

Why should we care about the twelve tribes of Israel?

Turn over to Revelation 7 (read 7:1-8).

This is in the middle of the seven seals – in the middle of the sixth seal to be precise. Judgment is about to be done upon the earth.

The souls under the altar (6:10) have asked God to avenge their blood.

And so now we hear that this judgment will not come until the 144,000 are sealed.

But notice what 7:4 says: “I heard the number of the sealed.”

Throughout Revelation there are several instances of “hearing” and “seeing.”

In 5:5, he “heard” “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah”

and in 5:6 he “saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain.”

Likewise, in chapter 7 “I heard the number of the sealed” –  
144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel.

And in verse 9, “After this I looked, and behold,  
a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation,  
from all tribes and peoples and languages.”

Revelation 7 helps us understand the importance of the 12 tribes.

The 12 tribes have become a great multitude.

As we go through the genealogies of Chronicles,  
we need to see how the 12 tribes point forward to the great multitude from all nations.

Since it has been a few weeks, let me refresh your memory as to where we are:

Chronicles 1 traces the line of Adam through ten generations to Noah and his three heirs,  
Shem, Ham and Japheth;

and then from Noah to Abraham and his three heirs,  
Isaac, Ishmael, and the sons of Keturah.

And we saw in chapter 1 how Chronicles anticipates where Revelation will go:  
Israel comes out of the nations – and becomes the firstfruits of the nations –  
so that all nations will be blessed through the seed of Abraham.

Chapters 2-4:23 then names the twelve sons of Jacob/Israel,  
and then particularly focuses on the tribe of Judah and the house of David.

The end of chapter 4 (verses 24-43) tells the story of Simeon,  
the brother of Judah who was essentially swallowed up by Judah.

Chapter 5 turns to the 2 ½ tribes across the Jordan,  
Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan.

Chapter 6 focuses on the tribe of Levi,  
and their distinctive calling to be a “bond of union” between their brothers.

Tonight we conclude our survey of the 12 tribes by looking at the last six together.

Wait! You might say.

Someone's missing!

We have gone through six tribes, and there are six more to go –  
but two of the 12 are East Manasseh and West Manasseh,  
and then with Ephraim as another one,  
that means that there are *three* tribes connected with Joseph!

So in fact, there are *two* of the sons of Jacob who are missing:  
Zebulun and Dan.

Both Zebulun and Dan are named among the sons of Jacob/Israel in chapter 1,  
so it's not a question of "forgetting" them.

Zebulun is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 6,  
when it talks about the apportionment of the Levitical cities –  
but Dan is omitted.

And we saw there that Dan's absence is due to the fact  
that Dan moved from the western part of the land to the far north –  
and so did not have any Levitical cities in their *northern* inheritance.

But why does the Chronicler omit Zebulun and Dan from his list here?  
Some might say he had no genealogical information about them?  
But that didn't stop him from including Naphtali –  
even though he only had the information from Numbers 26.  
And if he had that information about Naphtali,  
he should have had access to the same information  
about Zebulun and Dan.

Our list from Revelation 7 might help us here.

Revelation uses Joseph and Manasseh – (instead of Ephraim and Manasseh),  
so that Dan and Ephraim are missing.  
Every list of the tribes of Israel gives us 12 tribes.  
But there are a lot of different variations possible!

If you are listing the 12 sons of Jacob – that's easy, there are only 12!  
But Jacob adopted the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh,  
as his own.  
That makes 14!

So virtually every list of the "twelve tribes" will leave out two of the 14.

If it is a list of who receives the inheritance,  
then Levi gets dropped so as to include Ephraim and Manasseh.  
If it is a list of the tribal groupings,  
then Simeon gets dropped (his inheritance was included in Judah),  
but Levi is included.  
Other times you wind up with Joseph, Ephraim *and* Manasseh altogether –  
in which case a couple of the northern tribes get dropped!

Tonight, we discover that Dan and Zebulun are missing in the Chronicler's account.

