjoy great wealth. Most significantly, Jacob stated that the scepter would remain with Judah until Shiloh came. This prophecy refers to Jesus, the coming Messiah.

Judah was a servant-leader. His life serves as an example for all of those who are called to lead in whatever capacity it might be - at work, within the family, at church, at school, etc. He convinced his brothers to spare young Joseph's life, he volunteered to

take the punishment on behalf of Benjamin, and he took responsibility for his misconduct regarding Tamar. In each of these instances, Judah demonstrated impeccable character. In the same way, Christians should lead by example. True leaders valiantly defend the helpless, willingly accept the consequences even when they are not deserved, and courageously admit their mistakes rather than cowardly blaming others.

The bountiful wealth and riches enjoyed by the tribe of Judah portray the abundant spiritual blessings that redeemed believers have in Christ. God's love, mercy, protection, and providence are continuously showered upon His children. Even after we leave this earth, the immeasurable goodness of the LORD will not cease to be lavished upon Christians for all of eternity.

CONCLUSION

There is much more we could discuss about Judah the man, the tribe, and even the kingdom. For example, did you know that term "Jews" was first used to describe the inhabitants of Judah, but its meaning gradually broadened to include all of Israel? Anyway, let us conclude the message today by again emphasizing the major lesson of Judah. In some form or fashion, we are all called to be leaders. Other people look up to us for wisdom and direction. As we lead, may we exhibit the courage and character of Christ so that others might see Him on display in our lives and be inclined to follow. Furthermore, may we rest in the fact that God is for us and His blessings are never-ending.

The 12 Tribes of Israel - Dan

Originally Preached 2/11/2018

“Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path, that bites the horse’s heels, so that his rider falls backward. For Your salvation I wait, O Lord.” - Genesis 49:16-18

This morning we resume our discussion of the “The 12 Tribes of Israel”. Up to this point we have studied the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Each of these Old Testament families left a lasting legacy. We’ve been challenged to show repentant devotion to God and courageous leadership in our Christian service. Furthermore, we’ve been warned about the dangers of excessive anger and instability in our faith and practice. These are important lessons that we should take seriously. The focus of today’s message is Jacob’s fifth son, Dan.

The Bible vividly describes a future event called the rapture in which all Christians will be suddenly snatched away into Heaven. In their stead, God will use a chosen multitude of 144,000 Messianic Jews (Jews who believe that Jesus is the Messiah) to spread His word. During the 7 years of tribulation, the LORD will seal and protect these special messengers. The book of Revelation explains that God will choose 12,000 members of each of the 12 tribes of Israel to constitute this distinguished group (Revelation 7:4-8). Strangely, the “unofficial” tribe of Levi is included in this listing while the tribe Dan is left out. What reason might God have for excluding the descendants of Dan from this prestigious honor?

In his prophetic blessing, Jacob predicted that his son Dan would have to wait for his salvation (Genesis 19:18). While all of the other tribes, to a limited degree, will be safeguarded by the LORD from the onslaught of the Antichrist during the tribulation, the Danites will suffer greatly along with everyone else. Their deliverance will not come until Jesus returns at the end of the tribulation at the second coming. In other words, Dan will have to wait a bit longer than his brothers for his salvation to come. Again, we are left wondering why the tribe of Dan doesn’t get the same preferential treatment as the others do.

Perhaps we can find some answers in this morning’s sermon. Let’s dig into Scripture and see what we can learn about Dan and his descendants...

I. DAN - THE SON OF JACOB

Dan was the fifth son of Jacob. His mother was Bilhah, Rachel's handmaiden. Rachel had apparently been unable to bear children on her own and had grown quite jealous of her older sister Leah who had already given birth to 4 sons. Therefore, Bilhah was sent into Jacob specifically to produce a son for Rachel to raise as her own. Rachel named this child Dan, which means "judge", because God had vindicated her of her childlessness (Genesis 30:4-6).

Dan was with his brothers when they conspired against Joseph and sold him into slavery. He was also with them as they traveled back and forth to Egypt during the famine. However, Dan's name is not specifically mentioned in either instance. Dan had only one son, Hushim, at the time that he and his family moved to Goshen (Genesis 46:23). Other than this, not much is known about Dan's life.

II. DAN - THE TRIBE OF ISRAEL

Jacob and his entire family moved to Egypt, where the number of Hebrews grew dramatically. Years later when Moses led the Israelites across the Red Sea and on to Mt. Sinai, the population of able-bodied men from the tribe of Dan had increased to 62,700 (Numbers 1:39). Near the end of the exodus some 40 years later, the tribe numbered 64,400 (Numbers 26:43).

The tribe of Dan was positioned to the north of the tabernacle. They were the designated leaders of the northern camp, which also included Asher and Naphtali. The Danites were the tenth tribe in the marching order of Israel (Numbers 2:25-31).

During the days of the tabernacle and temple, the high priest wore a breastplate that displayed 12 gemstones which represented the 12 tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:15-21). This breastplate is sometimes replicated even today. The exact correlation between the stones and the tribes is often disputed, but some believe that the tribe of Dan is represented with a beryl. If so, Dan's color could possibly be light green.

Joshua apportioned most of the Promised Land to the various tribes after their invasion was complete. The sons of Dan received a small block of land in west-central Israel that included the city of Joppa - modern day Tel-Aviv. However, the Danites never fully displaced the Philistines who were living there, and instead relocated to the extreme northern portions of Israel (Joshua 19:40-48). The Biblical phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" is used to describe the entire breadth of Israel from north to south (1 Samuel 3:20), similar to saying "from Amarillo to Brownsville" to describe all of Texas.

The most well-known descendant of the tribe of Dan was the mighty Samson (Judges 13-16). The book of Judges tells of Samson's miraculous birth and incredible strength. Though he was deceived by his wife Delilah, God still used Samson to deliver His children from the heavy oppression of the Philistines. Though the Philistines were temporarily weakened, they were not completely destroyed by Samson.

Still unable to take full possession of their given territory, the Danites moved north. During the era of the judges they attacked and defeated the isolated city of Laish (also called Leshem). They renamed the city Dan, and set up idols there that they'd stolen from the house of Micah (Judges 18:27-31). The tribe of Dan was apparently the first to forsake God on a large scale and begin publicly practicing idol worship.

Centuries later, the nation of Israel under King Saul was still waging war against the Philistines. This is highlighted by the epic battle of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17). After the tragic death of Saul and his sons, many warriors from the tribe of Dan joined David's army and supported him as their new king (1 Chronicles 12:35). Finally, the Philistines were defeated once and for all during the reign of King David.

When united Israel split, the sons of Dan aligned themselves with the northern kingdom which kept the name Israel. Its first king, Jeroboam, set up a pagan temple in the city of Dan and urged his people to go worship there rather than travelling southward to Jerusalem which was in kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12:29). The tribe of Dan was conquered by the Assyrians when they invaded Israel sometime around 720 BC.

II. THE LESSON FROM DAN

The symbol for the tribe of Dan is a snake. In his blessing, Jacob compared Dan to a horned serpent lying in the path (Genesis 49:17) - perhaps referring to a poisonous snake called an adder. This is not a very flattering description when one considers the wicked reputation of snakes in the Bible. This symbol aptly represents the evil and idolatrous conduct displayed by the family of Dan.

Sadly, the legacy of the Danites is one of idolatry and paganism. The first and second commandments clearly state not to have any gods before the LORD and not to worship idols (Exodus 20), yet the tribe of Dan openly did both. Their blatant sinfulness was an offense to God. Perhaps this is the primary reason why the children of Dan will not be chosen as witnesses for Jesus during the coming years of tribulation.

In some cultures and religions, people still fashion actual graven images and idols to worship. This not the practice of most Christians today. That said, idolatry still runs rampant among believers in the church though in a more subtle way. Many people elevate things like money, food, pleasure, and success over God and allow these misguided worldly pursuits to become idols in their lives. In fact, idolatry - worshipping something or someone other than and in place of God - is at the root of all sin.

