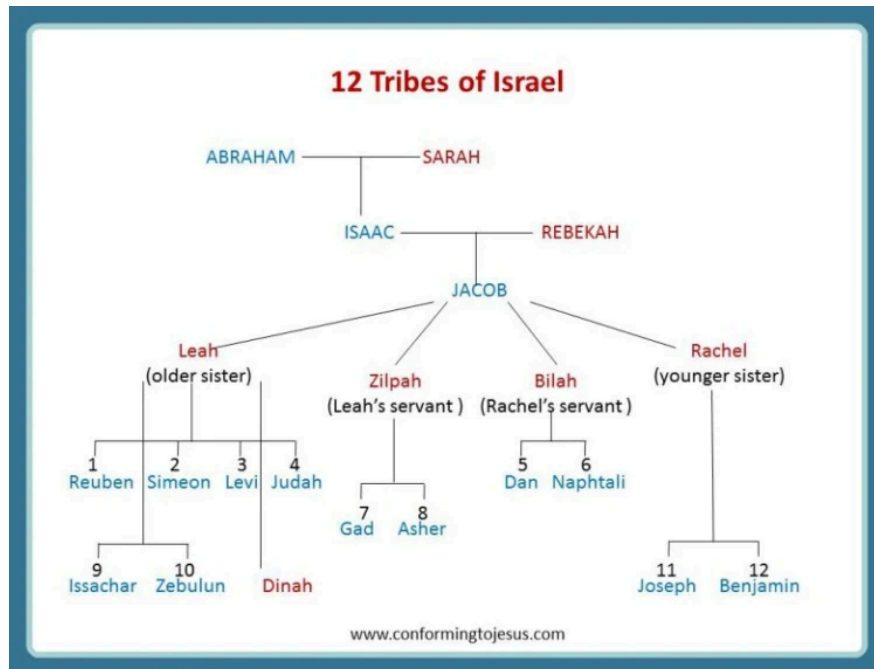


Who are the Patriarchs? and Messages from their lives

Eighth Lesson from the book of Genesis (42-50)

The Twelve Tribes of Israel in the Bible: The 12 tribes of Israel individually bore the names of Jacob's sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.



The Bible tells us that as the patriarch Jacob lay dying, he bestowed blessings on each of his twelve sons (Gen 49:1-28). These tribes were known as the twelve tribes of Israel, named in honor of Jacob, whose name was also Israel (Gen 32:28).

Below is a discussion of each tribe of Israel

Reuben: To his firstborn son, Reuben, Jacob said: "Reuben, you are my firstborn... excelling in honor [and] power. Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed [and] defiled it" (Gen 49:3-4). As the firstborn male, Reuben was entitled to a double inheritance, the royal kingdom and the priesthood. However, Reuben lost all of this when he committed adultery with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine (Gen 35:22). As a consequence of Reuben's sin, Jacob adopted Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim as his own, effectively transferring Reuben's firstborn right to a double inheritance to his younger brother Joseph (Gen 48:5). Jacob further skipped over Reuben by giving the kingdom to his son Judah and the priesthood to his son Levi.

Simeon and Levi: Jacob combined the blessing of his second son, Simeon, with that of his third son Levi: "Simeon and Levi are brothers — their swords are weapons of violence...

for they have killed men in their anger...Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel" (Gen 49:5-7). Jacob cursed Simeon and Levi for their anger to their vicious destruction of the Shechemites, who had attacked their sister Dinah (Gen 34:24-30). Simeon and Levi's anger was characterized by acts of fierce cruelty. As punishment for their cruelty, Jacob cursed the tribes of Simeon and Levi to be scattered throughout Israel. This prophecy came true for the tribe of Simeon in that the tribe was so small that it had to share its territory with the larger and more powerful tribe of Judah (Num 26:14; Josh 19:1-9). The lesson from the tribe of Simeon is that vicious anger can cause us to engage in sinful acts ourselves.

Judah: Any discussion on the tribe of Judah must begin with its most notable descendant-Jesus Christ. Jacob's blessing for his fourth son, Judah, was prophetic indeed: "Judah, your brothers will praise you...your father's sons will bow down to you...Like a lion he crouches and lies down...The scepter will not depart from Judah [until] the obedience of the nations shall be his" (Gen 49:8-10).