### **1. The Warrior Sons of Issachar (v1-5)**

<sup>1</sup>The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron, four. <sup>2</sup>The sons of Tola: Uzzi, Rephaiah, Jeriel, Jahmai, Ibsam, and Shemuel, heads of their fathers' houses, namely of Tola, mighty warriors of their generations, their number in the days of David being 22,600. <sup>3</sup>The son of Uzzi: Izrahiah. And the sons of Izrahiah: Michael, Obadiah, Joel, and Isshiah, all five of them were chief men. <sup>4</sup>And along with them, by their generations, according to their fathers' houses, were units of the army for war, 36,000, for they had many wives and sons. <sup>5</sup>Their kinsmen belonging to all the clans of Issachar were in all 87,000 mighty warriors, enrolled by genealogy.

In the days of the northern kingdom, Issachar ranked only behind Ephraim and Manasseh in power and authority.

Tola – named here in verse 2 – was a son of Issachar.

Another Tola (in Judges 10:1) the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, of the tribe of Issachar delivered Israel in the days of the judges.

Also, Baasha, king of Israel, was of the tribe of Issachar.

In David's day, the mighty warriors of Issachar numbered 22,600 from the fathers' houses, and if you include all their kinsmen in the clans of Issachar, there were in all 87,000 mighty warriors.

What does this communicate to those who heard the book of Chronicles read in the 4<sup>th</sup> century?

Why does it matter that Issachar had 87,000 warriors in the time of David?

Issachar is gone!

Issachar has been lost for more than 300 years.

They were deported in 722 B.C., and haven't been heard of since!

Why should Israel remember the mighty warriors of Issachar?

Well, let's up the ante!

Why should *you* care about the mighty warriors of Issachar?

Issachar has now been lost for nearly 3,000 years!

Why should you care about 87,000 fighting men in David's day?

One of the points that the Chronicler will come back to over and over again –  
is that when God’s people are rightly related to their God,  
blessing and honor (in some form) will be theirs.

Remember Issachar!

Because “back in the day” – the glorious day of David, the Messiah of Israel –  
Issachar had 87,000 mighty warriors!

## **2. The Warrior Sons of Benjamin (v6-12)**

<sup>6</sup> *The sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, and Jediel, three.* <sup>7</sup> *The sons of Bela: Ezbon, Uzzi, Uzziel, Jerimoth, and Iri, five, heads of fathers’ houses, mighty warriors. And their enrollment by genealogies was 22,034.* <sup>8</sup> *The sons of Becher: Zemirah, Joash, Eliezer, Elioenai, Omri, Jeremoth, Abijah, Anathoth, and Alemeth. All these were the sons of Becher.* <sup>9</sup> *And their enrollment by genealogies, according to their generations, as heads of their fathers’ houses, mighty warriors, was 20,200.* <sup>10</sup> *The son of Jediel: Bilhan. And the sons of Bilhan: Jeush, Benjamin, Ehud, Chenaanah, Zethan, Tarshish, and Ahishahar.* <sup>11</sup> *All these were the sons of Jediel according to the heads of their fathers’ houses, mighty warriors, 17,200, able to go to war.* <sup>12</sup> *And Shuppim and Huppim were the sons of Ir, Hushim the son of Aher.*

Verses 6-12 turn to the warrior sons of Benjamin –  
a much smaller group.

Like Issachar’s judge, Tola,  
Benjamin’s judge, Ehud, appears to be mentioned here (verse 10)

But these verses raise all sorts of questions.

The normal order in the OT moves from Issachar to Zebulun and from Benjamin to Dan.

But the Chronicler leaves Zebulun and Dan out of the record!

Some wonder if the original text included Dan here –

since Dan’s son was named Hushim – which looks a lot like Huppim,  
and his descendants were called Shuhamites (Numbers 26:42),  
and here Shuppim and Huppim are said to be sons of Ir, Hushim, the son of Aher.

The presence of Huppim and Shuppim is somewhat perplexing.

They appear in verse 12 in the line of Benjamin,  
but appear again in the almost unintelligible verse 15.

Some have argued that Dan’s name has dropped out.

But I would suggest that the Chronicler intentionally left it out –  
otherwise he would have 13 tribes.

And that would not do!

You cannot have 13 tribes of Israel!

But as for *why* Dan and *why* Zebulun,

that takes a little more work!

Dan is the easy one.

He drops out frequently, because his inheritance was abandoned to the Philistines,  
and in Judges 17-18 he moved to the far north,  
where he appears to have been the first of the tribes to succumb to idolatry.

