

Welcome to 10 Minute Topics

This week's topic is: Twelve Tribes

NORTH						
W E S T	Uninhabited	Asher	Dan	Naphtali	Uninhabited	E A S T
		Kohath (Levi)				
	Manesseh	Gershon (Levi)	Tabernacle	Moshe & Priests	Issachar	
	Ephraim				Judah	
	Benjamin				Zebulun	
	Uninhabited	Merari (Levi)			Uninhabited	
Gad		Reuben	Simeon			
SOUTH						

The twelve tribes of Israel are all descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. After the death of King Solomon, the tribes divided Israel into two kingdoms – Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom). After the Kingdom of Israel is defeated and scattered to the nations by Assyria, only two-and-a-half tribes are left in the Kingdom of Judah (Judah, Levi, and one-half of Benjamin). Today, no one knows for sure where the members of the “lost tribes” are located although there is some speculation regarding certain African, Arab, Persian, and Asian (especially Indian) populations.

The tribe of Levi was not given any land and they were to be priests in the Tabernacle and the later Temples. Joseph's tribe was divided between his two sons – Manesseh and Ephraim.

Reuben (רֶאוּבֵן) was the first-born of Jacob by Leah.

Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, as she had declared, “Behold Hashem has discerned my humiliation, for now my husband will love me.” (Genesis 29:32)

Reuben was the first-born of Jacob through Leah. He was born on the 24th of Kislev and died at the age of 155. He retained the genealogical birthright but his monetary rights were taken away and given to Joseph due to the incident with Bilhah. Since Reuben rescued Joseph from the hands of his brothers, he was honored by having the first city of refuge (Bezer) named in his tribe's territory.

Blessing - lost his right to national leadership due to the incident with Bilhah

Census - 46,500 (Numbers 1:21); 43,730 (Numbers 26:7)

Territories - Joshua 13:15-23

Breastplate Gem - Odem (Ruby)
Symbol - Dudaim (Mandrakes)
Color - Red
Astrological Sign - Cancer
Month - Tammuz
Hebrew Letter - Chet (ח)

Simeon (שִׁמְעוֹן) was the second-born of Jacob by Leah.

And she conceived again and bore a son and declared, “Because Hashem has heard that I am unloved, He has given me this one also,” and she called his name Simeon. (Genesis 29:33)

Simeon was the second-born of Jacob and Leah. He was born on the 28th of Tevet and died at the age of 120. Simeon and Levi decimated the city of Shechem when they found out that their sister Dinah had been raped by Shechem, son of Hamor. Simeon was the one who pushed Joseph into the pit and as a result, Joseph imprisoned Simeon in Egypt. Simeon was the ruler of the Hebrews in Egypt after Reuben died. After Simeon died, the leadership went to Levi.

Blessing - lost his right to national leadership due to his rage
Census - 59,300 (Numbers 1:23); 22,200 (Numbers 26:14)
Territories - Joshua 19:1-9
Breastplate Gem - Pitedah (Emerald)
Symbol - City of Shechem
Color - Green
Astrological Sign - Leo
Month - Av
Hebrew Letter - Tet (ט)

Levi (לֵוִי) was the third-born of Jacob by Leah.

Again she conceived, and bore a son and declared, “This time my husband will become attached to me for I have borne him three sons”; therefore He called his name Levi. (Genesis 29:34)

Levi was the third-born of Jacob and Leah. He was born on the 16th of Nissan and died at the age of 137. Simeon and Levi decimated the city of Shechem when they found out that their sister Dinah had been raped by Shechem, son of Hamor. Levi was the ruler of the Hebrews in Egypt after Simeon died.

Blessing - lost his right to national leadership due to his rage
Census - not counted (Numbers 1:47); 23,000 (Numbers 1:62)
Territories - none
Breastplate Gem - Bareket (multi-colored stone)
Symbol - Choshen (Breastplate)
Color - Red, White, and Black
Astrological Sign - none

Month – none

Judah (יהודה) was the fourth-born of Jacob by Leah.

She conceived again, and bore a son and declared, “This time let me gratefully praise Hashem”; therefore she called his name Judah; then she stopped giving birth. (Genesis 29:35)

Judah was the fourth-born of Jacob and Leah. He was born on the 15th of Nissan and died at the age of 119. Jacob taught his sons not to seek higher rank and by fulfilling this teaching, Judah merited kingship. Judah was the one who convinced his brothers to sell Joseph instead of killing him. After Levi died, the Hebrews sought to give the leadership to Judah, but a heavenly voice said to leave Judah’s sovereignty until the proper time.