CONCLUSION

The tribe of Dan is the fourth of the 12 tribes of Israel (excluding Levi). For the most part, the Danites historically chased after false gods and worshiped idols. God was extremely displeased with their behavior, and thus they are the only tribe that will not have a remnant sealed and protected during the tribulation period. We can learn from the tribe of Dan that God hates and will certainly punish idolaters.

As we close, I challenge us to think about idols in our own lives. Perhaps you don't have any pagan statues or monuments in your house, but are you worshipping other types of idols nonetheless? Am I? If so, may we repent of our idolatry and restore God to His first and rightful place.

The 12 Tribes of Israel - Naphtali

Originally Preached 2/18/2018

“Naphtali is a doe let loose, He gives beautiful words.” - Genesis 49:21

Be consistent in your Christian faith and practice. Avoid excessive anger and cruelty. Turn from you sinfulness, repent, and be restored. Demonstrate courageous leadership in your service to God. Place the LORD first and foremost in your life and do not worship idols. These are the major lessons we have covered thus far in our latest exciting sermon series titled “The 12 Tribes of Israel”.

This morning we are at the midpoint of our study. We will focus our attention on Naphtali - the sixth son of Jacob. Like his brothers, Naphtali is the patriarch of a large family made up of many descendants. The tribe of Naphtali plays an important and unique role in Scripture as the fifth of the 12 tribes of Israel. They too have left a enduring legacy that we as Christians can learn from still today.

Before we delve into our study of Naphtali, let’s highlight an event that involved each of the 12 tribes. After crossing the Red Sea during the exodus, Moses led the children of Israel to Mt. Sinai where they camped for around 2 years. During their stay, the people built the and erected the tabernacle. Upon its completion they held a special dedication ceremony to consecrate it (Numbers 7). A leading representative from each of the tribes brought a dedication offering to the tabernacle - one each day for a period of 12 days. The tribes brought and presented their gifts following the same order as they marched. The sons of Naphtali were among those who participated in this celebration.

What can we learn from the Bible about Naphtali? What does the LORD want to teach us through him? May we listen intently with our ears and hearts as we dig into God’s word today.

I. NAPHTALI - THE SON OF JACOB

As stated in the introduction, Naphtali was the sixth son of Jacob (also named Israel). He was the second and last son of Bilhah, who was the handmaiden of Rachel. Because Rachel was unable to bear children herself, she allowed Bilhah to birth children on her behalf. Though not directly from her womb, Rachel was now considered the mother of 2 of Jacob’s sons while her sister Leah was the mother of 4. Rachel felt as though she had been wrestling with Leah and had finally won, so she named this

new child Naphtali which means “My struggle” (Genesis 30:7-8).

Naphtali is not singled out or specifically mentioned much during his lifetime. He was certainly with his brothers when they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites. Years later when worldwide drought and famine struck, he journeyed to Egypt with his brothers on multiple occasions to buy grain. When Jacob and his sons resettled in Egypt, Naphtali brought his family along. He had 4 sons whose names were Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem (Genesis 46:24). Besides these few details, little else is known about Naphtali’s life.

II. NAPHTALI - THE TRIBE OF ISRAEL

Moses took 2 separate censuses during the exodus, one near the beginning and the other near the end. They were separated by a period of about 40 years. The number of warriors from the tribe of Naphtali counted during the first census was 53,400 (Numbers 1:42-43). By the time of the second census, this number had declined to 45,400 (Numbers 26:48-50).

Like his full brother Dan, the tribe of Naphtali was also stationed on the northern side of the tabernacle. The Naphtalites were the twelfth tribe in the marching order of Israel. As such, they were the last camp to set out in the procession and served as the rear guard of the entire group (Numbers 2:29-30).

Scripture describes an ornate breastplate that the high priest wore whenever he served in the tabernacle or temple. It displayed 12 beautiful gemstones which represented the 12 tribe of Israel (Exodus 28:15-21). The Bible is unclear about which stone depicts each tribe, but some suggest that the jasper stands for Naphtali. If that is true, then reddish-brown is the color of the Naphtalites.

Each of the 12 tribes received an inheritance of land following the conquest of Canaan. The region allotted to the family of Naphtali was in the north, and partly bordered the Lake of Chinnereth (Joshua 19:32-39). Many years later, the nearby city of Chinnereth became known as Capernaum and the Lake of Chinnereth was more commonly called the Sea of Galilee. It was in this region that Jesus and His disciples conducted the majority of their ministry.

The tribe of Naphtali did not drive all of the Canaanites out of their territory, but instead conscripted them into forced labor (Judges 1:33). This may have been a source of ongoing provocation. Ultimately Barak, a descendant of Naphtali (Judges 4:6), led a

coalition army under the judgeship Deborah that defeated the Canaanites. As a result of their victory, the tribe of Naphtali is praised for its courage in Deborah's song (Judges 5:18). Years later, the Naphtalites assisted Gideon in his battle against the Midianites (Judges 6:35).

When the era of the judges ended, the 12 tribes united to form a single nation. After Saul's reign, the tribe of Naphtali was one of several who supported David in his bid to become the new king over all of Israel. They sent 1,000 captains and 37,000 soldiers (1 Chronicles 12:34) to join his army. Hiram, a craftsman of bronze who had familial connections to Naphtali, later helped King Solomon in the construction of the first temple (1 Kings 7:14). After the nation divided, the tribe of Naphtali joined the northern kingdom of Israel.

The land of Naphtali was ravaged by Ben-hadad of Assyria (1 Kings 15:20). During the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III, the Assyrians captured and carried off numerous exiles from the tribe of Naphtali (2 Kings 15:29). The entire northern kingdom of Israel, including all of Naphtali, was conquered by the Assyrians sometime around 720 BC.

III. THE LESSON FROM NAPHTALI

The symbol for the tribe of Naphtali is a doe... as in "doe, a deer, a female deer". Jacob described Naphtali as a doe that had been set free (Genesis 49:21). For the most part, does do not have antlers. If they do, these are usually small and underdeveloped. As such, does are not regarded as the regal leaders of the deer family. They are overshadowed by the more powerful and majestic stags. This is a fitting description of the tribe of Naphtali.

In many of the listings of the 12 tribes of Israel, Naphtali is mentioned last. Though they were definitely courageous and brave, they always seemed to be out of the limelight and serving quietly in the background. For the most part, they never garnered much praise or attention. This is reflected in the fact that Barak, the aforementioned military leader who defeated the Canaanites, did not receive the glory for his victory but instead it went to a woman (Judges 4:9).

The region and people of Naphtali were wiped out by the Assyrians and displaced. The area was resettled by a mixed population of people (many of whom were pagans). The prophet Isaiah described it as a land in anguish that God had treated with contempt. However, he further prophesied that the LORD would someday bring glory and honor to it (Isaiah 9:1). By the time of the New Testament, all of what was once Naphtali had

become a part of a larger Roman province named Galilee. The more orthodox Jews in Judea despised and looked down upon the Galileans. It was in this most unlikely place that Jesus lived and served (Matthew 4:12-17), thereby fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy.

One of the wonderful lessons we can draw from the tribe of Naphtali is that God exalts the humble. Naphtali, and later Galilee, was a place of no reputation that was often overshadowed or forgotten. Yet, it was the the land that Jesus called home. This serves as an example of the Scriptural truth that "the first shall be last and the last shall be first". Jesus humbled Himself, even to the point of death on the cross, so that sinners might be lifted up. All Christians are called to practice humility in our relationships with God and others.

CONCLUSION

The fifth of "The 12 Tribes of Israel" are the descendants of Naphtali. They were an imperfect people who made many mistakes, like all of us do, but God ultimately honored their humility. They were generally considered to be lowly and inconsequential among the tribes, yet Jesus ministered comfortably among them. In his book, James the half-brother of Christ writes that "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" James (4:6).