We learn from this blessing that Judah would be a powerful nation, worthy of praise. Jacob's blessing also compares the tribe of Judah to a lion, the king of all beasts who fears no other animal despite having enemies who wish to kill it. In comparison, Scripture calls Jesus "the King of kings" (Rev 17:14), who also fears no one and yet has enemies who wish to obliterate His name from the Earth. The prophecy that the scepter "will not depart from Judah" testifies to Jesus' supremacy and eternal rule. As Jacob's prophecy and the gospels make clear, Jesus' rule shall be eternal and at His name, every knee will bow (Phil 2:10-11).

Dan: In blessing his fifth son, Dan, Jacob foretold that: "Dan will provide justice for his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan will be a snake by the roadside...that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward" (Gen 49:16-17). That Dan is called a "snake" by his father sheds light on the future dark dealings of this tribe. In particular, the tribe of Dan was allotted fertile land in Canaan but failed to conquer the area. Moreover, the tribe began worshipping idols. Notably, the tribe of Dan is omitted from the tribes of Israel mentioned in the Tribulation (Rev 7:4-8). The story of Dan reminds us of how easily we can compromise our faith when we follow our own will and not God's.

Naphtali: What Can We Learn from the Tribe of Naphtali? Jacob's sixth son, Naphtali, received this short but hopeful blessing: Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns (Gen 49:21). Moses went on to add that Naphtali was "abounding with the favor of the Lord" (Deut 33:23). Despite these blessings, the tribe of Naphtali disobeyed God by living among the Canaanites (Jud 1:33), and by doubting God when God chose them to fight against the Canaanites (Jud 4:6-9). However, the tribe did later support the newly crowned King David, and also played a pivotal role in building King Solomon's Temple (1 Chr 12:34; 1 Kgs 7:13-47). This tribe teaches us that human nature is often contradictory, filled with moments of courage and cowardice, obedience and disregard. Most importantly, this tribe proves that God ultimately blesses the least. We see this, here, because this tribe lived in Galilee which, despite its lowly status at the time, would be the first area to hear Jesus preach of the Kingdom of God.

Gad: What Can We Learn from the Tribe of Gad? In blessing his seventh son, Gad, Jacob touted Gad's military prowess: Gad will be attacked by a band of raiders, but he will attack them at their heels (Gen 49:19). The tribe of Gad received the best of the newly conquered Promised Land as a reward for its faithful obedience to God during the conquest and for the role it played in helping its brother tribes secure their territories (Deut 33:20-21; Num 32:18). The lesson learned from the tribe of Gad is that we will reap the rewards of steadfastly obeying God. This tribe also teaches us to look beyond the fulfillment of our own needs and help others reach their goals.

Asher: What Can We Learn from the Tribe of Asher? Jacob's blessing of his eighth son, Asher, foretold material prosperity: Asher's food will be rich; he will provide delicacies fit for a king (Gen 49:20). Moses also blesses Asher, saying, "Let him be favored by his brothers" (Deuteronomy 33:24). The Bible tells us that there were times when the tribe of Asher did what God wanted it to do, such as helping Gideon defeat Israel's enemies (Jud 6:35), and other times when the tribe did what it wanted to do instead, such as refusing to help their fellow Israelites fight against the Canaanites (Jud 5:17).

Issachar: What Can We Learn from the Tribe of Issachar? Jacob said to his ninth son, Issachar: "Issachar is a rawboned donkey lying down among the sheep pens. When he sees how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor" (Gen 49:14-15). Scholars disagree as to the meaning of Jacob's blessing of Issachar. However, we know that being called a "donkey" in biblical times was a good thing, as kings rode on donkeys (Math 21:1-11; 1 Kgs 1:33). Perhaps the takeaway from the prophecy of Issachar is that those who submit to their work reap the benefits of their labor.

Zebulun: What Can We Learn from the Tribe of Zebulun? To his tenth son, Zebulun, Jacob briefly prophesied: "Zebulun will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships; his border will extend toward Sidon" (Gen 49:13). While we know little about Zebulun the man, we do know that his tribe, as prophesied, lived by the sea (Deut 33:19), and was known for its brave, loyal warriors (1 Chr 12:33). Perhaps the lesson to draw from this tribe's reputation is that there are blessings to be had in living close to nature and practicing valor and loyalty.

Joseph: What Can We Learn from the Tribe of Joseph? Jacob blessed his eleventh — and favorite — son, Joseph, saying: "Joseph is a fruitful vine...with bitterness archers attacked him...but his bow remained steady...because of your father's God [who] blesses you with blessings of the skies above" (Gen 49:22-26). For Joseph's steadfast faithfulness, Jacob rewarded Joseph with a double portion of land by adopting Joseph's two sons Ephraim and Manasseh as his own (Gen 48:5).