Zebulun also pretty much vanishes into thin air.

There are references to Elon the Zebulunite in the book of Judges,  
but the only references to Zebulun after that are idealized references.  
(Psalm 68 – which speaks of the tribes of Israel coming to worship God;  
Isaiah 9 – speaking of how the land that had long been destroyed would be restored;  
Ezekiel 48 – describing the idealized vision of the restored people of God;  
And Chronicles itself speaks of the peoples of Zebulun  
only in conjunction with the other northern tribes.)

Zebulun's territory was on the west side of the Sea of Galilee – next to Naphtali.

Unlike Dan, you cannot explain Zebulun's omission by its location.

Three other tribes had territory further north than Zebulun,  
and would have fallen to their enemies sooner.

So it may be that Zebulun was absorbed into Ephraim or Manasseh –  
like Simeon was absorbed into Judah.

We don't quite know why Dan and Zebulun disappear from the genealogies here,

but as Michael Wilcock points out,

there are no fewer than 17 different groupings of the 12 tribes!

Which one (or two) depends on context!

Certain things are clear:

There are 12 sons of Jacob.

Because of the inclusion of Ephraim and Manasseh,  
there are fourteen possible names –

but the biblical authors regularly stick to 12.

There are 12 portions for the inheritance (Ephraim and Manasseh each get one –  
but Levi does not).

Manasseh gets two clearly defined territories –  
one on the east side and one on the west side of the Jordan –  
but because Simeon is lumped into Judah,  
there are still 12 territories.

So here in 1 Chronicles, the author provides us with 12 tribes.

He has to ignore Zebulun and Dan to do this!

But since there are 12 tribes,

and since Manasseh has been (effectively) two tribes for a millennium,  
he treats Manasseh as two (giving Joseph three tribes),

requiring him to “forget” Dan and Zebulun  
for the purpose of his genealogical discussion.

But what do we learn about Benjamin?

One thing we learn about Benjamin here  
is that Benjamin was known for his mighty men –  
but also that Benjamin was weaker and smaller than Issachar.  
We learn why from Judges 20-21,  
where Benjamin had been guilty of heinous sin –  
and Israel nearly obliterated Benjamin.  
Judges tells us that only a few hundred Benjamites remained –  
so it is not surprising that it took them generations to rebuild.

You may have noticed the name of Omri in verse 8.  
That is probably *not* the famous Omri who was the father of Ahab,  
and the founder of the Omride dynasty in Israel.  
This Omri seems to have lived before the time of David.  
But Omri was a common enough name in Israel.  
We will see it again in 1 Chronicles 9:4 of a Judahite,  
and again an officer from the tribe of Issachar in the time of David.

### 3. The Sons of Naphtali (v13)

<sup>13</sup> *The sons of Naphtali: Jahziel, Guni, Jezer and Shallum, the descendants of Bilhah.*

Four sons of Naphtali are all we get.

Indeed, since he has omitted Dan (the other son of Bilhah –  
the concubine of Jacob, and maidservant of Rachel),  
these four sons are all we know of the descendants of Bilhah.

### 4. The Sons of Manasseh (v14-19)

<sup>14</sup> *The sons of Manasseh: Asriel, whom his Aramean concubine bore; she bore Machir the father of Gilead.* <sup>15</sup> *And Machir took a wife for Huppim and for Shuppim. The name of his sister was Maacah. And the name of the second was Zelophehad, and Zelophehad had daughters.* <sup>16</sup> *And Maacah the wife of Machir bore a son, and she called his name Peresh; and the name of his brother was Sheresh; and his sons were Ulam and Rakem.* <sup>17</sup> *The son of Ulam: Bedan. These were the sons of Gilead the son of Machir, son of Manasseh.* <sup>18</sup> *And his sister Hammolecheth bore Ishhod, Abiezer and Mahlah.* <sup>19</sup> *The sons of Shemida were Ahian, Shechem, Likhi, and Aniam.*

Verses 14-19 provide us with an array of textual problems.

There are several textual variants.

