

MAP

The Twelve Tribes of Israel



“As for me, here is my covenant with you: You will become the father of many nations...I will make you extremely fruitful and will make nations and kings come from you. I will confirm my covenant that is between me and you and your future offspring throughout their generations. It is a permanent covenant to be your God and the God of your offspring after you. And to you and your future offspring I will give the land where you are residing—all the land of Canaan—as a permanent possession, and I will be their God.”

GENESIS 17:4–8

God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis marked the beginning of a unique relationship between God and Abraham’s descendants through his son Isaac. In Genesis 32 and 35, God met with Abraham’s grandson Jacob and renamed him Israel. These encounters affirmed that God’s covenant would be fulfilled through Jacob’s lineage, the eponymous nation of Israel. Through Jacob’s twelve sons, this family would grow into a large nation of many tribes that Joshua would lead into the land promised to Abraham.

This list below shows the relationship between the tribal allotments found in the second half of Joshua, and Jacob’s twelve sons. These sons are listed here in order of their birth, along with the name each son was given by his mother to commemorate the circumstances of his birth.

1

Reuben

SON OF LEAH

Meaning

The LORD has seen my affliction. **GN 29:32**

2

Simeon

SON OF LEAH

Meaning

The LORD heard. **GN 29:33**

3

Levi

SON OF LEAH

Meaning

My husband will become attached to me. **GN 29:34**

Because the tribe of Levi functioned as priests, they did not receive a geographical tribal allotment. However, God commanded the other tribes to give the Levites forty-eight cities from their territories to live in and raise livestock. God also commanded that a portion of all offerings and other sacrifices be given to the Levites as an inheritance.

4

Judah

SON OF LEAH

Meaning

I will praise the LORD. **GN 29:35**

5

Dan

SON OF BILHAH,
RACHEL'S HANDMAID

Meaning

God has vindicated me.
GN 30:6

6

Naphtali

SON OF BILHAH,
RACHEL'S HANDMAID

Meaning

I have wrestled. GN 30:8

7

Gad

SON OF ZILPAH,
LEAH'S HANDMAID

Meaning

What good fortune!
GN 30:11

8

Asher

SON OF ZILPAH,
LEAH'S HANDMAID

Meaning

I am happy. GN 30:13

9

Issachar

SON OF LEAH

Meaning

God has rewarded me.
GN 30:18

10

Zebulun

SON OF LEAH

Meaning

My husband will honor me.
GN 30:20

11

Joseph

SON OF RACHEL

Meaning

May the LORD add another
son to me. GN 30:24

The tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim, named for Joseph's two sons, are treated as tribes of Joseph. Manasseh is also sometimes referred to as a half-tribe, because half of the tribe was given land on the east side of the Jordan River and the other half the land west of the Jordan.

12

Benjamin

SON OF RACHEL

Meaning

She named him Ben-oni, but his father called him Benjamin. GN 35:18