Although this adoption technically split the tribe of Joseph in two, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are collectively referred to as the tribe of Joseph. In the story of Joseph, we learn that Joseph's faith and humility won him favor with his father and ensured a prosperous future for his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Moreover, Joseph's willingness to forgive his brothers despite their severe mistreatment of him saved all of Israel during a famine (Gen 42).

Benjamin: What Can We Learn from the Tribe of Benjamin? Jacob's twelfth son, Benjamin, received the final blessing: "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder" (Gen 49:27). As Jacob predicted, this tribe adopted its founder Benjamin's inclination toward war despite being the smallest of the tribes (1 Chr 8:40; 2 Chr 17:17).

Yet the second half of Jacob's blessing predicts a division of riches after the battle. This is important when we consider that a notable member of the tribe of Benjamin is the Apostle Paul. As seen through the life of Paul, this tribe teaches us that, despite hostility toward God early in our lives, if we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, God can spread His message of salvation far and wide through us.

According to the biblical account, Jacob had 12 sons who became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. However, when Jacob blessed his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh, he elevated them to the status of his own sons and gave them each a portion of the inheritance. As a result, Joseph's tribe was split into two, with Ephraim and Manasseh taking the place of Joseph and Levi among the 12 tribes of Israel. This is described in Genesis 48-49.

Why is it significant that Christ chose Twelve Apostles? Jesus called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named apostles. (Luke 6: 13) "It is you who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father has conferred one on me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22: 28-30). Jesus chose Twelve Apostles because they represent the Twelve Tribes of Israel, thus showing a link between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

In the Old Testament the number twelve is symbolic of perfection and completion, particularly in matters of governance. Hence, the twelve sons of Jacob gave rise to the Twelve Tribes of Israel, who combined to form a kingdom in the Promised Land, which had its political center in Jerusalem. In the New Testament when Christ was beginning his earthly ministry, he chose twelve of his disciples to be his inner circle, his Apostles, whom he endowed with special powers and responsibilities to govern his Church. They represented the Twelve Tribes of Israel of the Old Covenant and form the basis of the New Jerusalem, the heavenly kingdom that is the ultimate fulfillment of the New covenant.

Ultimately, in Heaven the Twelve Apostles will judge the Twelve Tribes of Israel (cf. Luke 22:30).

The number of Apostles reflects the continuity of the Old and New Law and the fulfillment of the Old Covenant in the New Covenant established by Christ. It also looks ahead to the everlasting Kingdom of Heaven, where the faithful will be gathered under God's holy reign. In the Book of Revelation, "twelve apostles of the Lamb" have their names inscribed on the twelve foundations of the city, underscoring the Apostles' foundational role in the building of God's kingdom through their apostolic ministry. There were twelve people anointed to serve governmental functions, including Aaron, Saul, David, and Solomon. In the New Testament the Book of Revelation presents twelve foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem, twelve gates, twelve pearls, and twelve angels, all of which symbolize the perfection of Heaven.

Parallelism between 12 tribes of Israel and 12 disciples of Jesus

Rachel had Joseph and Benjamin	Peter and Andrew were brothers from Galilee/Bethesda
Bilhah (Rachel's handmaid) had Dan and Naphtali	James and John were brothers from Galilee/Bethesda and they were fishing partners with Peter and Andrew
Zilpah (Leah's handmaid) had Gad and Asher	James and Judah/Thaddeus were brothers from the same unknown town
Leah had Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun	The remaining Disciples were same in number; Phillip, Bartholomew, Judas, Matthew and Simeon
Jacob adopted Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh	Paul and Matthias were added to the Apostles
Ephraim though younger was given prominence	Paul (short in stature) was from Benjamin the smallest Tribe
Manasseh was not prominent unlike Ephraim	Matthias was not as prominent as Paul
The tribes Simeon and Levi were known for and cursed to be scattered due to their haste with swords	Simon Peter was hasty with a knife and as an Apostle to the Jews reached out to Levi
Simeon and Levi destroyed Shechem with swords when Dinah was raped	James and John were called "Sons of Thunder"
Judah proposed to betray and sell Joseph	Judas betrayed and sold Jesus
Reuben attempted to save Joseph and failed	Peter tried to save Jesus and failed
Joseph loved his only brother Benjamin	Jesus loved John and at the cross Jesus gave his mother into John's care
Joseph sat down with his brothers for a meal in Egypt	Jesus sat down with his disciples to eat passover meal.
Judah offered himself a ransom for Benjamin's life	Peter claimed that he would die for Jesus
Jacob confirmed that Judah would hold the position	In the same way, after Jesus' death Peter was commissioned by Jesus to be the "Rock" for the others