Blessing - gained the right to national leadership and royalty as well as the ancestor of the Mosiach (Messiah)

Census - 74,600 (Numbers 1:27); 76,500 (Numbers 26:22)

Territories - Joshua 15:1-63

Breastplate Gem - Nofech (Carbuncle)

Symbol - Lion

Color - Sky Blue

Astrological Sign - Aries

Month - Nissan

Hebrew Letter - Hey (ה)

Dan (דן) was the fifth-born of Jacob by Bilhah.

So she [Rachel] gave him Bilhah her maidservant as a wife, and Jacob consorted with her. Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Then Rachel said, “G-d has judged me, He has also heard my voice and has given me a son.” She therefore called his name Dan. (Genesis 30:4-6)

Dan was the first-born of Jacob and Bilhah. He was born on the 9th of Elul and died at the age of 125. Dan’s sons were as numerous as a forest of reeds. In the merit of Dan, Rachel was granted conception. Dan is buried in his children’s city of Eshthaol.

Blessing - the defender of the people

Census - 62,700 (Numbers 1:39); 64,400 (Numbers 26:43)

Territories - Joshua 19:40-48

Breastplate Gem - Tarshish (Chrysolite Amber)

Symbol - Snake

Color - Sapphire Blue

Astrological Sign - Capricorn

Month - Tevet

Hebrew Letter - Ayin (ע)

Naphtali (נַפְתָּלִי) was the sixth-born of Jacob by Bilhah.

Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. And Rachel said, "Sacred schemes have I maneuvered to equal my sister, and I have also prevailed!" And she called his name Naphtali. (Genesis 30:7-8)

Naphtali was the second-born of Jacob and Bilhah. He was born on the 5th of Tishrei and died at the age of 133. Naphtali went as a messenger anywhere the Tribes wished and he would carry out their missions immediately. Naphtali is the one who told Judah of the plot to kill Joseph. Naphtali's speech was pleasant to his father and therefore his father blessed him.

Blessing - swift on his feet and able to praise and give thanks with beautiful words

Census - 53,400 (Numbers 1:43); 45,400 (Numbers 26:50)

Territories - Joshua 19:32-39

Breastplate Gem - Shevo (Turquoise)

Symbol - Deer

Color - Burgundy

Astrological Sign - Pisces

Month - Adar

Hebrew Letter - Kof (כ)

Gad (גָּד) is the seventh-born of Jacob by Zilpah.

When Leah saw that she had stopped giving birth, she took Zilpah her maidservant, and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, bore Jacob a son. And Leah declared, "Good luck has come!" So she called his name Gad. (Genesis 30:9-11)

Gad was the first-born of Jacob and Zilpah. He was born on the 10th of Cheshvan and died at the age of 125. Gad is buried across the Jordan in Rumiah, which was given to his descendants as an inheritance.

Blessing - warrior and defender of the people

Census - 45,650 (Numbers 1:25); 40,500 (Numbers 26:18)

Territories - Joshua 13:24-28

Breastplate Gem - Achlamah (Calf-Eye or Crystal or Amethyst)

Symbol - Army

Color - Gray

Astrological Sign - Virgo

Month - Elul

Hebrew Letter - Yud (י)

Asher (אָשֶׁר) was the eighth-born of Jacob by Zilpah.

Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, bore a second son to Jacob. Leah declared, "In my good fortune! For women have deemed me fortunate!" So she called his name Asher. (Genesis 30:12-13)

Asher was the second-born of Jacob and Zilpah. He was born on the 20th of Shevat and died at the age of 162. Asher inherited more castles than Judah inherited lands. The daughters of the tribe of Asher were beautiful and wed priests and kings. Asher told his daughter Serah that anyone who came and said "G-d said to me, I have surely remembered you" is the true redeemer of the Hebrews from Egypt.

Blessing - successful farmer (specifically olive trees)

Census - 41,500 (Numbers 1:41); 53,400 (Numbers 26:47)

Territories - Joshua 19:24-31

Breastplate Gem - Leshem (Topaz or Opal)

Symbol - Olive Tree

Color - Pearl

Astrological Sign - Aquarius

Month - Shevat

Hebrew Letter - Tsadi (צ)

Issachar (יִשָּׂכָר) was the ninth-born of Jacob by Leah.

