

Twelve Sons of Israel



REUBEN

"See, a son!"

Symbol: Water (Gen. 49:3–4)

Location: Outside the promised land, east of the Dead Sea in rich pasturelands suitable for their large herds (Num. 32:1).

Notable: Included Mount Nebo from which Moses had viewed the promised land.



SIMEON

"Hearing"

Symbol: Gate (Gen. 34:24–25)

Location: Enclave of land within Judah's territory.

Notable: They were shepherds who migrated in search of pasturelands, possibly a fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy that Simeon would be scattered (Gen. 49:5–7).



JUDAH

"Praise"

Symbol: Lion (Gen. 49:9–10)

Location: Large portion of land, which included important cities like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Hebron.

Notable: Jesus was a descendant of Judah in the lineage of King David (Matt. 1).



DAN

"Judge"

Symbol: Snake or scales of justice (Gen. 49:16–17)

Location: Included the port city of Joppa.

Notable: Dan failed to conquer the Philistines, so they migrated north of the Sea of Galilee (Judg. 18).



NAPHTALI

"My struggle"

Symbol: Deer/doe (Gen. 49:21)

Location: Upper Galilee, included the city of Hazor.

Notable: Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 9:1–2; Matt. 4:13–22).



GAD

"Good fortune" or "warrior"

Symbol: Tents, like a battlefield camp (Gen. 49:19)

Location: Fertile land outside the promised land, along the Jordan River.

Notable: Described as brave warriors in 1 Chronicles 12:8.



ASHER

"Happy"

Symbol: Tree or food (Gen. 49:20)

Location: Northern coastal region.

Notable: By the time of David, the tribe may have lost its influence, being absent from David's list of chief rulers (1 Chron. 27).



ISSACHAR

"There is a reward"

Symbol: Donkey (Gen. 49:14)

Location: Near the Sea of Galilee and included the fertile valley of Jezreel.

Notable: During the time of David, they were known for their wisdom and foresight (1 Chron. 12:32).



ZEBULUN

"Dwelling"

Symbol: Ship (Gen. 49:13)

Location: Lower Galilee.

Notable: Recognized at different times for their courage, loyalty, and humility (Judg. 5:18; 1 Chron. 12:33; 2 Chron. 30:10).



MANASSEH

"One who forgets"

Symbol: Branch (Gen. 49:22)

Location: Two large territories, east and west.

Notable: Named Manasseh because God made Joseph forget all his hardships (Gen. 41:51). Those in the east are referred to in the Bible as the half-tribe of Manasseh.



EPHRAIM

"Double fruitfulness"

Symbol: Bull (Deut. 33:17)

Location: Central territory.

Notable: Named Ephraim because God made Joseph very fruitful (Gen. 41:52). Jacob's blessing indicated that Ephraim would be greater than Manasseh the firstborn (Gen. 48:17–20).



BENJAMIN

"Son of the right hand"

Symbol: Wolf (Gen. 49:27)

Location: North of Jerusalem, a strategic position in ancient Israel.

Notable: In the era of the judges, a civil war nearly obliterated the tribe of Benjamin (Judg. 20).