For the next few weeks we will try to cover 2 tribes in a single sermon in hopes that we might conclude this series by Easter. That said, next Sunday we'll discuss both Gad and Asher. Until then, may we always walk humbly with our God.

The 12 Tribes of Israel - Gad & Asher

Originally Preached 2/25/2018

“As for Gad, raiders shall raid him, but he will raid at their heels. As for Asher, his food shall be rich, and he will yield royal dainties.” - Genesis 49:19-20

Having a basic knowledge of “The 12 Tribes of Israel” will help readers to understand the Bible more proficiently. These dozen families represent the numerous descendants of Jacob, and many of the characters named in Scripture are identified by the tribe to which they belong. As we have already discovered in this series, each tribe has a unique story that can be beneficial to our Christian lives.

Moses instructed the children of Israel to conduct a special ceremony consisting of blessings and curses after they entered into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 11:29). Following their victory at Ai, Joshua and the people paused to hold this solemn observance (Joshua 8:30-35) before continuing their military campaign throughout Canaan. On that holy day, 6 tribes gathered on Mt. Gerizim to pronounce blessings and the other 6 gathered on Mt. Ebal to pronounce curses. All of tribes participated in this event, including the sons of Levi (Deuteronomy 27:11-13). Only a few leaders and priests stood in the valley between them, near the ancient city of Shechem. The purpose of this ceremony was to remind Israel that the consequences of their choices would lead to either God’s blessing or His curse.

In today’s sermon we will discuss 2 tribes - Gad and Asher. Though neither tribe is very well known, there are still important lessons we can learn from them. So, let’s pick up where we left off last week as we continue with our study of the 12 tribes...

I. GAD & ASHER - THE SONS OF JACOB

Gad and Asher were the seventh and eighth sons of Jacob respectively. There was an ongoing feud between Leah and her sister Rachel. Each longed for Jacob’s love and wanted desperately to give him children. Leah had already personally given birth to 4 sons, but had since become unfruitful. She saw how Rachel was using her maid Bilhah as a surrogate, and decided to follow suit. Leah sent her handmaiden Zilpah in to Jacob in order to conceive on her behalf. Zilpah had 2 sons for Leah. She named them Gad which means “good fortune” and Asher which means “happy” (Genesis 30:9-11).

The Bible doesn’t say much about either Gad or Asher. As young men, they plotted with

their brothers against Joseph. As older men, they journeyed back and forth to Egypt with them to buy food. Eventually both Gad and Asher resettled in Goshen along with the rest of Jacob's large family. By that time, Gad had 7 sons while Asher had 4 sons, a daughter, and 2 grandchildren (Genesis 46:16-18). Presumably, Gad and Asher later died and were buried - along with their brothers - somewhere in Egypt.

II. GAD & ASHER - THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL

When the first census was taken, the tribe of Gad was numbered at 45,650 and the tribe of Asher was numbered at 41,500 (Numbers 1:24-25,40-41). When the second census was taken, the tribe of Gad had shrunk to 40,500 but the tribe of Asher had grown to 53,400. During the years of the wilderness wanderings, the population of the Asherites actually increased substantially (Numbers 26:18,47).

Gad camped on the southern side of the tabernacle (Numbers 2:14-15). They were in the same camp as Reuben and Simeon. The Gadites marched sixth in the procession of Israel. Asher camped on the northern side of the tabernacle. They were in the same camp as Dan and Naphtali. The sons of Asher were eleventh in the marching order (Numbers 2:27-28).

Some suggest that the diamond symbolizes the tribe of Gad on the breastplate of the high priest (Exodus 28:15-21). If so, the color for Gad is clear or transparent, sometimes represented as white. These same individuals believe that Asher's descendants are depicted on the plate by the onyx. According to this premise, the color for the Asherites is black.

Prior to invading the Promised Land, Moses granted the tribe of Gad an inheritance on the eastern side of the Jordan River (Numbers 32). It bordered the river between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. This fertile land was known as Gilead. Later, Joshua gave an area in the far northwestern region of Canaan to the tribe of Asher (Joshua 19:24-31). Their inheritance was also lush and fruitful. It ran along the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea.

Though they were valiant warriors, the tribes of Gad and Asher both had difficulty displacing the hostile inhabitants of their respective lands (Judges 1:31). Perhaps their ongoing struggles to keep peace at home prevented them at times from coming to the aid of their brothers. Both tribes are chastised for not assisting Deborah in her battle against the Canaanites (Judges 5:17). Sometime later however, Asher responded to a call and came to assist Gideon in his fight with the Midianites (Judges 6:35).

During the era of the united nation of Israel, both Gad and Asher sent men to join King David's army (1 Chronicles 12). During these years, princes were named as leaders over each of the tribal divisions of Israel. For some unknown reason, Gad and Asher were not included in the list of tribal chiefs (1 Chronicles 27). Some historians believe that both families had lost their distinctive significance by this point. When the nation split, Gad and Asher joined the northern kingdom of Israel which remained independent for over 200 years until it was defeated by the Assyrians.

Immediately after the conquest, in the days of Joshua, the trans-Jordan tribes (including Gad) built an altar near the Jordan River. The tribes who had settled in Israel were greatly disturbed by this offensive altar and feared that the trans-Jordan tribes intended to offer sacrifices there rather than at the tabernacle in Shiloh. This misunderstanding almost led to civil war, but when a delegation of both sides met they were able to work out the confusion (Joshua 22:10-34).

Centuries later, King Hezekiah of Judah reinstated the Passover in the southern kingdom. He graciously invited all of the Israelites - including those in the northern kingdom - to meet in Jerusalem for this long-overdue celebration. Hezekiah's couriers were laughed at by many in the north, but to their credit some men from Asher humbled themselves and came down to the Passover ceremony (2 Chronicles 30:11). In the New Testament, when Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to the temple to be dedicated, a prophetess named Anna from the tribe of Asher worshiped Him (Luke 2:36-38).

III. THE LESSONS FROM GAD & ASHER

The symbol for the tribe of Gad is a battlefield tent or encampment. Before the conquest of Canaan even began, the Gadites had already requested, received, and settled in a region east of the Jordan River. Still, Moses made them promise to fight alongside their brothers during the invasion of the Promised Land (Numbers 32). When the time came, the men of Gad kept their word and enlisted in Joshua's army. They earned a reputation for their bravery and ability as skilled warriors.

The symbol for the tribe of Asher is a bowl of food, as would be served in a lavish banquet. Both Jacob (Genesis 49:20) and Moses (Deuteronomy 33:24-25) spoke of Asher as rich, royal, and abundantly blessed. The inheritance allotted to the tribe of Asher was extremely fertile and productive. Interestingly, there is no apparent reason given in Scripture for why the tribe of Asher was so highly favored. The Asherites do not

stand out as more noble or worthy than any of the other tribes. Still, God sovereignly chose to bless them.

There are 2 major lessons that can be gleaned from the legacies of Gad and Asher. The first is that believers should always keep their promises and honor their commitments. It would be better not to make a promise at all rather than to make one and not keep it (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). The second lesson is that God's children are not worthy of the abundant blessings that He bestows upon them. Rebellious sinners do not deserve salvation, yet if they turn to the LORD in repentance He showers them with compassion and forgiveness through Christ Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Gad and Asher are the seventh and eighth sons of Jacob, and the sixth and seventh tribes of Israel. Though they are not as well known as many of the other tribes, still both have a long and notable history. Together they teach us that God's blessings come to those who are obedient. That said, may we always strive to obey the LORD in everything that we do.

Next week we will discuss the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun. Like Gad and Asher, these 2 tribes are also relatively obscure. We will discover, yet again, that even the lesser known tribes have an important story to tell. Until then, may God bless us beyond what we deserve!