G-d hearkened to Leah; and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. And Leah declared, "G-d has granted me my reward because I gave my maidservant to my husband." So she called his name Issachar. (Genesis 30:17-18)

Issachar was the fifth-born of Jacob and Leah. He was born on the 10th of Av and died at the age of 122. A donkey caused Issachar to be born for it led Jacob to the tent of Leah. Issachar sat and engaged in Torah study while Zebulun sailed the seas for commerce and supplied Issachar. The descendants of Issachar were sages, who were experts in intercalation.

Blessing - great Torah scholar, decider of Torah laws, and determine the Jewish calendar (specifically leap years)

Census - 44,400 (Numbers 1:29); 64,300 (Numbers 26:25)

Territories - Joshua 19:17-23

Breastplate Gem - Sapir (Sapphire)

Symbol - Sun and Moon

Color - Bluish Black

Astrological Sign - Taurus

Month - Iyar

Hebrew Letter - Vav (ו)

Zebulun (זְבוּלֹן) was the tenth-born of Jacob by Leah.

Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. Leah said, “G-d has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will make his permanent home with me for I have borne him six sons.” So she called his name Zebulun. (Genesis 30:19-20)

Zebulun was the sixth-born of Jacob and Leah. He was born on the 7th of Tishrei and died at the age of 110. G-d told Zebulun that everyone would need his chilazon in order to dye their tzitzit blue. Zebulun engaged in trade and supported Issachar who studied Torah. Zebulun was buried in Sidon.

Blessing - fisherman, keeper of harbors, and Torah scholar

Census - 57,400 (Numbers 1:31); 60,500 (Numbers 26:27)

Territories - Joshua 19:10-16

Breastplate Gem - Yahalom (Pearl or Diamond)

Symbol - Ship

Color - White

Astrological Sign - Gemini

Month - Sivan

Hebrew Letter - Zayin (ז)

Joseph (יוֹסֵף) was the eleventh-born to Jacob by Rachel.

G-d remembered Rachel; G-d hearkened to her and He opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, “G-d has taken away my disgrace.” So she called his name Joseph, saying, “May Hashem add on for me another son.” (Genesis 30:22-24)

Joseph was the first-born of Jacob and Rachel. He was born circumcised. Jacob took the birthright away from Reuben and gave it to Joseph. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. He lived in Egypt where he became an interpreter of dreams and eventually the viceroy. Joseph observed the sabbath before the command to observe it was given. Since Joseph received the birthright of the firstborn son, his inheritance was doubled. His tribal inheritance was split between his sons Manasseh and Ephraim.

Blessing - inherits the heritage of Jacob (and by extension Abraham)

Census - 40,500 (Ephraim-Numbers 1:33), 32,200 (Manasseh-Numbers 1:35); 32,500

(Ephraim-Numbers 26:37), 52,700 (Manasseh-Numbers 26:34)

Territories - Ephraim-Joshua 16:1-10; Manasseh-Joshua 13:29-32;17:7-18

Breastplate Gem - Shoham (Onyx or Emerald)

Symbol - Ox; Young Bull (Ephraim); Wild Ox (Manasseh)

Color - Black; Red-Violet (Ephraim); Violet (Manasseh)

Astrological Sign - Libra (Ephraim); Scorpio (Manasseh)

Month - Tishrei (Ephraim); Chesvan (Manasseh)

Hebrew Letter - Lamed (ל) (Ephraim); Nun (נ) (Manasseh)

Benjamin (בִּינְיָמִין) was the twelfth-born to Jacob by Rachel.

They journeyed from Beth-el and there was still a stretch of land to go to Ephrath, when Rachel went into labor and had difficulty in her childbirth. And it was when she had difficulty in her labor that the midwife said to her, “Have no fear, for this one, too, is a son for you.” And it came to pass, as her soul was departing – for she died – that she called his name Ben Oni [son of my mourning], but his father called him Benjamin. (Genesis 35:16-18)

Benjamin was the second-born of Jacob and Rachel. He was born on the 11th of Cheshavan and died at the age of 105. With each son of Jacob a twin sister was born. An extra twin sister was born with Benjamin. Benjamin was one of only nine people to have entered the Garden of Eden during their lifetimes. When Joseph was sold to Egypt, his righteous brother Benjamin took his spiritual place, lest it be missing.

Blessing - warrior and defender of the people

Census - 35,400 (Numbers 1:37); 45,600 (Numbers 26:41)

Territories - Joshua 18:11-28

Breastplate Gem - Yashfeh (Jasper)

Symbol - Wolf

Color - All colors of the other 11 tribes

Astrological Sign - Sagittarius

Month - Kislev

Hebrew Letter - Samech (ס)