

בְּהַעֲלוֹתְךָ

B'ha'alotka

(when you go up)

B'midbar [Numbers] 8:1-12:16

The Tribes of Israel

Within Torah there are thirteen different places where all the tribes of Israel are listed. That is equivalent to once for each of the tribes. There are an additional two places where there is an incomplete listing; that is, most of the tribes are listed, but one or more of the tribes are not listed, making it an incomplete list. Those lists are found in B'reshit 29-30 and Devarim 33. It is interesting to note that of both the first and last list of the tribes recorded in the Torah, neither one is a complete list. In the list in B'reshit 29-30 Benyamin is missing as he was born later. And in the list of the tribes in Devarim 33 Shimon and Yissachar are missing.

Then when one looks into the Tanak there are three additional listings in the prophets and another listing of the tribes in the writings. There is also one listing in the Brit in the book of Revelation. The listing in Revelation is not a complete list as the list in Yehoshua (Joshua) is not a complete list either.

When we look at the lists of these tribes in the Torah and the order in which the tribes are listed several interesting facts become evident. One of those facts is that in nearly every case the tribes are listed in a different order, except in three of the listings. In each of the listings of the tribes which are in a different order, the first tribe listed is always Reuven, with the single exception of the list in Devarim 29 which begins with the tribe of Shimon.

In each of the three listings in which the tribes are listed in the same order the first tribe listed is Yehudah. Below you will find a chart of the listings. Only those listings in the Torah which are complete listings; i.e., all the tribes are included in the list, are included in this chart. Those found outside of the Torah and those in the Torah that do not include all the tribes are not included in this list.

| <i>Gen 35 by mother</i> | <i>Gen 46 Tribes going into Egypt</i> | <i>Gen 49 Blessings</i> | <i>Ex 1 came to Egypt</i> | <i>Num 1 head/tribe</i> | <i>Num 1 census</i> | <i>Num 2 camp</i> | <i>Numbers 7 sacrifices of the leaders</i> | <i>Num 10 left Sinai</i> | <i>Num 13 spies</i> | <i>Num 26 census</i> | <i>Num 34 land div.</i> | <i>Deut 29 Blessings and curses</i> |
|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Reuven | Reuven | Reuven | Reuven | Reuven | Reuven | Yehudah | Yehudah | Yehudah | Reuven | Reuven | Reuven | Shimon |
| Shimon | Shimon | Shimon | Shimon | Shimon | Shimon | Yissachar | Yissachar | Yissachar | Shimon | Shimon | Gad | Levi |
| Levi | Levi | Levi | Levi | Yehudah | Gad | Zevulun | Zevulun | Zevulun | Yehudah | Gad | ½ Manasseh | Yehudah |
| Yehudah | Yehudah | Yehudah | Yehudah | Yissachar | Yehudah | Reuven | Reuven | Reuven | Yissachar | Yehudah | Yehudah | Yissachar |
| Yissachar | Yissachar | Zevulun | Yissachar | Zevulun | Yissachar | Shimon | Shimon | Shimon | Ephrayim | Yissachar | Shimon | Yoseph |
| Zevulun | Zevulun | Yissachar | Zevulun | Ephrayim | Zevulun | Gad | Gad | Gad | Benyamin | Zevulun | Benyamin | Benyamin |
| Yoseph | Gad | Dan | Benyamin | Manasseh | Josheph/ Ephrayim | Ephrayim | Ephrayim | Ephrayim | Zevulun | Manasseh | Dan | Reuven |
| Benyamin | Asher | Gad | Dan | Benyamin | Manasseh | Manasseh | Manasseh | Manasseh | Yoseph/ Manasseh | Ephrayim | Yoseph/ ½ Manasseh Ephrayim | Gad |
| Dan | Yoseph | Asher | Naphtali | Dan | Benyamin | Benyamin | Benyamin | Benyamin | Dan | Benyamin | Zevulun | Asher |
| Naphtali | Benyamin | Naphtali | Gad | Asher | Dan | Dan | Dan | Dan | Asher | Dan | Yissachar | Zevulun |
| Gad | Dan | Yoseph | Asher | Gad | Asher | Asher | Asher | Asher | Naphtali | Asher | Asher | Dan |
| Asher | Naphtali | Benyamin | Yoseph | Naphtali | Naphtali | Naphtali | Naphtali | Naphtali | Gad | Naphtali | Naphtali | Naphtali |