Probably the simplest resolution (and the one that best respects the texts we do have)  
is to read it as follows:

v14            “The sons of Manasseh, whom his Aramean concubine bore”  
                  [Asriel may be what is called “dittography”]

where a scribe accidentally copied the same letters twice –  
“asher aladah” means “whom she bore” –  
and Asriel simply copies the first five Hebrew letters in that phrase!  
But Numbers 26 lists Asriel as a son of Gilead,  
so the other option is that Asriel was accidentally displaced,  
and actually belongs as the first *son* of Machir,  
explaining why Zelophehad is called the *second* son]

“Machir, the father of Gilead 15 (he took a wife whose name was Maacah)  
[Huppim and Shuppim may have been accidentally copied here.  
In a text as complicated as a genealogy,  
one careless scribe is all it would take to make a mess of the text!]

“and whose second (son) was named Zelophehad. (He had only daughters).  
Machir’s wife Maacah had a son and called his name Peresh... etc.”

But the textual issues should not distract us from what we are getting here –  
namely, the most detailed account of the *western* line of Manasseh in scripture.

Numbers 26 and other places focus on the *eastern* line of Manasseh,  
where the sons of Gilead settled.

Here we learn that *other* sons of Gilead settled in the west  
(something Joshua 17 had suggested in the settlement of the daughters of Zelophehad).

The reference to the daughters of Zelophehad would remind his hearers  
that when a man died without sons,  
his daughters would inherit (and would be required to marry inside the clan) –  
in order to prevent the inheritance from passing out of the family.

Israel’s future depends upon the connection between land and seed.  
These genealogies continue to point us to the hope of God’s people –  
that through the seed of the woman  
all the nations would be blessed –  
that though the inheritance of the land  
the glory of the nations would stream into Jerusalem.

Our hope continues to depend on the connection between land and seed!  
Because Christ himself is the seed of the woman –  
and Christ himself *is* our inheritance!

### 5. The Sons of Ephraim (v20-29)

<sup>20</sup>The sons of Ephraim: Shuthelah, and Bered his son, Tahath his son, Eleadah his son, Tahath his son, <sup>21</sup>Zabad his son, Shuthelah his son, and Ezer and Elead, whom the men of Gath who were born in the land killed, because they came down to raid their livestock. <sup>22</sup>And Ephraim their

*father mourned many days, and his brothers came to comfort him. <sup>23</sup>And Ephraim went in to his wife, and she conceived and bore a son. And he called his name Beriah, because disaster had befallen his house. <sup>24</sup>His daughter was Sheerah, who built both Lower and Upper Beth-horon, and Uzzen-sheerah. <sup>25</sup>Rephah was his son, Resheph his son, Telah his son, Tahan his son, <sup>26</sup>Ladan his son, Ammihud his son, Elishama his son, <sup>27</sup>Nun his son, Joshua his son. <sup>28</sup>Their possessions and settlements were Bethel and its towns, and to the east Naaran, and to the west Gezer and its towns, Shechem and its towns, and Ayyah and its towns; <sup>29</sup> also in possession of the Manassites, Beth-shean and its towns, Taanach and its towns, Megiddo and its towns, Dor and its towns. In these lived the sons of Joseph the son of Israel.*

The genealogy of Ephraim is designed to show how Joshua was descended from Ephraim.

No later generations are listed.

There are a few oddities here.

One is the death of Ezer and Elead – killed by the men of Gath (possibly the Philistines).

But then Ephraim had another son, Beriah (!)

Why is that strange?

Because Ephraim was born in Egypt, and never lived in the land!

It is possible that this refers to another Ephraimite named Ephraim –

but it is cryptic enough to be somewhat puzzling.

Also, there is Sheerah – a daughter who built cities (v24).

We'd like to know more – but we don't!

Verse 27 brings us to the conclusion of the genealogical list:

Joshua, the son of Nun.

We know of many other Ephraimites in scripture –

but the Chronicler is interested only in Joshua –

the one who caused Israel to inherit the land!

And many of the leading cities of the northern kingdom are included here:

Bethel – assigned to Benjamin (Joshua 18:22)

Shechem – technically in the territory of Manasseh (Joshua 17:7)

but assigned to Ephraim (20:7, 21:21) – see Joshua 16:9

Also verse 29 points to Ephraimite cities in Manasseh

Beth-Shean, Taanach, Megiddo, and Dor.

Ephraim and Manasseh – the sons of Joseph – will play an important role in the nation of Israel.

Remember 5:1-2

The “birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel.”