The 12 Tribes of Israel - Issachar & Zebulun

Originally Preached 3/4/2018

“Zebulun will dwell at the seashore; and he shall be a haven for ships, and his flank shall be toward Sidon. Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds. When he saw that a resting place was good and that the land was pleasant, he bowed his shoulder to bear burdens, and became a slave at forced labor.” - Genesis 49:13-15

Thus far in our series on “The 12 Tribes of Israel” we have discussed Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Levi, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. We have learned several things about each of these men and their descendants. Before we embark on today’s message, let’s take a few moments to see if you can differentiate these particular tribes from one another. As you read the paragraphs below, try to identify which tribe which is being described. Are you ready?

- * This tribe is often listed last or toward the end of the 12 tribes. It was never prominent or considered noteworthy. Yet, despite it’s humility, God honored this particular tribe and region. Jesus conducted the majority of His ministry and spent most of His time there.
- * This tribe descended from Jacob’s firstborn son. As the son of Jacob, this man slept with his father’s concubine Bilhah. His descendants settled outside of the Promised Land and were inconsistent in their faith and practice.
- * This tribe grew dramatically during the exodus and was extremely blessed. Their inheritance bordered the Mediterranean Sea. A prophetess who was a descendant of this tribe saw and worshiped the baby Jesus in Jerusalem just days after His miraculous birth.
- * This tribe was the smallest of the 12 by the end of the exodus. They received an vaguely defined inheritance and gradually lost their distinctiveness. As the son of Jacob, this man slayed an entire city for the sins of one man. His anger was excessive and cruel.
- * This tribe is not generally considered to be one of the 12. Rather than a specific area, they received several cities as an inheritance that were scattered throughout the Promised Land. God chose them to be the caretakers of the tabernacle/temple and some served as priests.
- * This tribe settled outside of the Promised Land, but promised to assist their brothers during the conquest of Canaan. They honored their promise and fought valiantly. Afterwards, they assisted in building an altar which almost led to civil war among the tribes.
- * This tribe became the largest, most prominent of them all. It had the largest inheritance, and after the nation of Israel split it became the name of the southern kingdom. As the son of Jacob,

this man showed courageous leadership. Jesus is a descendant of this tribe.

* This tribe became known for its sinful and wicked behavior. Though they were granted an inheritance near Philistia, many of these people migrated north. They conquered a city and named it after their ancestor, the son of Jacob. They set up and openly worshiped idols.

Last Sunday we talked about 2 of the lesser known tribes of Israel. This morning we will do the same, this time focusing our attention on Issachar and Zebulun. While neither of these tribes stands out among the others, we still need to be somewhat familiar with them.

I. ISSACHAR & ZEBULUN - THE SONS OF JACOB

Issachar and Zebulun were the ninth and tenth sons of Jacob. Leah had given birth to Jacob's first 4 sons, but had not provided him with another child for quite some time. During this gap, Jacob had 4 additional sons through Bilhah and Zilpah, the handmaidens. Eventually Leah became fertile again and had 2 additional sons. She named the first of them Issachar which means "There is a reward" because she felt that God had rewarded her for giving some mandrakes to her sister Rachel. She named the second son Zebulun which means "Dwelling" because she hoped that Jacob would again dwell with her (Genesis 30:14-20).

There are very few details given in the Bible about either Issachar or Zebulun. Many scholars agree that these 2 brothers were extremely close to each other, as their tribes are sometimes spoken about together. They assisted their brothers in the plot against Joseph, traveled with them during the famine years later, and ultimately moved to Egypt along with the rest of Jacob's family. Records indicate that Issachar had 4 sons and Zebulun had 3 (Genesis 46:13-14).

II. ISSACHAR & ZEBULUN - THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL

Moses took 2 censuses during the exodus, both of which are recorded in the book of Numbers. According to the first counting, the tribe of Issachar had 54,400 fighting men and Zebulun had 57,400 (Numbers 1:28-31). According to the second, both Issachar and Zebulun had grown to 64,300 and 60,500 respectively (Numbers 26:23-27). Both of these tribes were relatively large and strong in comparison to the others.

Issachar and Zebulun camped side-by-side on the eastern side of the tabernacle, along with their older brother Judah. These 3 tribes together were the largest of the quadrants

stationed around the tabernacle. The sons of Issachar were 2nd and those of Zebulun were 3rd in the marching order of Israel (Numbers 2:3-9).

In Old Testament times, the Jewish high priest wore a breastplate with 12 stones on it that depicted the 12 tribes of Israel. Some experts believe that the topaz represents Issachar and the emerald represents Zebulun. If this is accurate, then the color for the tribe of Issachar is greenish yellow while Zebulun is a darker green (Exodus 28:17).

The portions of Canaan that were allotted to Issachar and Zebulun bordered each other (Joshua 19:10-23). The land of Issachar included the beautiful Jezreel Valley and the city of Nazareth, where the boy Jesus grew up. Next to it, the territory of Zebulun included the city of Cana where Jesus performed His first recorded miracle by turning water into wine.

After settling in the Promised land, the Zebulunites didn't drive out all of the Canaanites from their midst but instead subjected them to forced labor (Judges 1:30). Both Zebulun and Issachar are praised for aiding Deborah in her battle against Sisera (Judges 5:14-15) and later the tribe of Zebulun is again mentioned for assisting Gideon (Judges 6:35) in his fight with the Midianites. During this period of time, a man named Tola from the tribe of Issachar (Judges 10:1-2) and a man named Elon from the tribe of Zebulun (Judges 12:11-12) both served as judge. Not much is known about either of these 2 judges.

Years later, after the tribes had united to form the single nation of Israel, the sons of Issachar and Zebulun strongly supported King David (1 Chronicles 12:32-33). When the nation divided, Issachar and Zebulun became part of the northern kingdom. One of the northern kings, a man named Baasha, was actually from the family of Issachar (1 Kings 15:27-28). Both tribes participated in the Passover celebration held by King Hezekiah in Judah (2 Chronicles 30:18-20). Sometime around 720 BC the northern kingdom was defeated and decimated by the Assyrians and these 2 tribes were lost.

III. THE LESSONS FROM ISSACHAR & ZEBULUN

The symbol for the tribe of Issachar is a donkey. Donkeys were used as beasts of burden to carry or pull heavy loads and equipment. This is a fitting image for Issachar. They had a reputation for being hard workers. As blue-collar laborers, these men got their hands dirty every single day and developed a practical wisdom that only comes from real-life experience. Perhaps this is why the sons of Issachar are described as men who "understood the times" and knew "what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32). They

were astute men who knew the true value of work.

The symbol for the tribe of Zebulun is a ship. Although their territory did not officially border any bodies of water, over time many of the Zebulunites apparently migrated eastward toward the Mediterranean Sea and westward toward the Sea of Galilee. It was not uncommon for members of one tribe to live peaceably in the regions of another. Many of the descendants of Zebulun moved to port cities along the seashores where they engaged in commerce and trade. The Bible implies that they enjoyed great success in their exploits.

The history and legacy of each of these tribes can be beneficial to Christians today. They have similar and related stories. From Issachar believers learn the importance of practical wisdom and hard work. The Bible explicitly commands Christians not to be lazy, but rather to work in order to take care of themselves and their families. The sons of Zebulun realized great success as a result of their business efforts. They enjoyed abundance and treasures (Deuteronomy 33:18-19). Such success is possible when people are willing to work.

CONCLUSION

Issachar and Zebulun are the ninth and tenth sons of Jacob. They are the eighth and ninth tribes of Israel. By the days of the New Testament, both of their tribal territories had long-since dissolved and become parts of Galilee. The reputation of these 2 tribes can be seen in the life of Jesus, who did the majority of His work and found His greatest success among the people of Galilee. May we as Christians today be equally committed to the work and ministry that God has called us to. May we labor tirelessly for the cause of Christ.

The 12 Tribes of Israel - Joseph & Manasseh

Originally Preached 3/11/2018

“Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall... The blessings of your father have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; May they be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers. ” - Genesis 49:22,26

One of the continuing themes we have seen in this series is the tension between Rachel and her older sister Leah. Both women were married to Jacob and they battled bitterly against one another for his affection. Though Jacob clearly loved Rachel more, she was barren and unable to bear him any children. Leah, on the other hand, sought to win Jacob's heart by giving him 6 sons and a daughter. During their dispute, both Rachel and Leah offered their handmaidens to Jacob to birth sons on their behalf. Finally, after many years of marriage, God blessed Rachel and enabled her to conceive and give birth to a son (Genesis 30:22-24).

