

The Royal Arch Banners, The Twelve Tribes

By John Cavanagh - 15 minutes

John's entertaining take on explaining the origin of the banners and the characteristics of the tribes is again appropriate to be presented by a number of Companions.

4. Banners and Tribes

- a) The Tribe of Judah
- b) The Tribe of Naphtali
- c) The Tribe of Asher



- d) The Tribe of Dan
- e) The Tribe of Benjamin
- f) The Tribe of Manasseh



- g) The Tribe of Issachar
- h) The Tribe of Zebulun
- i) The Tribe of Reuben



- j) The Tribe of Simeon
- k) The Tribe of Gad
- l) The Tribe of Ephraim



The Tribe of Judah

The tribe of Judah was unwilling to assist in the battle between Israelites and their enemy. Simply; it's not that we don't enjoy a good battle, but the southern kingdom is just too far away and it's only an insignificant rural backwater, a bit like _local town_ there's no merit or Honour in fighting for them. The tribe of Judah was the leading tribe of the Kingdom of Judah. King David and King Solomon; the Royal line; belonged to the tribe and the line continued after the fall of the Kingdom of Judah. The traditional Jewish belief was that the Messiah would be of the Davidic line and from our Tribe, Indeed the Prophet Jesus of Nazareth was from the tribe of Judah.

Many important Jewish leaders have belonged to the tribe of Judah. For example the literary prophets Isaiah and Zechariah, belonged to the tribe, as well as the later characters of Zerubbabel the Prince and Nehemiah the rebuildder of Jerusalem.

When Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem, Jewish history from that time forward is predominantly the history of the tribe of Judah.



The Tribe of Naphtali

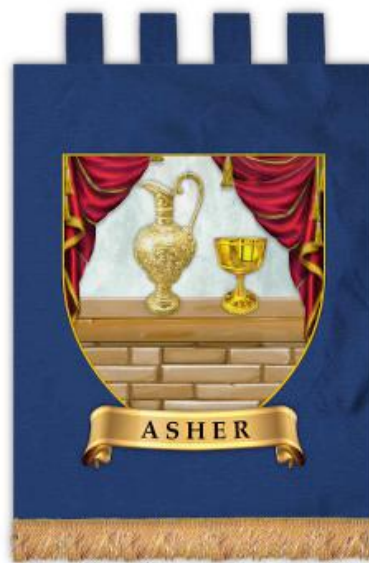
Now Jacob had been at it again with the maidservant of his second wife Rachel and he got her in the family way again and this younger of the two sons born to his wife's servants gave his name to the tribe of Naphtali. After Joshua, (not our Joshua, because you come long much later and your name is actually Jeshua, but that another story), led the people of Israel into the Promised Land. The Tribe of Naphtali was allocated a region northwest of the Sea of Galilee. After the death of King Solomon the 10 northern tribes established an independent Kingdom of Israel. But sadly in 734 BC the Naphtalites were conquered by the Assyrian's who by 721 BC gained control over the entire northern kingdom. Israelites who were deported into slavery and those who remained behind were gradually assimilated by other peoples and never returned. The tribe of Naphtali thus lost its identity and became known in Jewish legend as one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel Hiram, the famous worker in brass whom Solomon brought from Tyre, was the son of a woman of the tribe of Naphtali. The symbol of the tribe is a gazelle-a very quick animal. The people of Naphtali were like the gazelle, free to roam, a free spirited people



The Tribe of Asher

Well I have no idea where we are, I am lost. Are we in the North or the South, or the East and West. You see I am from the tribe of Asher and our land is scattered over the tribal regions. It's more a collection of settlements in other people's land, "seems nothing has changed much today then". We eventually settled among the Phoenicians in the upper region of Palestine. Throughout our history we have been fairly disconnected from the other tribes of Israel.

Our Banner bares a flourishing Tree or Cup, and our Tribe were fruitful and prolific, we were great farmers, wherever we ended up and we used the land well and produced abundant fruits to sell and trade.



The Tribe of Dan

Eay up, we're from the North; (in a broad northern accent) the lands to the north of Galilee, and west of the River Jordan. The tribe of Dan is the second largest Israelite tribe and our main trade was seafaring. It's a bit chaotic here as we have no central government but we do have leaders known as Judges.

We; as a people; are concerned with the growth of the threat from Philistines, so to counter this we are going to form a strong centralised monarchy with the other northern tribes to meet this threat, and we think Saul will be our new king, the first King of Israel. Will he be a good choice, only time will tell?

Our most famous Danite was Samson; you might have heard of him, strong lad was he, but he could have done with a haircut.

The emblem of the Scales of justice on our Banner; represents Dan and the Judge's ruling over our people.



The Tribe of Benjamin

The Tribe of Benjamin was designated by a green Banner emblazoned with a Wolf because it was ever a warlike and cruel Tribe.

