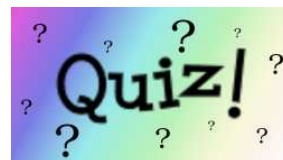


Osaka International Church  
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Series: Patriarchs  
Title: The Tribes of Israel  
Scripture: Genesis 48-50  
Key Verse: 2 Timothy 4:6-7

## I. Introduction

Good morning! Just for fun, let's begin with a couple of simple quiz questions to stimulate our thinking.

1. How many sons did Jacob have?
2. How many tribes of Israel were there?



For both questions, if you answered, "twelve," then that is a very good answer. The Bible consistently refers to the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel. But as we will see today, that is not the whole story. If you count the names, you will see that there are actually more than twelve sons of Jacob and more than twelve tribes of Israel. And, if we pay attention to how the names are used, we can learn some interesting things. Let's begin by reading Genesis 48:1-5, where we will find two more sons of Jacob.

## II. Scripture Genesis 48:1-5 (NIV)

**[1] Some time later Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim along with him. [2] When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," Israel rallied his strength and sat up on the bed. [3] Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me [4] and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.' [5] "Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine.**

## III. Teaching

In Genesis 41, the story of the birth of Joseph's two sons is given, and now they are adopted by Jacob. In the following verses, Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh, crossing his arms to place his right hand on the head of Ephraim, the younger child. In doing this, Jacob placed the younger son over the older son, a prophetic act that spoke about the future of their tribes. When we count these two adopted sons with the twelve natural sons of Jacob, there are 14 sons in total.



From this point forward, Ephraim and Manasseh are treated as Jacob's own sons. And, 400 years later, when Israel returns to the Promised Land as a nation, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh each receive a full inheritance, as you can see on this map. But if there are 14 sons total, why does the map still show only 12 tribes?



Well, Joseph is not shown because Joseph's descendants are through Ephraim and Manasseh. In other words, there is no tribe of Joseph, because he has become the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. And Levi is not shown because his descendants became the priests and they are spread out in the land, but they are still a distinct tribe. So, how many tribes are there? I would say there are 13; Levi, plus the 12 on the map.

But if there are actually 14 sons and 13 tribes, why does the Scripture always refer to the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel? Apparently, the authors of Scripture, guided by God's Holy Spirit, decided to preserve the symbolic number of twelve. In order to do this, the lists of the

names are varied slightly depending on the situation. In times of war, Levi is left out because the priests don't go to war, and Ephraim and Manasseh are listed instead of Joseph in order to preserve the number 12. But when Levi needs to be included, such as in the pronouncement of the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 27, then the name of Joseph is used and Ephraim and Manasseh are left out. Thus, the symbolic number of twelve, which represents a kind of perfection, is preserved.

This may seem a bit obscure, but these kinds of things help us to understand that the Bible is one integrated message system. The Bible includes 66 books written by over 40 authors over a time period of 1,500 years, but it is also one unified book, written by the leading of the Holy Spirit. When we find something curious, like differences in the lists of the names of the tribes of Israel, then we have a chance to dig deeper and figure out why the difference is there and what it means.



For example, in Revelation 7:4-8, the text speaks of 12,000 people from each of the twelve tribes of Israel being sealed for God's protection. But if you look at the twelve names, it is a very unusual list, because Levi and Joseph are included and Dan and Ephraim are left out. This is not an accident; it has to be the choice of the Holy Spirit. But, why are Dan and Ephraim left out when the tribes are sealed?

The 12 Tribes of Israel	
Book of Genesis	Book of Revelation
Rueben	Judah
Simeon	Rueben
Levi	Gad
Judah	Aser
Dan	Nephtalim
Naphtali	Manasses
Gad	Simeon
Asher	Levi
Issachar	Issachar
Zebulum	Zebulum
Joseph	Joseph
Benjamin	Benjamin

The answer is probably to be found in **1 Kings 12:28-29**, **“After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan.”** In these verses, King Jeroboam leads Israel into idol worship by making two golden calves and telling a detestable lie, saying that it was these idols that led the people out of Egypt. The golden calves are placed in Dan and Bethel, in the territories of the tribes of Dan and Ephraim, and so these tribes become centers of idol worship and rebellion against the true God. Apparently this is why they are left out of those sealed with God's protection in Revelation 7. This is a strong statement of how God detests the sin of idol worship, and it is a warning to us to stay away from the worship of false gods.

However, it would be a mistake to think that this means that God will never forgive the tribes of Dan and Ephraim. In fact, in the end-times vision of Ezekiel 48, both Dan and Ephraim listed, showing that God's grace and mercy has been given to them in the end. God's love, mercy, and grace, are greater than any sin, and He is always ready to forgive us when we call upon His name, confess our sins, and repent.

By the way, have you ever noticed that the symmetry between the sons of Jacob and the apostles? There were 12 original sons of Jacob, plus two adopted sons, making a total of 14. And, Jesus chose 12 original apostles, but afterwards two more apostles were chosen, Matthias (Acts 1:26) and Paul (Acts 9:15), so we can say that there was a total of 14 specially chosen apostles. And, the Bible always speaks of the 12 tribes of Israel, yet we can count 13 tribes. Similarly, the Bible speaks of the 12 apostles, but we can count 13 apostolic ministries, one ministry for each apostle except Judas, who was lost.

