

TRIBE OF BENJAMIN

CULTURAL INSIGHT

The tribe of Benjamin is one of the biblical Israelite tribes, claiming descent from Israel's youngest son, through Rachel. This tribe is described in the Bible as one of the smallest of the Israelite tribes (see 1 Samuel 9:21), in part because much of the tribe was slaughtered during a civil war in the period of the judges (see Judges 20–21). In a number of places in the scriptures, Israelites from the tribe of Benjamin are described as being left-handed.¹ The tribal allotment of Benjamin was next to that of the tribe of Judah. This is perhaps why 1 Kings 12:20 suggests that only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to house of David during Jeroboam's rebellion, but 1 Kings 12:21 describes Rehoboam fighting on the side of Judah. Significantly, Jerusalem, which David set up as his capital and which became the capital city of the Kingdom of Judah and the site of the temple of Jehovah, is in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin (see Judges 1:21).

The most famous Benjaminites described in the Old Testament are Ehud, one of the judges (Judges 3:12–30); Esther's uncle Mordecai (Esther 2:5); and especially Saul, the first king of the united Israel (1 Samuel 9:1). In the New Testament, Paul described himself as a Benjaminite (Romans 11:1). In fact, his Hebrew name, Saul, is almost certainly a reference to King Saul, the most famous Benjaminite in Israelite history.

According to later Jewish interpretive tradition, each tribe was assigned a stone, a flag color, and a symbol for that flag. Benjamin's stone was a jasper, the tribal flag was multicolored with all the colors of the other tribes' flags, and its symbol was a wolf.² This symbol derived from the description of Benjamin as a ravaging

¹ See Judges 3:15; 20:16. First Chronicles 12:2 suggests ambidextrous training.

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

wolf in Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49:27. In Moses's blessings on the tribes in Deuteronomy 33, Benjamin is described as dwelling in safety "between two shoulders" (Deuteronomy 33:12). This is possibly a reference to the inheritance of Benjamin between the two powerful tribes of Ephraim and Judah (see Joshua 18:11).

Related verses

Genesis 49:27

Exodus 1:3

Numbers 1:36–37

Deuteronomy 27:12

Deuteronomy 33:12

Joshua 18:11–28

Judges 1:21

Judges 5:14

Judges 19

Judges 20

Judges 21:1–15

1 Samuel 9:1–21

1 Samuel 10:20–21

1 Samuel 13:2

2 Samuel 2:5

2 Samuel 4:2

2 Samuel 19:16–17

2 Samuel 21:14

1 Kings 12:21

2 Chronicles 11:23

Ezra 1:5

Ezra 4:1

Ezra 10:9

Psalms 68:27

Psalms 80:2

Jeremiah 1:1

Jeremiah 17:26

Jeremiah 33:13

Ezekiel 48:22

Ezekiel 48:32

Obadiah 1:19

Credits

Author: Avram R. Shannon

General Editor: Taylor Halverson

Associate Editor: Morgan Tanner

Senior Editor: Sarah Whitney Johnson

Assistant Editor: Verlanne Johnson

ScripturePlus Design: Jasmin Gimenez Rapple