

TRIBE OF ASHER

CULTURAL INSIGHT

Asher is the name of one of the tribes of Israel that claimed descent from Jacob through Zilpah, Leah's slave. The name Asher can be understood to mean "happy" or "blessed" (see Genesis 30:13). It has occasionally been connected as a divine name on the lines of Asherah. Asher was not a prominent Israelite tribe. According to Joshua 19:24–31, the inheritance of the tribe of Asher in the promised land was on the Mediterranean coast in the northwestern corner of the Holy Land. Although there are not really any prominent characters in the Old Testament from the tribe of Asher, in the New Testament the prophet Anna, who blessed the baby Jesus in the temple, is from the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36).

According to later Jewish interpretive tradition, each tribe was assigned a stone in the high priest's breastplate, along with a flag color and a symbol for that flag. The stone for the tribe of Asher was a beryl, and its flag is described as being "like the precious stone with which women adorn themselves."¹ The symbol on the flag was an olive tree, which is connected to Jacob's blessing on Asher that "his bread shall be fat" (Genesis 49:20). Olive oil was the primary fat consumed in ancient Israel. This association of Asher with oil, and therefore with good fortune, is also visible in Moses's blessing on the tribes in Deuteronomy 33:24.

Related verses

Genesis 30:13

Genesis 49:20

Exodus 1:4

Numbers 1:40

¹ Numbers Rabbah 2:7, in Judah J. Slotki, *Numbers Rabbah I* (London, England: Soncino Press, 1939), 30.

Numbers 2:27–28

Deuteronomy 33:24–25

Joshua 19:24–31

Judges 1:31

Judges 5:17

Judges 6:34–35

Ezekiel 48:34

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