When studying Torah it is important that when we find items that are repeated again and again we pay attention to these as YHWH is giving us a message. In this case with the repeating of the listing of the tribes, in each case in a different order with the exception of three times, we find that this is highly significant. First it brings to mind this verse.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15b

“... at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall a matter be established.”

Surely YHWH has declared to us something quite important by these three witnesses that the order of the tribes given in these three instances is something that we should pay special attention to. But what could it be that YHWH is trying to say to us? Let us carefully consider the meaning of each one of these names and then what the meaning of those names might mean in this particular order.

It is also important for us to see and realize that the tribes listed in this particular order can be divided into two equal groups. The first group begins with the tribe of Yehudah and the second group begins with the tribe of Ephrayim. It is important to note that these two tribes are representative of the two houses of Israel – Yehudah and Yoseph. Therefore, we may very well find that the message is actually in two parts. The first part of the message is to the house of Yehudah and the second part of the message is to the house of Ephrayim. As we will soon see this is in fact the case here.

Yehudah – I will praise YHWH
Yissaschar – there is recompense/reward
Zevulun – exalted or habitation
Reuven – behold, a son
Shimon – heard
Gad – troop or fortune

Ephrayim – double fruit
Manasheh – causing to forget
Benyamin – son of the right hand
Dan – judge
Asher – happy
Naphtali – (my) wrestling

The message to Yehudah seems to be focused upon the Son being exalted by them. When Yehudah exalts Yeshua as the Son of Elohim, then he will praise YHWH and he will have his reward and be exalted for seeing the Son for he has heard the good news and received the fortune contained in it.

The message to Ephrayim seems to be also dealing with the Son, but focused in a different manner. Ephrayim has the double fruit and if this bounty causes him to forget the Son of the right hand of YHWH, then he will be judged accordingly or if he heeds the warning and does not forget the Son, then he will be happy in the Day of Judgment, for such is the wrestling of Ephrayim.

Both of these messages are right on point for us today in both houses. Such is the message that we find listed in the tribes in this order. But that is not the end of this matter for there are some very subtle differences listed in these three chapters. Yes, the tribes are in this order in each one of these chapters. However, there is a minor difference in each chapter. In chapter 2 we find a brief mention of the tribe of Levi. Then in chapter 10 we find the three sons of Levi mentioned. This further enhances the message that YHWH is giving to us.

When the tribe of Levi is mentioned in chapter two it is an important message because the name “Levi” means *joined or attached to*. What this tells us is that in order for the two houses of Israel to be properly joined then the Levites must be doing their commanded duties.

This message is further enhanced in chapter 10 with the inclusion of the names of the sons of Levi listed. Let us look at the meaning of their names as well.

Gershon – refugee
Merari – bitter
Kohath – ally or assembly

What makes the meanings of these names even of greater significance is where YHWH placed them in the list of the tribes. Please note below.

Yehudah – I will praise YHWH
Yissaschar – there is recompense/reward
Zevulun – exalted or habitation

Gershon – refugee
Merari - bitter

Reuven – behold, a son
Shimon – heard
Gad – troop or fortune

Kohath – ally or assembly

Ephrayim – double fruit
Manasseh – causing to forget
Benjamin – son of the right hand
Dan – judge
Asher – happy
Naphtali – (my) wrestling

Notice that these names are not placed together, but they are divided into two places. Gershon and Merari are listed between Zevulun and Reuven, putting the meaning of their names associated with the house of Yehudah. It is also interesting to note that these six tribes are split into two equal groups. Perhaps these six tribes also loosely correspond to the six working days of creation, indicating to us that the Son would come on the fourth day (which He did) and before He would come many in Israel would be bitter refugees, which was the case. This could also be a double message in that those who reject the Son would also become bitter refugees.