Examples of symmetry like these remind us that the Bible is an integrated whole, given by the Holy Spirit. As Paul wrote to Timothy in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

Back to Genesis. **Genesis 49:1**, **“Then Jacob called for his sons and said: “Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.”** Jacob calls his 12 sons together and gives a prophetic word to each about what will happen to their descendents. Some of the words are severe and some are positive, but the Scripture calls them all blessings in **Genesis 49:28**, saying, **“All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him.”** The prophetic words given to the sons are all interesting, although sometimes difficult to interpret. But for today, we will look at only one.

So far in our study of Genesis, we have neglected Judah. But he will become the most important son of

Jacob, because Jesus will come through his descendents. Joseph received a double blessing of inheritance in the land through the adoption of his two sons, and Levi will eventually inherit the priestly role of intercessor for the nation. But it is Judah who receives the Messianic blessing that will bring salvation to the whole world through Jesus Christ.

Judah is a bit notorious because he was the one who suggested selling Joseph into slavery in Genesis 37:27, although he may have made the suggestion only to save Joseph from being killed. But Judah really does well in Genesis 44:33 when he offers himself as a slave in place of his brother, Benjamin. So Judah rises from notoriety to a place of honor, and he receives the Messianic blessing, including these prophetic words. **Genesis 49:10, "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his."**

In ancient times, the king's scepter, or ruler's staff, symbolized his authority. In some cases, kings even used their scepter to express decisions, especially on life and death issues. So the meaning of the prophecy given here is that the descendents of Judah will have the right to be rulers and kings, and they will have sovereign authority over life and death until the True King and Lord, the Messiah comes.

History shows that King David and the line of kings after him came from the tribe of Judah. And, even when the Jews went into captivity in Babylon, they still had sovereign control over their internal affairs, and also Daniel, the prophet, who had a place of authority, was from the tribe of Judah. The term, "Jews," is actually derived from, "Judah," and after the Jews returned to the land after the Babylonian captivity, the authority over life and death was later held by the Jewish Sanhedrin until the time of Jesus.

But by the time Jesus was arrested, the Sanhedrin no longer had this authority. **John 18:31**, records that, **"Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected."** This raises the question, "When did the Jews lose the authority to give the death penalty?" History records (e.g. <http://www.direct.ca/trinity/shiloh.html>) that they lost it when Jesus was a young boy, specifically when the Roman Procurator Caponius, a predecessor of Pontius Pilate, was sent to take control of Israel. It is said that when they lost their authority, the Sanhedrin put on sackcloth and mourned saying, *"Woe unto us for the scepter has departed from Judah and the Messiah has not come."* They understood what the prophecy meant, but they thought the prophecy had failed, because they did not realize that the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, was already in Israel.

The historical dates are not exact, but it seems very likely that the Genesis 49:10 prophecy was fulfilled in Luke 2, when the twelve-year old boy Jesus went to Jerusalem with His parents for Passover. Joseph and Mary lost Jesus and they searched for three days before finding Him in the temple. They rebuked Him, but what did Jesus say? **Luke 2:49, "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"**



Why did Jesus have to be at the temple at that time? Probably to fulfill the prophecy that said the Messiah would come before the scepter was taken from Judah. We don't always understand the prophecies, but we can be sure of this. God will always do what He has said; the Scripture cannot be broken; His Word will never fail.

#### IV. Conclusion

Some of what we have discussed today has gotten a little complex, but before we close I want to return to something a little closer to home. The closing paragraphs of Genesis record the deaths of Jacob and Joseph and tell what happened to their bodies. Joseph died last, and his remains were embalmed and placed in a coffin that was carried up to the Promised Land when Moses led Israel out of Egypt 400 years later. This picture shows Moses about to part the Red Sea.

Jacob died first, and after his remains were embalmed, Joseph led a great mourning before taking Jacob's remains to the Cave of Machpelah in the Promised Land. Jacob was greatly honored in death, but how did Jacob



live his last days? The closing chapters of Genesis reveal that Jacob faced the end by worshipping God and caring for his sons. Jacob finished well.

What about Joseph? After Jacob died and was buried, Joseph's brothers were once again afraid of Joseph. They thought that perhaps Joseph had been kind to them only out of respect for Jacob their father. But in **Genesis 50:19-21**, we read, **"But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them."** Joseph had no thought of revenge. Joseph went to his death with faith and forgiveness on his lips. Joseph finished well.

Jacob and Joseph are good examples of people who finished the journey of faith in victory. The journey is often long, and many fail to walk with the Lord to the end. In fact, Dr. J. Robert Clinton, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, did a study and found that only about 30 percent of the great men of faith in the Bible really finished well.

What does it mean to finish well? It means to walk with God victoriously to the end. Once we come to faith in Jesus, we should walk with Him to the very end, so that we can meet Him with joy. If you have been walking with Jesus for many years, then rejoice in that; but don't slow down. Keep your eyes on Jesus and continue walking with Him until the end. And if you are new to the life of faith, the journey ahead may seem long, but be assured, the Lord is with you and He will never leave you.

The Apostle Paul is another man who finished well. In **2 Timothy 4:6-7**, Paul says, **"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."** Let's finish the race and finish it strong in faith. Then when we go home to be with Jesus we will be able to rejoice with Him in victory and give a good report like Paul, **"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."** And He will have a reward for us in His hand. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The crown is on His head and the scepter is in His hand.



## V. Let's Pray