Joseph forgave his brothers for what they had done to him

Jesus forgave Peter for his betrayal,

Who are the Patriarchs in the Bible? Patriarchs are the founding fathers of the Old Testament nation of Israel, and Israel was born because God found among them a people wishing to follow Him and worship Him, a people with a heart for God, unlike the other surrounding nations who rebel against God. In the Old Testament time Israel was the only nation on earth under God, its constitution was God's Law and everyone lived according to God's Principles and Commandments. If someone from another nation had the desire to follow God, he could certainly do so, God never prevented anyone from loving Him and following Him. For example, Ruth a Moabite woman followed God and became a part of covenant people. Outside of Israel one could still follow God, but it was not easy, since there were other laws and other rules based on unjust justice, because those laws did not come from God but from the corrupt heart of man, whose purpose was to dominate other men.

Moreover, in other nations it would not have been easy to follow God faithfully, because by law the pagan gods of the local religion had to be worshiped, including the king who was considered a living god, one was required to participate actively in local religious practices, local religious festivals, etc., and therefore he was forced to transgress the Law of God and betray Him. Peoples from other nations were not in themselves cut off from a possible covenant with God, but in practice they were, because they were in rebellion against God and were happy to submit to the local culture and its laws, even if clearly unjust.

That is why God chose the Israelite people with whom he stipulated the Covenant. And this Covenant consisted in the fact that God would make His people His family and protect them by giving them a land where they could live in peace and worship Him, and His people should be faithful to Him, following His Law which was just and fair. This is the significance of the Patriarchs of Israel and of the entire nation that descended from them, and this is why the history of Israel, as outlined in the Old Testament, is so important, as God established His covenant with them and His presence at that time lived on earth through them. Today we Christians follow God in the new Covenant through Jesus and we are the spiritual heirs and the historical roots of our faith originate in them.

Lessons from the lives of Patriarchs: The New Testament tells us that many Old Testament historical accounts were recorded as examples for us to avoid (1 Cor 10: 1-11/ 6 & 11). Of course, many Old Testament stories teach positive lessons as well. The lives of the patriarchs are particularly instructive for us today. Below let us list out 5 positive and 5 negatives lessons from their lives.

Positive:

Obedience: On a more positive note, the patriarchs often exemplified obedience to God. This virtue is very vividly displayed in Abraham's willing sacrifice of his son, Isaac (22.1ff).

Faith: Hebrews 11 recognizes many of the patriarchs as people of faith. God revealed himself to them and they acted on his word. God told Abram to leave his homeland for a land that he would later show him; Abram obeyed and became the father of the nation of Israel (12.1ff). Having received God's promises in a dream, Jacob pledged his loyalty to God (28.18ff) and afterward lived a very changed life.

Tithing: Tithing was a part of at least two patriarchs' lives. Abram gave tithes of the spoil he collected during his rescue of Lot from captivity (14.18-20). Jacob vowed to give God a tenth of all he would give him (28.22).

Conflict Resolution: Happily, some patriarchs learned to manage conflict. Abram unselfishly offered Lot his choice of the land for his livestock (13.8ff). Jacob and Esau overcame their youthful rivalry and treated each other with dignity and respect in their later years (32.1ff).

Wise Mate Selection: At least two patriarchs demonstrated careful selection of a mate. Isaac waited until the age of 40 before marrying Rebekah, and he did so only after his father, Abraham, carried out a careful selection process (24.1ff). Jacob worked 14 years to earn the right to marry Rachel (29.15ff). Both Isaac and Rachel married relatives who shared their same heritage.

Negative:

Compromise: Unfortunately, the patriarchs did not separate themselves completely from the worldly practices of the people around them. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the life of Lot and his family, who chose to live in a wicked city, forsook moral values, and saw great personal loss as a result (13.12; 19.1ff). To a lesser degree it is seen in the lives of those who practiced polygamy and were willing to perpetuate their seed via surrogate motherhood--Abram and Sarai (16.1ff; 25.6); Esau (26.34-35); and Jacob, Leah, and Rachel (30.1ff).

Faithlessness: The patriarchs were prone to act outside the context of faith in God at times. For example, Abraham and Sarah found it difficult to believe God's promise that they would bear a son in their old age (17.15-19; 18.9-15).