Benjamin was a great favourite with his Father Jacob as he was his youngest son.

Jacob described him as the father of a fierce and warlike people and this is what they became. They made war single-handed against all the other Tribes, and overcame them in battle Saul, who also sprang from this tribe, possessed great military talents. His whole life was spent in war; and at length he, as well as his sons, was slain in battle.

Some modern interpretations of the Banner consider the ravenous wolf to refer to the Temple's altar, in regard to the vast fire which consumed vast numbers of sacrificial offerings made there.

Benjaminites in the southern kingdom of Judah were assimilated by the more powerful tribe of Judah and gradually lost their identity, this was after they refused to join with the other ten tribes in the Northern country of Israel and had allied themselves with the Judean tribe, and so of all the twelve tribes only those of Judah and the descendants of the tribe of Benjamin remain to this day.

St Paul the Apostle was of the tribe of Benjamin.



The Tribe Of Manassar

Well what can I tell you about the tribe of Manassar ?

Well in all the books that have been written about the twelve tribes of Israel throughout all the ages and of all the great studies over many years and the millions of pages on the World Wide Web.

Shall I tell you what they've discovered ?

Not an lot !

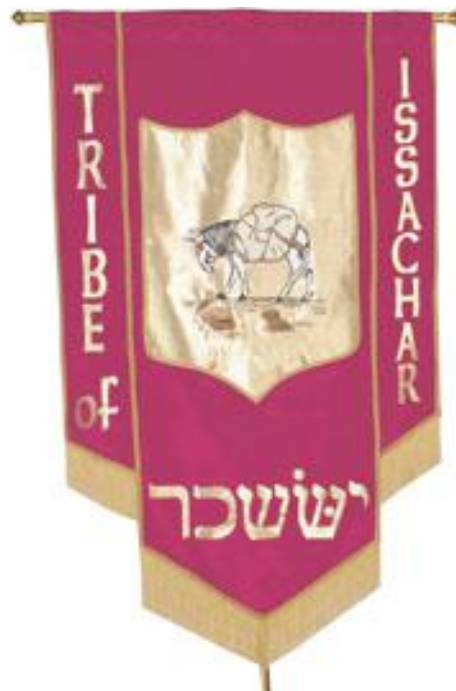


The Tribe Of Issachar

Looking for staff sir, I can do anything Issachar name literally means man of hire, The Banner of Issachar was sky-blue, with a strong Ass couching beneath its load. The Ass is a patient animal and a proper symbol of labour, many farmers used them for all the donkey work in those times (Team “nay not Donkeys”). And accordingly Issachar worked quietly upon the land allotted to them, and cultivated it with diligence and assiduity creating the best produce in the land.

We didn't want to get involved with war or commerce; we were lovers of peace and quietness. The image of the Ass couching beneath its load was an appropriate symbol of the character of our Tribe, The Ass is a hard working beast a mild temperament but sometime stubborn. The tribe of Issachar would prefer a submission to every species of tyranny and oppression, rather than fighting in battle.

Issachar was one of the 10 northern tribes that established the independent Kingdom of Israel that survived until the Assyrian conquest of 721 BC.



The Tribe of Zebulun

The People of Zebulun were seafarers and fishermen. Not only that, but with our land beside the sea, we just happened to be in a place to see the ships as they came into port. We had a clear view from our vantage point on the cliffs above the sea. Knowing the ships were coming and seeing the crippled ships make their way to safety, the people of Zebulun would prepare for the oncoming duties of repairing these ships. And so we would fix the sails and repair the timbers. So we were early shipbuilders and recyclers as we kept what we replaced for use on other ships that came a calling.

We were not; as some have claimed; scoundrels who lit beacons on the shore away from rocks, to entice ships to flounder and then strip their cargo for ourselves. We're not pirates we're good hardworking shipwrights. That's just vicious slanderous rumours from other jealous tribes.

Naturally because of our maritime history, our Banner carries an emblem of a sailing vessel.



The Tribe of Reuben

(Wearing farmers hat and carrying crook staff)

Oh ah, Oh ah, Oh ah,

I am from the tribe of Reuben and we were big Farmers with vast lands in the east, we owned a large number of cattle and ran our lands as a sort of workers cooperative, perhaps an early form of communism ?

We have good grazing land ideal for livestock suitable for pasture. Which was a good job as they sacrificed a hell of a lot of animals in those days?

We take things easy here and we declined to take part in the war against Sisera, conscientious objectors you might say, we just carried on slowly working away tending the flocks, my people weren't interested in war and fighting we just idly rested among the flocks as if it were a time of peace. We were settled east of the Dead Sea in the same general area occupied by the tribe of Gad and played a secondary role in the history of the Jewish people; This led to us falling down the pecking order of the tribes.