Joseph was the firstborn son of Rachel and the eleventh son of Jacob. The name Joseph means “He will increase”. Rachel, who'd been unfruitful for so long, gave him this name in hopes that God would increase her productivity and give her yet another son. The name also carries a more prophetic meaning. Over the course of his life, Joseph increased in prestige and power to become an influential leader in Egypt who was instrumental in the history of Israel.

While we know relatively little about his brothers, the Bible provides us with many details about Joseph's life. He was Jacob's favorite child and always received preferential treatment from his father. Joseph proudly wore a coat of many colors that his father had made especially for him. What's more, Joseph had dreams that one day his older brothers (and even his parents) would bow down before him. For these and other reasons, Joseph's brothers hated him and plotted to kill him. Instead, they sold him to slave traders and then lied to their father Jacob telling him that his beloved son Joseph was dead (Genesis 37).

Joseph was bound and taken to Egypt where he was purchased by an Egyptian officer named Potiphar. Joseph worked as a servant in Potiphar's house and was quite successful. However, Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of making sexual advances towards her. Potiphar believed her and was furious. He had Joseph thrown into prison (Genesis 39).

While he was incarcerated, Joseph met 2 of Pharaoh's servants who'd been thrown in jail also - the cupbearer and the baker. Both of these men had mysterious dreams. They shared them with Joseph and he accurately interpreted their dreams. Joseph predicted that the baker would be executed and that the cupbearer would be freed. The cupbearer promised that after his release he'd speak to Pharaoh on Joseph's behalf, but he forgot to do so (Genesis 40).

After 2 more years spent in prison, Pharaoh had a dream that his magicians could not interpret. The cupbearer finally remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about him. Joseph was brought before Pharaoh, interpreted his dream, and was subsequently released from prison. Pharaoh was so impressed that he positioned Joseph as second in command over all of Egypt. Joseph was tasked with preparing for and then administering grain and supplies during the years of famine (Genesis 41).

When his brothers came to Egypt to purchase food, they did not immediately recognize Joseph. Eventually he revealed his identity to them. Though he could have been justifiably angry at them for what they'd done to him years before, Joseph lovingly forgave his brothers. He even secured permission from Pharaoh for his father and their entire family to move to Egypt (Genesis 42-47). Joseph's life is an amazing testimony of how God can use bad intentions and circumstances to produce desirable and good outcomes.

As you may recall from earlier in this series, Jacob's first born son Reuben forfeited his birthright to receive a double portion of his father's inheritance because he'd slept with Bilhah. Before his death, Jacob transferred this honor to his beloved son Joseph (Genesis 48:2). As a result, not just 1 but rather 2 of the 12 tribes of Israel are descended from the line of Joseph. These 2 tribes are Ephraim and Manasseh. In today's message, we will consider the tribe of Manasseh.

I. MANASSEH - THE GRANDSON OF JACOB

Manasseh was the oldest son of Joseph, and therefore Jacob was his grandfather. He was born in Egypt during Joseph's tenure as ruler. His mother was named Asenath. The name Manasseh means "One who forgets" and was so chosen because God had made Joseph forget about all of his former difficulties (Genesis 41:51).

Nothing is known about Manasseh's adult life, but when he was just a child his father Joseph took him and his brother to see their dying grandfather. On this occasion Jacob

pronounced a blessing over both boys and adopted them as his own sons, effectively naming them as tribal patriarchs. Though Jacob foretold that Manasseh would be the lesser of the 2, still he prophesied that the descendants of Manasseh would be a great people (Genesis 48:18-19).

II. MANASSEH - THE TRIBE OF ISRAEL

For a period of 400 years in Egypt, the descendants of Jacob multiplied. When Moses first counted them all at Mt. Sinai, the fighting men of Manasseh numbered 32,200 (Numbers 1:34-35). During the years of the exodus the tribe of Manasseh increased significantly to 52,700 (Numbers 26:34).

The tribes camped in a prescribed order during the exodus. The sons of Manasseh set up on the western side of the tabernacle. They were the 8th tribe in the procession of the children of Israel (Numbers 2:20).

12 different gemstones were inset on the breastplate of the high priest. These gems represented the 12 tribes of Israel. Some believe that the agate stood for Manasseh. If so, the color of this tribe is yellowish-brown (Exodus 28:17).

Manasseh is unique among the tribes in that they received 2 separate and distinct areas of inheritance. Some of them settled outside of the Promised Land in regions east of the Sea of Galilee and the northern Jordan River (Numbers 32:33-42). These became known as "the half tribe of Manasseh". The rest of this tribe settled in the central region of the Promised Land, which included the notable cities of Samaria, Shechem, and Shiloh (Joshua 17).

The daughters of Zelophehad (of the tribe of Manasseh) successfully lobbied Moses to secure their father's portion of the inheritance (Numbers 27:1-11). After the land was apportioned, the Manassites were unable to drive all of the Canaanites out of their territories (Joshua 17:12-13; Judges 1:27) and had ongoing problems during the era of the judges. During these turbulent years, 3 of the judges named in the Bible were descendants of Manasseh. These were Gideon (Judges 6:14-15), Jair (Judges 10:3-5), and Jephthah (Judges 11).

When the age of the judges ended, Israel merged for a time into a single nation. But after only 120 years, it separated again into 2 kingdoms. Manasseh joined the northern kingdom, also called Israel, and Samaria became its capital city. The northern kingdom existed for about 200 years and fell to the Assyrians around 720 BC. The conquering

Assyrians resettled the area with exiles from foreign lands. For centuries thereafter, the remaining local Jews intermarried with these foreigners and their mixed descendants became known as Samaritans.

III. THE LESSON FROM MANASSEH

The symbol for the tribe of Manasseh is a bough of grapes or a sheaf of grain. Both symbols are derived from Jacob's blessing of Joseph. Manasseh was a large and populous tribe. Unfortunately, it was also a family divided. Some of the Manassites chose to settle east of the Jordan River in northern Gilead while others chose to occupy the central portion of Israel. This division ultimately diminished the prominence and reputation of the tribe.

As Christians today, we can learn indirectly from the story of Manasseh that divided loyalties often lead to negative consequences. Jesus taught that a house divided could not stand (Mark 3:25). From the days of the Old Testament all the way to the present time, division among believers has remained as one of the greatest problems in the church.

CONCLUSION

Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob and he fathered 2 tribes through his sons. Manasseh became the tenth tribe of Israel. We must be careful not to confuse him with other men in the Bible also named Manasseh - such as the wicked king of Judah (2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33). There are likely several lessons we can learn from the tribe of Manasseh, but a major one stresses the importance of unity and the peril of division. As we close our services today, I invite us all to put away those things which separate us from each other and to come together in one accord in the name of Jesus.

The 12 Tribes of Israel - Ephraim

Originally Preached 3/18/2018

“He blessed Joseph, and said, ‘The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and may my name live on in them, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.’” - Genesis 48:15-16

When the Children of Israel arrived at Kadesh-barnea, Moses decided to send a band of spies into the Promised Land. They were supposed to scout out the area and assess the strength of any possible adversaries that lived there. Moses selected 1 man from each of the 12 tribes of Israel to form this stealthy group. These spies quietly travelled through southern Canaan for several days before returning to the Israelite camp. When they got back, Moses asked them to describe what they had seen. The group presented a thorough report to the congregation.

The spies stated that the Canaanites appeared to be very strong and their cities looked quite formidable. Moses asked the spies if they believed that the Children of Israel could successfully invade the Promised Land and defeat these inhabitants. The team took a vote on the question. 10 of the men said “No” because they were fearful of the sizable enemy. Only 2 of the scouts voted “Yes” because they believed that God was with them and would give them the victory. The majority opinion carried, and the Children of Israel turned back from the Promised Land and instead wandered through the wilderness for the next 40 years (Numbers 13 & 14).