Deceit: The lives of the patriarchs contain more than a hint of deceit. In at least two instances Abraham and Sarah misled the people around them concerning their identity as husband and wife (12.10ff; 20.1ff). Their son, Isaac, and his wife, Rebekah, did the same years later (26.6ff), illustrating the influence that a poor moral example can have on future generations. Rebekah conspired with her son, Jacob, to deceive Isaac and

steal Esau's blessing (27.5ff). Jacob himself was later tricked by his father-in-law, Laban, into marrying Leah rather than Rachel (29.20ff)

Conflict: Many patriarchs were involved in (often unnecessary) conflict. Lot and Abraham were divided over the land that was available to feed their respective flocks and herds (13.1ff). Sarai despised Hagar for her conception of Ishmael (16.4ff). Later, rivalry between Isaac and Ishmael led Sarah to expel Hagar from her household (21.9ff). Jacob and Esau were in conflict over the inheritance of their father's birthright and blessing (25.29-34; 27.30ff). Leah and Rachel developed an intense rivalry as each attempted to gain the favor of Jacob (30.1ff).

Preferential Treatment: Favoritism was a part of family life among some of the patriarchs. Isaac and Rebekah each favored a particular son (25.27-28; 27.5ff). Perhaps in imitation of his parents' behavior, Jacob loved his second wife and her children more than his first wife and her children (29.30; 33.1).

Brief Summary: The Book of Genesis can be divided into two sections: **Primitive History** and **Patriarchal History**.

Primitive history records (1) Creation (Genesis 1-2); (2) the Fall of man (Genesis 3-5); (3) the Flood (Genesis 6-9); and (4) the dispersion (Genesis 10-11).

Patriarchal history records the lives of four great men: (1) Abraham (Genesis 12-25:8); (2) Isaac (Genesis 21:1-35-29); (3) Jacob (Genesis 25:21-50:14); and (4) Joseph (Genesis 30:22-50:26).

Primitive history: God created a universe that was good and free from sin. God created humanity to have a personal relationship with Him. Adam and Eve sinned and thereby brought evil and death into the world. Evil increased steadily in the world until there was only one family in which God found anything good. God sent the Flood to wipe out evil, but delivered Noah and his family along with the animals in the Ark. After the Flood, humanity began again to multiply and spread throughout the world.

Patriarchal history: God chose Abraham, through whom He would create a chosen people and eventually the promised Messiah. The chosen line was passed on to Abraham's son Isaac, and then to Isaac's son Jacob. God changed Jacob's name to Israel, and his twelve sons became the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. In His sovereignty, God had Jacob's son Joseph sent to Egypt by the despicable actions of Joseph's brothers. This act, intended for evil by the brothers, was intended for good by God and eventually resulted in Jacob and his family being saved from a devastating famine by Joseph, who had risen to great power in Egypt.

Foreshadowings: Many New Testament themes have their roots in Genesis. Jesus Christ is the Seed of the woman who will destroy Satan's power (Gen. 3:15). As with Joseph, God's plan for the good of mankind through the sacrifice of His Son was intended for good, even though those who crucified Jesus intended it for evil. Noah and his family are the first of many remnants pictured in the Bible. Despite overwhelming odds and difficult circumstances, God always preserves a remnant of the faithful for Himself. The remnant of Israelites returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity; God preserved a remnant through all the persecutions described in Isaiah and Jeremiah; a remnant of 7,000 priests were hidden from the wrath of Jezebel; God promises that a remnant of Jews will one day embrace their true Messiah (Romans 11).

Practical Application: The overriding theme of Genesis is God's eternal existence and His creation of the world. There is no effort on the part of the author to defend the existence of God; he simply states that God is, always was, and always will be, almighty over all. In the same way, we have confidence in the truths of Genesis, despite the claims of those who would deny them. All people, regardless of culture, nationality or language, are accountable to the Creator. But because of sin, introduced into the world at the Fall, we are separated from Him. But through one small nation, Israel, God's redemptive plan for mankind was revealed and made available to all. We rejoice in that plan.

God created the universe, the earth, and every living being. We can trust Him to handle the concerns in our lives. God can take a hopeless situation, e.g. Abraham and Sarah being childless, and do amazing things if we will simply trust and obey. Terrible and unjust things may happen in our lives, as with Joseph, but God will always bring about a greater good if we have faith in Him and His sovereign plan. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).