So water features on our banner and we are likened to water as it always slowly flows to the lowest point.

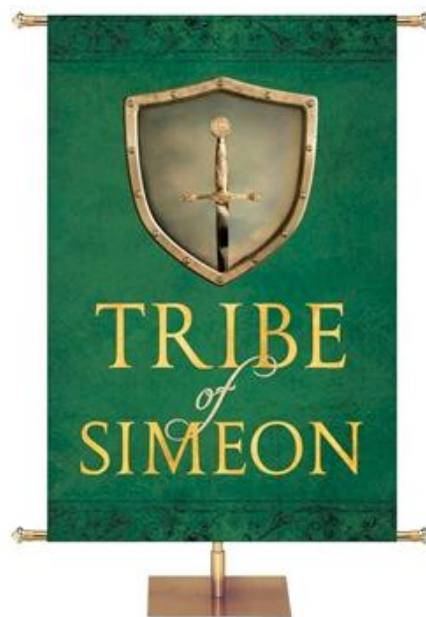


The Tribe of Simeon

Big issue, Big Issue. Any change please, spare some change sir. I am from the tribe of Simeon and we are homeless. This is because of the evil and wicked way my family have treated the "Sheshemites. This is after we had promised them courtesy and kindness, and then went back on our promise, metaphorically stabbed them in the back Henceforth we were stripped of all our possessions and told to wander through the lands of Judah. Our Patriarch said 'Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel. I will divide them, and scatter them in Israel'".

So we have no fixed abode. The emblem on our banner is a dagger to remind us of our violent past, but you have nothing to fear from me this evening, and I was just wondering if you had any Spare change sir, any spare change ?

Big issue, Big issue.



The Tribe of Gad

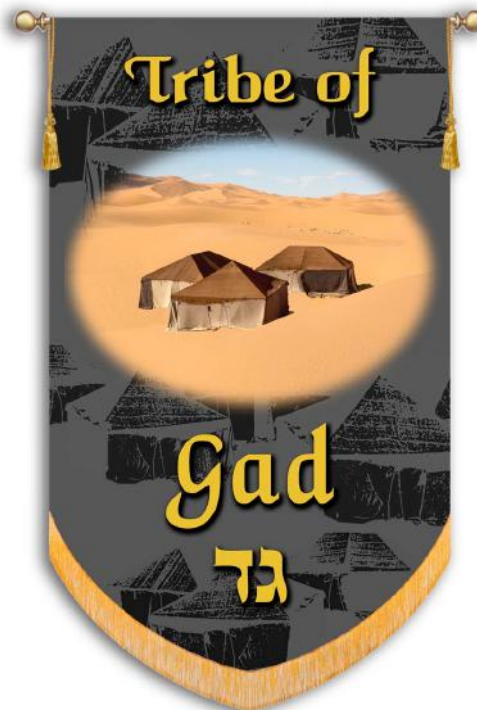
Is it after the watershed yet ?

Well good cos this is a tale of a somewhat sordid nature.

The tribe of Gad was named after the elder of two sons born to Jacob and Zilpah. Now Zilpah wasn't Jacobs wife, oh no no no no no, his wife was Leah and this woman of "easy virtue" she was a maidservant of his wife !!!

Nudge nudge; wink wink; SAY no more.

This wasn't the only extra marital shenanigans that occurred with Jacob, as you will hear later on. Anyway, after the tribes had settled into their lands, they were shocked to hear that Gad had built an altar in its territory across the Jordan. The other tribes took the altar to be a sign that the Gadites were breaking from the worship of God, and plans were made to attack Gad for its transgression. But they had to be careful as the Tribe of Gad was credited with 40,000 men able to bear arms, it would be like taking on a superpower and victory wasn't assured at all. They decided on Battle anyway, but prior to the battle, wiser heads sent a delegation over the River Jordon to Gad to learn more about its action in building this alter and rebuke the tribe for its sin and try to avert conflict. The emissaries discovered that Gad had in fact constructed the altar to honour TTALGMH and to prevent the Jordan River, a significant geographical divide between Gad and the majority of the other tribes, from spiritually dividing God's people It had all been a misunderstanding and peace was resumed.



The Tribe of Ephraim

After the death of Moses, Joshua his brother and an Ephraimite, led the Israelites into the Promised Land and it was Joshua that assigned territory to each of the 12 tribes.

Members of the tribe of Ephraim settled in the fertile, hilly region of central Palestine. They gradually gained great power, for the Ephraimites acted as hosts to the tribal assemblies.

It was in 930 BC the tribe of Ephraim led the 10 northern tribes in a successful revolt against the south and established the Kingdom of Israel.

From about 745 BC, the northern kingdom was often referred to as the Kingdom of Ephraim, a reflection of the tribe's importance. Our Banner depicts an Ox, an animal of patient industry and strength; this reflects the character of the tribe.