Though they had been outvoted, God still rewarded the 2 spies who had trusted in Him. All of the other spies along with the entire first generation of the exodus died in the wilderness with the exception of these 2 men and Moses. Their names were Caleb and Joshua. Joshua became the leader of the Israelites after Moses died and Caleb later received a special inheritance specifically for his family. It is noteworthy that Caleb was from the tribe of Judah and Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim. Over time, these 2 tribes became the most prominent of the 12. This is no coincidence; it shows God’s ongoing blessing of both Caleb’s and Joshua’s posterity.

This morning we will study the tribe of Ephraim. It was the second most distinguished of the tribes, following only Judah. After today’s message, we will only have one more tribe left to consider in this series through “The 12 Tribes of Israel”.

I. EPHRAIM - THE GRANDSON OF JACOB

Ephraim was the grandson of Jacob and the younger son of Joseph. He and his older brother Manasseh were both born in Egypt during the years when Joseph was serving as Pharaoh's second-in-command. His mother was Asenath. The name Ephraim means "double fruitfulness" and it expresses Joseph's joy because God had made him "fruitful in the land of his affliction" (Genesis 41:52).

The Bible doesn't mention Ephraim's adult life, but it does describe a scene from his childhood. After Jacob's family moved to Egypt, Joseph took his 2 sons to meet their aged grandfather. Jacob promised that 2 tribes would emerge from the line of Joseph - one through Manasseh and the other through Ephraim. Jacob then crossed his arms while laying his hands on his grandsons to pronounce a blessing. By doing this, he transferred the blessing of the firstborn son to the second and vice versa. When Joseph started to correct him, Jacob insisted that Ephraim - though the younger - would be greater than his brother (Genesis 48:8-20).

II. EPHRAIM - THE TRIBE OF ISRAEL

Moses counted the Children of Israel twice during the exodus. The first census took place near the beginning of the journey. At this time, the tribe of Ephraim had 40,500 warriors (Numbers 1:32-33). By the time of the second census near the end of the trek, the sons of Ephraim had declined to 32,500 (Numbers 26:37).

Whenever the Israelites stopped and set up camp, the tribe of Ephraim was stationed on the western side of the tabernacle. It was the leading tribe of the western camp, which also included Manasseh and Benjamin. The Ephraimites marched 7th in the procession of Israel (Numbers 2:18).

During the Old Testament era, the high priest wore a special breastplate. It displayed 12 beautiful gemstones which depicted the 12 tribes of Israel. Many religious experts believe that the jacinth represented Ephraim. If so, the color of the tribe is orangish-red (Exodus 28:17).

The Ephraimites received a small, but strategically located, area of land in central Canaan (Joshua 16). Their inheritance included the city of Bethel, where Abraham had built an altar many years earlier (Genesis 12:8) and where God had confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob (Genesis 28).

After the conquest ended, various regional judges ruled in Israel for almost 350 years. Deborah hailed from the tribe of Ephraim (Judges 4:4-5) and so did Abdon (Judges 12:13-15). During these years, the tribe of Ephraim battled bravely against the enemy on multiple occasions. However, they were greatly offended when Gideon didn't immediately call them for assistance (Judges 8:1). Later, the Ephraimites pridefully provoked a civil war with the judge Jephthah because he had defeated the Ammonites without waiting for their help (Judges 12:1-6).

Following centuries of rule by tribal judges, the 12 tribes united to form the single nation of Israel. The prophet/judge Samuel, who was himself a descendant of Ephraim (1 Samuel 1), named Saul as the first king. Sometime later, the tribe of Ephraim sent soldiers to support young David's bid to become the new king (1 Chronicles 12:30). After the reign of King Solomon, the nation of Israel split.

During the period of the divided kingdoms, the tribe of Ephraim was aligned with the northern monarchy of Israel and Jeroboam, its first king, was an Ephraimite (1 Kings 11:26). Just as the southern kingdom was named Judah, so also the northern kingdom was often called Ephraim. Thus, there are many instances in Scripture - especially in the writings of the prophets - where the name Ephraim does not refer to a particular tribe but rather to all of the tribes in the northern kingdom. Israel/Ephraim fell to the Assyrians sometime around 720 BC.

III. THE LESSON FROM EPHRAIM

The symbol for the tribe of Ephraim is an ox (Deuteronomy 33:17). An ox is an incredibly strong animal, but it can also be wild and uncontrollable. In a similar way, the tribe of Ephraim was very powerful and influential. Sadly, they were also horribly sinful and wicked at times. They struggled with pride, idolatry, and disobedience. The leadership they exhibited over the northern kingdom actually led people away from God rather than towards Him.

The tribe of Ephraim serves as an example of wasted potential. Though they had so much going for them, their pride and self-centeredness often seemed to get in their way. Their elevated position among the tribes could have been used as a source for good to point others towards righteousness. Instead, on the whole, they did just the opposite. As a result, the northern kingdom collapsed much sooner than the southern kingdom did. Each of the northern kings in succession just got worse and worse...

Like Ephraim, God has blessed each individual person with the potential to lead others to Him. He has entrusted the gospel message to believers and equipped them for the work of ministry. He has called His followers to be ambassadors for Christ and to carry the name of Jesus everywhere. He continually gives them opportunities to point lost sinners to the loving Savior. Yet, all too often, Christians fail to draw people toward the Lord but instead they actually push them away. Their potential for good is frequently squandered away...

CONCLUSION

Ephraim was a man, a tribe, and a nation. The man named Ephraim was the second son of Joseph, and was a grandson of Jacob. The tribe that descended from Ephraim was the eleventh of the 12 tribes. Ephraim was an alternative name for the northern kingdom, more commonly known as Israel. When we read the word Ephraim in the Bible we must be careful to consider the context of the passage to determine which of these meanings is appropriate.

The main idea of today's message about Ephraim is this: we must be careful not to waste the potential that God has given to us. He has called us to do good works and to shine the light of Jesus in dark places. But are we actually doing that? If so, how often are we doing it? How much potential are we wasting? Could we and should we be doing more for Jesus?

Next week we'll conclude this series on "The 12 Tribes of Israel" with a message about Jacob's youngest son Benjamin. In the meantime, may we each strive to reach the potential for good that God has placed within us.

The 12 Tribes of Israel - Benjamin

Originally Preached 3/25/2018

“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he devours the prey, and in the evening he divides the spoil.” - Genesis 49:27

This morning we will finish our sermon series on “The 12 Tribes of Israel”. The last of these messages is on the tribe of Benjamin. Following our brief study of this particular tribe, we will consider some final thoughts on tribes as a whole. That said, let’s jump right in...

I. BENJAMIN - THE SON OF JACOB

Benjamin was the 12th and youngest son of Jacob. All of his older brothers were born while Jacob lived in Paddan-aram and worked for his father-in-law Laban. Eventually Jacob and his family returned to Canaan and settled for a time in Bethel. They travelled from there toward Bethlehem, but shortly before arriving Rachel went into severe labor. Sadly, she died shortly after giving birth to her second son, but before doing so Rachel named him Ben-Oni which means “son of my sorrows”. Sometime later, his father Jacob renamed him Benjamin which means “son of the right hand” indicating his favored status (Genesis 35:16-20).

Because the Bible is unclear as to exactly when Benjamin was born, there are a few different possibilities. If he was only a few years younger than Joseph, then the two brothers would have known each other well before Joseph was sold into slavery. This seems to be the most plausible theory based upon the clues in the text. That said, young Benjamin was likely not involved in the conspiracy of his older brothers against Joseph (Genesis 37:18-36). However, some suggest that Joseph was much older and was sold into slavery before Benjamin’s birth. If so, Joseph would not have known about the death of his mother Rachel or the existence of his younger brother Benjamin until years later. Perhaps seeing Benjamin for the very first time as an adult prompted Joseph’s emotional response in Egypt (Genesis 43:29-30).