Judah was the one from whom the Messiah came –

but Joseph received the birthright – the double portion of the inheritance.



Throughout Chronicles we will continue to see Ephraim and Manasseh as the leading tribes of the northern kingdom.

## **6. The Warrior Sons of Asher (v30-40)**

<sup>30</sup> *The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah.* <sup>31</sup> *The sons of Beriah: Heber, and Malchiel, who fathered Birzaith.* <sup>32</sup> *Heber fathered Japhlet, Shomer, Hotham, and their sister Shua.* <sup>33</sup> *The sons of Japhlet: Pasach, Bimhal, and Ashvath. These are the sons of Japhlet.* <sup>34</sup> *The sons of Shemer his brother: Rohgah, Jehubbah, and Aram.* <sup>35</sup> *The sons of Helem his brother: Zophah, Imna, Shelesh, and Amal.* <sup>36</sup> *The sons of Zophah: Suah, Harnepher, Shual, Beri, Imrah.* <sup>37</sup> *Bezer, Hod, Shamma, Shilshah, Ithran, and Beera.* <sup>38</sup> *The sons of Jether: Jephunneh, Pispah, and Ara.* <sup>39</sup> *The sons of Ulla: Arah, Hanniel, and Rizia.* <sup>40</sup> *All of these were men of Asher, heads of fathers' houses, approved, mighty warriors, chiefs of the princes. Their number enrolled by genealogies, for service in war, was 26,000 men.*

Verses 30-40 then give the list of the sons of Asher.

Most of these names are unknown other than this list.

Why the Chronicler includes certain lists is not entirely clear.

From how short Naphtali is,

it may be simply that he included whatever information he had!

But certainly the Chronicler wants us to think about Asher in the same light as Issachar and Benjamin – a warrior tribe.

The only possible connection to other parts of scripture would be the “Shomer/Shemer” of v32/34 who might possibly be the Shemer of 1 Kings 16:24 the founder of Samaria.

(The territory of Asher is along the coast of Tyre – while Samaria is located in Manasseh – but it would not be surprising to find the sons of Asher further inland – especially during the heyday of Tyre and Sidon!)

## **Conclusion**

So, we have finished our count of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The whole number has been completed (even though two sons of Jacob were left out) – it would have been “wrong” to have 14 tribes of Israel, so 2 had to be ignored!

The whole people of God stands before you – as they once did in ancient days – back in David’s day – back when things were as they should be!

Is this simply nostalgia – wishing for the good old days?

Christopher Lasch said it well:

“We need to distinguish between nostalgia and the reassuring memory of happy times,  
which serves to link the present to the past and to provide a sense of continuity.

The emotional appeal of happy memories  
does not depend on disparagement of the present,  
the hallmark of the nostalgic attitude.

Nostalgia appeals to the feeling that the past offered delights no longer obtainable.

Nostalgic representations of the past evoke a time irretrievably lost  
and for that reason timeless and unchanging.

Strictly speaking, nostalgia does not entail the exercise of memory at all,  
since the past it idealizes stands outside time, frozen in unchanging perfection.

Memory too may idealize the past,  
but not in order to condemn the present.

It draws hope and comfort from the past in order to enrich the present  
and to face what comes with good cheer.”

Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*, ch. 3.

Or, to paraphrase Jaroslav Pelikan:

Nostalgia is the dead faith of the living, while memory is the living faith of the dead.

You need to remember the 12 tribes of Israel –

and their “glory days” –  
because what God has done in Jesus Christ  
is restore (and advance) the glory of David.

The kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ has already begun.

We do not yet see all things under his feet  
(certainly the Chronicler did not yet see it, either!)

but we see something better than the Chronicler saw:  
we see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor.

As the Word of the LORD comes to you this night,

Jesus himself is present before you.

All these names that you have heard

bear witness to you that Jesus is Lord – that he is the exalted Christ –  
the son of David who reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Therefore, you may not be nostalgic – wistful for some “good old days” that will never return!

Something better is here!

But you *must* remember those days!

Remember that when God’s people were rightly related to God –  
they were blessed – they were honored – they were mighty warriors!

And as you remember what God did for them,  
the exalted Warrior, Jesus Christ, draws near to you,  
equipping you for battle in his kingdom today!