Then, when we look at the name of Kohath between the two houses, we see that it is once again the Levites, in particular the Kohathi who will help to bring back the true assembly and the true worship of YHWH in a way that pleases Him.

This study then can be taken to the next step when we look at the meaning of the names of the nasi'im (leaders) of the tribes in this same order. See below for the meanings of each of these names of the leaders and of their fathers.

Tribe

Yehudah
Yissaschar
Zevulun
Reuven
Shimon
Gad
Ephrayim
Manasheh
Benyamin
Dan
Asher
Naphtali

Leader

Nachshon - enchanter
N'tan'el – given of Elohim
Eliav – my El is Father
Elitzur – my El is Rock
Sh'lumi'el – shalom of El
Elyasaph – my El gathers
Eliyshama – hearing my El
Gamli'el – reward of El
Avidan – judgment of my father
Achi'ezer – help of my brother
Pagi'el – event of El
Achira – evil of my brother

son of

Amminadav – my kinsman is noble
Tzu'ar – little rock
Chelon - strength
Sh'dey'ur – spreader of light
Tzuri-Shaddai – Shaddai my rock
R'uel – friend of El
Ammihud – splendor of my people
P'dahtzur – the rock has ransomed
Gidoni – hewer (warlike)
Ammishaddai – my people of Shaddai
Akran – acquired trouble
Enan – having eyes to see

Levi

Gershon - exile
Kohath - allied
Merari - bitter

Eliasaph – my El gathers
Elitzaphan – treasure of my El
Tzuri'el – El my rock

Lael – belonging to El
Uzzi'el – my strength is of El
Avichayil – my father is might

Then to look at the meanings of these names through the eyes of Torah and to look at them in the same order and same divisions as above, we see the first three names would give us something like this:

An enchanter given by Elohim who is El my Father

This brings to mind the following passage.

Devarim Deuteronomy 13:1-4

1 "If there arise in your midst a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder,

2 and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, that which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them';

3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet, or to that dreamer of dreams; for YHWH your Elohim tests you, to know whether you love YHWH your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul.

4 You shall walk after YHWH your Elohim, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His Voice, and you shall serve Him, and cling to Him.”

So the meanings of the names of the first three leaders clearly seems to be a warning to us. Let us heed the warning from YHWH.

Then the meanings of the next three leaders is what happens if we do in fact heed this warning:

El is my Rock and I shall have the shalom of El when He gathers me to Himself

This is further seen when we also look at the meanings of the two leaders of Levites that are placed between these two groups, which is the leader of the sons of Gershon and the leader of the sons of Merari – “My El gathers” and “El my Rock” (respectively). These meanings make the following leaders a twofold witness showing to us the importance of heeding the warning.

Then we would have the next leader of the sons of Kohath and his name means “treasure of my El.” We see that this is further borne out in the meaning of the names of the leaders of the next six tribes.

When we hear and obey our Elohim, then we will receive our reward from Him. This is the foreordained judgment of Elohim to those who love Him and are a help to his brothers around him. However, this event will not take place if we close our eyes to the evil in our brother and do not help him as YHWH has commanded us to do. We must see clearly the evil of our brother and work to take the log out of our own eye that we might turn and help our brother get the speck out of his eye.

We see that the message contained in the meanings of the names of the leaders begins and ends with a warning. May we shema this message and understand it clearly in our day that we might walk according to His ways and not the ways of man.

ABBA YHWH, teach us Your ways that we might walk in the fullness thereof; in the name of Yeshua our Mashiach. Amein.

Shabbat Shalom

Zerubbabel ben Emunah

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