Benjamin did not make the first journey to Egypt with his brothers, but he did go with them on their second trip. Jacob did not really want to send Benjamin with them, but felt that he had no other choice. For all he knew, Pharaoh was not going to assist them anymore and perhaps would keep Simeon jailed if Benjamin did not show up (Genesis 42 & 43). Fortunately, Joseph lovingly forgave his brothers and permitted them all to

move to Egypt. Jacob's entire family resettled in Goshen, including Benjamin and his sons (Genesis 46:21).

II. BENJAMIN - THE TRIBE OF ISRAEL

During their time in Egypt, the descendants of Jacob's sons became more and more numerous and were distinguished from each other as the 12 tribes of Israel. Centuries later, when Moses led them out of Egypt, he counted the fighting men of each of these tribes. Benjamin had 35,400 soldiers at the beginning of the exodus (Numbers 1:36-37) and 45,600 by the end of it (Numbers 26:41).

There was a prescribed order in which the children of God marched during the exodus. The tribe of Benjamin was ninth in this line. Also, there was a set arrangement in which they camped. The Benjaminites were located on the western side of the tabernacle (Numbers 2:22).

The high-priest wore an ornate breastplate adorned with 12 stones that represented the 12 tribes. The exact correlation between the stones and the tribes is uncertain. Some believe that the tribe of Benjamin is depicted by the amethyst (Exodus 28:19). If this is the case, the color associated with Benjamin is purple.

The sons of Benjamin received a small inheritance of land located just north of Jerusalem (Joshua 18:11-28). It was centrally located within Israel. As such, it was an extremely important and strategic area.

Only one of the judges named in Scripture hailed from the tribe of Benjamin. His name was Ehud, the left-handed warrior who killed King Eglon of Moab (Judges 3:12-30). Years later the 12 tribes joined together to form a single nation and they anointed their first king. His name was Saul, and he too was a descendant of Benjamin (1 Samuel 9 & 10). After Israel divided, the Benjaminites became a part of the southern kingdom of Judah (2 Chronicles 11:1-12). The Southern kingdom was conquered by Babylon in 586 BC.

Mordecai and Esther were both from the tribe of Benjamin. Together, they saved the Jews from Haman's genocidal edict (Esther 1-10). Following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, a former Pharisee from the tribe of Benjamin became an apostle and carried the gospel to the Gentiles throughout Asia and Europe. His name was Paul (Romans 11:1).

While there are many Biblical stories involving the tribe of Benjamin, perhaps the most

notorious took place during the reign of the judges (Judges 19-21). A Levite and his concubine were journeying through the territory of Benjamin and decided to stop and spend the night. The Benjamite men of the city surrounded the house where they were lodging and demanded that the Levite come out so that they could sexually assault him. The Levite refused, but fearing that more violence might occur, he sent his concubine out to appease them. The worthless men of Benjamin raped her multiple times throughout the evening and night so that she died the next morning. When the other 11 tribes learned what had happened they formed an alliance against Benjamin, attacked, and almost annihilated it completely. Only a small remnant of the Benjaminites remained to repopulate the tribe. For this reason, Benjamin is sometimes called the lost tribe due to its near extinction.

III. THE LESSON FROM BENJAMIN

The symbol for the tribe of Benjamin is a wolf (Genesis 49:27). The wolf is a ravenous predator that devours its prey. So also, the tribe of Benjamin were skilled fighters who were experts in combat. Apparently, they learned to fight left-handed in order to throw-off their adversaries (Judges 20:16; 1 Chronicles 12:2).

One of the lessons Christians can learn from the tribe of Benjamin is the despicable nature of sexual immorality. Their sin is reminiscent of that of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Benjamites were guilty of both rape and homosexuality. That said, any type of sexual relationship outside of the clearly defined limits established by God in the Bible is sinful. This includes all types of fornication, adultery, incest, bestiality, and so on. Sexual sin is particularly awful because it violates one's own body (1 Corinthians 6:18).

CONCLUSION

As we conclude our series on "The 12 Tribes of Israel", let us remember the major lessons from each tribe. Some were negative, while others were positive. We learned to avoid inconsistency in our faith and practice. We were warned of the dangers of excessive anger and divided loyalties. We were urged to refrain from idolatry and sexual immorality. In addition, we saw the tragedy of wasted potential. On the other hand, we were also reminded to practice humility and to show courageous leadership. We were prompted to be trustworthy promise-keepers and wise workers. Such behaviors will lead to abundant success in the LORD's sight. Finally, we discovered that Christians are undeservedly blessed and are the chosen ministers of God.

But the even greater lesson of this series is about the faithfulness of God. Even though

all of the tribes were eventually conquered and dispersed, the LORD's promise to Israel remains intact. His covenant to restore and bless the nations of the world through Israel is eternal.

Earlier in this series, we read that God will set aside and protect a remnant of 12,000 people from each of the 12 tribes - excluding Dan and including Levi - during the Tribulation. These 144,000 believing Jews will be witnesses for Jesus Christ during these difficult years. When the Tribulation ends after 7 years Jesus will return to the earth and set up His earthly kingdom.

For 1,000 literal years, during a period called the Millennium, Jesus will reign over the entire earth from the capital city of Jerusalem (Revelation 20:2-7). The nation of Israel will be fully restored and all of God's promises to them will be fulfilled. These will be years of great peace and comfort on the earth.

During the Millennium, the land of Israel will once again be divided among the reconstituted 12 tribes of Israel. The boundaries of these territories will be much different than they were in Old Testament times. In one of his apocalyptic visions of the future, Ezekiel described this future redistribution (Ezekiel 48). Basically, every tribe will receive a horizontal strip of land that runs east to west across Israel. From north to south the tribes will be Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben, Judah, a holy district which will include the Levites and the city of Jerusalem, Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad.

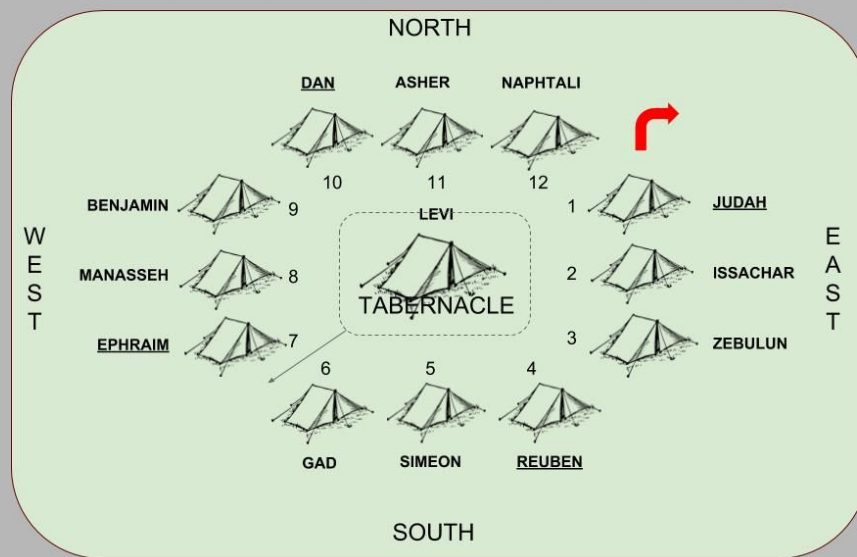
God has not forgotten nor will He ever forget the the descendants of Jacob. They are His chosen nation. The 12 tribes are not just a relic of the past, but still have an important and eternal role to play in the LORD's grand design for humanity. In the future, He will restore them and elevate them to a place of distinction and honor. In the end, the 12 tribes of Israel are a sterling testament of God's never-ending faithfulness to His people.

APPENDIX & MAPS

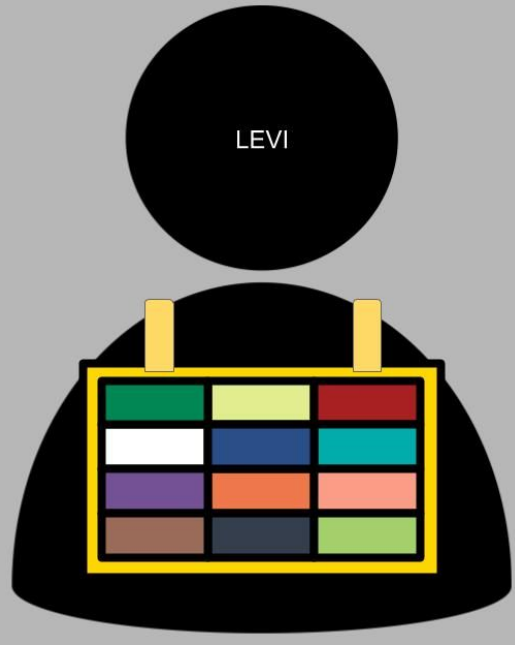
Population of the 12 Tribes from the 1st and 2nd Census

TRIBE	1st CENSUS	2nd CENSUS
1) REUBEN	46,500	43,730
2) SIMEON	59,300	22,200
3) JUDAH	74,600	76,500
4) DAN	62,700	64,400
5) NAPHTALI	53,400	45,400
6) GAD	45,650	40,500
7) ASHER	41,500	53,400
8) ISSACHAR	54,400	64,300
9) ZEBULUN	57,400	60,500
10) MANASSEH	32,200	52,700
11) EPHRAIM	40,500	32,500
12) BENJAMIN	35,400	45,600
<i>LEVI</i>	<i>22,000</i>	<i>23,000</i>

The Camping Arrangement & Marching Order of the 12 Tribes of Israel



The Breastplate of the High Priest



The Breastplate of the High Priest

ZEBULUN Emerald	ISSACHAR Topaz	JUDAH Ruby
GAD Diamond	SIMEON Sapphire	REUBEN Turquoise
BENJAMIN Amethyst	MANASSEH Agate	EPHRAIM Jacinth
NAPHTALI Jasper	ASHER Onyx	DAN Beryl

The Convocation at Shechem

Mt. Gerizim

Blessings

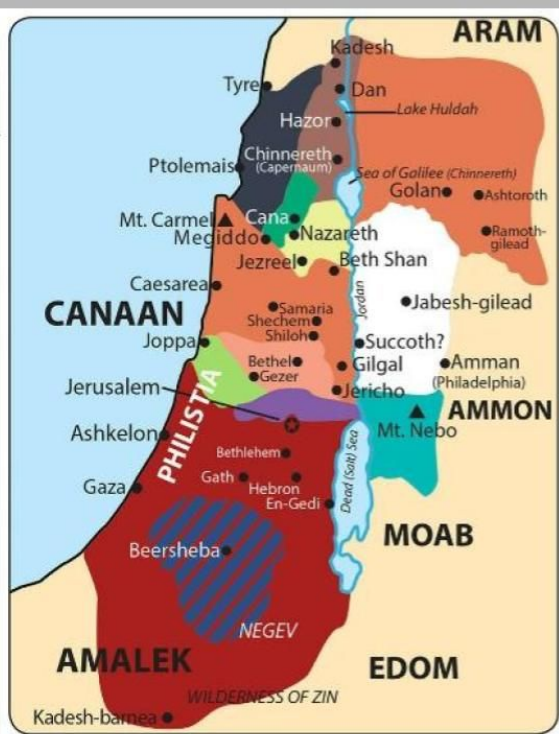
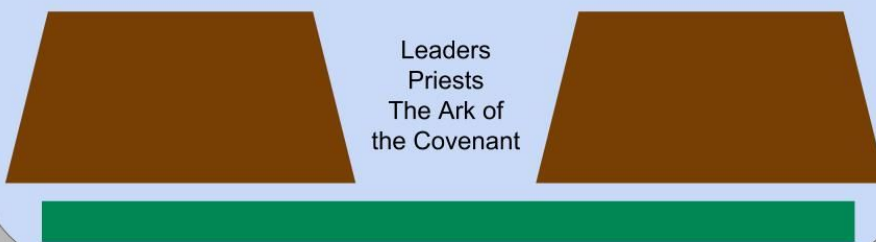
- Simeon
- Levi
- Judah
- Issachar
- Joseph (*Eph & Man*)
- Benjamin

Mt. Ebal

Curses

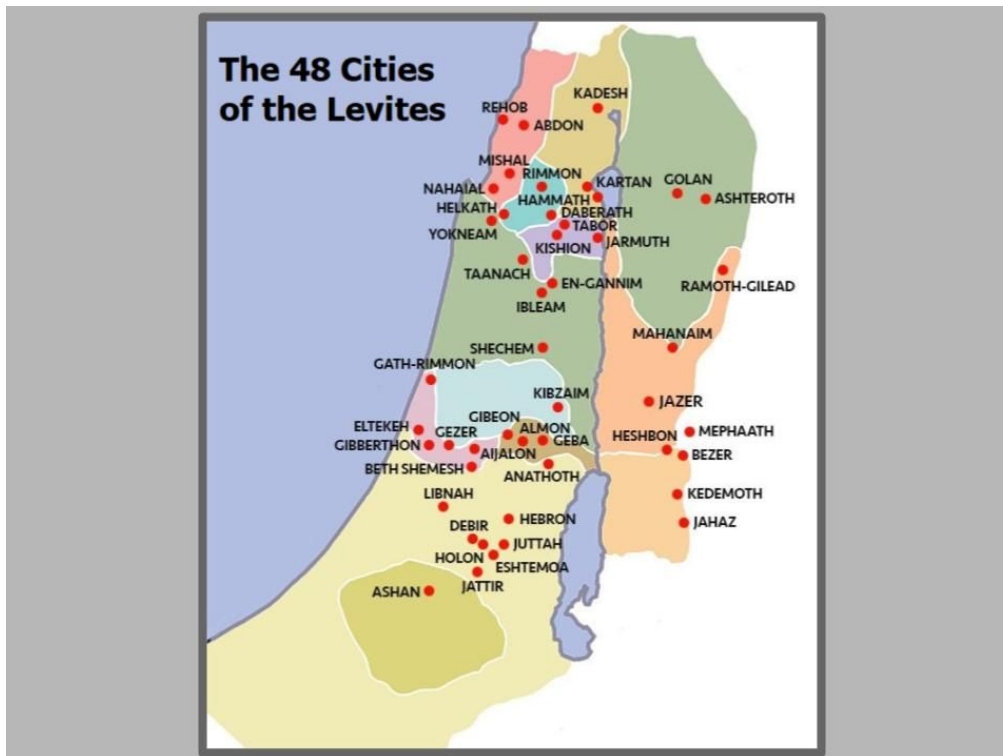
- Reuben
- Gad
- Asher
- Zebulun
- Dan
- Naphtali

Leaders
Priests
The Ark of the Covenant



The Territories of the 12 Tribes

- REUBEN
- SIMEON
- JUDAH
- DAN
- NAPHTALI
- GAD
- ASHER
- ISSACHAR
- ZEBULUN
- MANASSEH
- EPHRAIM
- BENJAMIN



The Division of the Tribes of Israel after the Nation Split



ISRAEL

EPHRAIM
ISSACHAR
ZEBULUN
ASHER
NAPHTALI
DAN
GAD (Trans-Jordan)
REUBEN (Trans-Jordan)
MANASSEH (½ Trans-Jordan)

JUDAH

JUDAH
BENJAMIN
SIMEON[^]
LEVI*

[^] The territory of Simeon was located in Judah. However the Simeonites themselves moved north to join Israel.

* Those Levites who lived in the cities of Israel moved south Judah. *Levi* is not generally listed as one of the 12 tribes.

**Division of
Israel
during the
Millennium**

Ezekiel 48

