

# Hagar, Egyptian Maidservant

(by Sr. Christine Hilliard, CSJ)

## Genesis 16:1-16

<sup>1</sup>Abram's wife Sarai had borne him no children. She had, however, an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar. <sup>2</sup>Sarai said to Abram: "The LORD has kept me from bearing children. Have intercourse, then, with my maid; perhaps I shall have sons through her." Abram heeded Sarai's request. <sup>3</sup>Thus, after Abram had lived 10 years in the land of Canaan, his wife Sarai took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his concubine. <sup>4</sup>He had intercourse with her, and she became pregnant. When she became aware of her pregnancy, she looked on her mistress with disdain. <sup>5</sup>So Sarai said to Abram: "You are responsible for this outrage against me. I myself gave my maid to your embrace; but ever since she became aware of her pregnancy, she has been looking on me with disdain. May the LORD decide between you and me!" <sup>6</sup>Abram told Sarai: "Your maid is in your power. Do to her whatever you please." Sarai then abused her so much that Hagar ran away from her.

<sup>7</sup>The LORD's messenger found her by a spring in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur, <sup>8</sup>and he asked, "Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She answered, "I am running away from my mistress, Sarai." But the LORD's messenger told her: "Go back to your mistress and submit to her abusive treatment. <sup>10</sup>I will make your descendants so numerous," added the LORD's messenger, "that they will be too many to count. <sup>11</sup>Besides," the LORD's messenger said to her: "You are now pregnant and shall bear a son; you shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard you, God has answered you. <sup>12</sup>He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him, in opposition to all his kin shall he encamp." <sup>13</sup>To the LORD who spoke to her she gave a name, saying "You are the God of Vision;" she meant, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after my vision?" <sup>14</sup>That is why the well is called Beer-lahai-roi. It is between Kadesh and Bered. <sup>15</sup>Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram named the son whom Hagar bore him Ishmael. <sup>16</sup>Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

## Genesis 21:1-21

<sup>1</sup>The LORD took note of Sarah as he had said he would; he did for her as he had promised. <sup>2</sup>Sarah became pregnant and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time that God had stated. <sup>3</sup>Abraham gave the name Isaac to this son of his whom Sarah bore him. <sup>4</sup>When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded. <sup>5</sup>Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup>Sarah then said, "God has given me cause to laugh, and all who hear of it will laugh with me. <sup>7</sup>Who would have told Abraham," she added, "that Sarah would nurse children! Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." <sup>8</sup>Isaac grew, and on the day of the child's weaning, Abraham held a great feast. <sup>9</sup>Sarah noticed the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing with her son Isaac; <sup>10</sup>so she demanded of Abraham: "Drive out that slave and her son! No son of that slave is going to share the inheritance with my son Isaac!" <sup>11</sup>Abraham was greatly distressed, especially on account of his son Ishmael. <sup>12</sup> But God said to Abraham: "Do not be distressed about the boy or about your slave woman. Heed the demands of Sarah, no matter what she is asking of you; for it is through Isaac that the descendants shall bear your name. <sup>13</sup>As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a great nation of him also, since he, too, is your offspring."

<sup>14</sup>Early the next morning Abraham got some bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. Then, placing the child on her back, he sent her away. As she roamed aimlessly in the wilderness of Beer-sheba, <sup>15</sup> the water in the skin was used up. So she put the child down under a shrub, <sup>16</sup>and then went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away; for she said to herself, "Let me not watch to see the child die." As she sat opposite him, he began to cry. <sup>17</sup>God heard the boy's cry, and God's messenger called to Hagar from heaven: "What is the matter, Hagar? Don't be afraid; God has heard the boy's cry in this plight of his. <sup>18</sup>Arise, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand; for I will make of him a great nation." <sup>19</sup>Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and then let the boy drink. <sup>20</sup>God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert bowman, <sup>21</sup>with his home in the wilderness of Paran. His mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

## Parallels between Abram/Abraham and Hagar

- Both were forced to leave their home (12:1 and 16:6/21:14)
- Both received a Divine promise that their descendants would be too numerous to count (15:5 and 16:10)
- Both were faced with the prospect of the death of a son: Abraham was willing to carry it out himself while Hagar could not bear to see her son die (22:9 and 21:16,18)
- Both had theophanies:
  - The LORD appeared to Abram and said, *I am the God Almighty [El Shaddai, the God of the mountain]*. (15:7)
  - When the LORD spoke to Hagar, it was she who named God: *You are the God of seeing [El Roi]*. (16:3)

## Hagar in the New Testament: Galatians 4:21-31

<sup>21</sup>Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup>For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the freeborn woman. <sup>23</sup>The son of the slave woman was born naturally, the son of the freeborn through a promise. <sup>24</sup>Now this is an allegory. These women represent two covenants. One was from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; this is Hagar. <sup>25</sup>Hagar represents Sinai, a mountain in Arabia; it corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery along with her children. <sup>26</sup>But the Jerusalem above is freeborn, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup>For it is written:

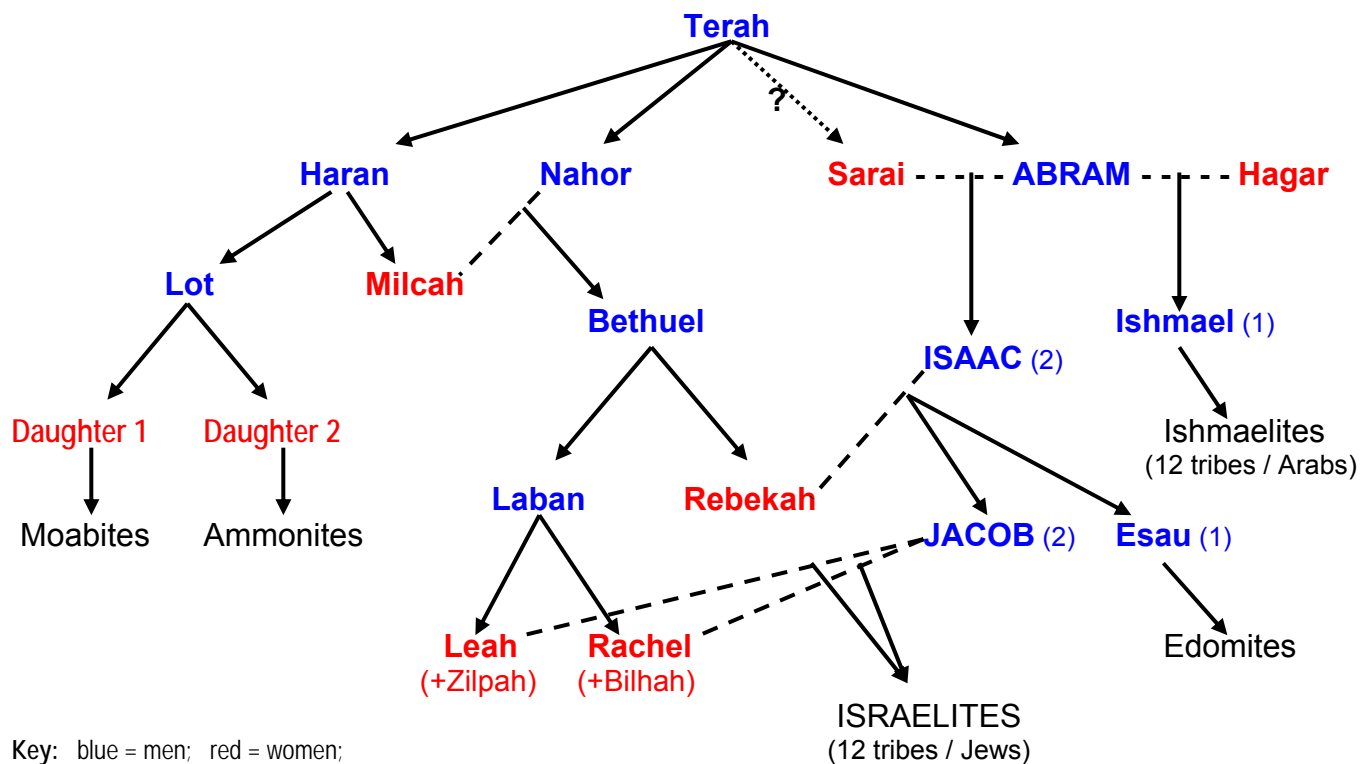
*Rejoice, you barren one who bore no children;  
break forth and shout, you who were not in labor;  
for more numerous are the children of the deserted one  
than of her who has a husband. (cf. Isaiah 54:1)*

<sup>28</sup>Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of the promise. <sup>29</sup>But just as the child of the flesh persecuted the child of the spirit, it is the same now. <sup>30</sup>But what does the scripture say?

*Drive out the slave woman and her son!  
For the son of the slave woman shall not  
share the inheritance with the son (cf. Genesis 21:10)*

of the freeborn. <sup>31</sup>Therefore, brothers, we are children not of the slave woman but of the freeborn woman.

## Family of Abraham



**Terah:** from Ur of the Chaldeans; has 3 sons; wife not named (Gen 11:26-32; cf. Luke 3:34).

**Haran:** dies in Ur before his father dies; wife not named; son Lot, daughters Milcah & Iscah (11:27-28).

**Nahor:** marries **Milcah**, daughter of his brother Haran (11:29); have 8 sons, incl. Bethuel (22:20-24).

**Abram:** main character of Gen 12–25; recipient of God’s promises; name changed to **ABRAHAM** (17:5); sons Ishmael (by Hagar) and Isaac (by Sarah); after Sarah’s death, takes another wife, **Keturah**, who has 6 sons (25:1-4), including Midian, ancestor of the **Midianites** (37:28-36).

**Lot:** son of Haran, thus nephew of Abram, who takes care of him (11:27–14:16; 18:17–19:29); wife and two daughters never named; widowed daughters sleep with their father and bear sons, who become ancestors of the **Moabites** and **Ammonites** (19:30-38).

**Sarai:** Abram’s wife, thus Terah’s daughter-in-law (11:29-31); Abram also calls her his “sister,” which seems deceptive in one story (12:10-20); but in another story Abram insists she really is his half-sister (his father’s daughter by another wife; 20:1-18); originally childless, but in old age has a son, Isaac (16:1–21:7); name changed to **SARAH** (17:15); dies and is buried in Hebron (23:1-20).

**Hagar:** Sarah’s Egyptian slave-girl; mother of Abram’s first son, Ishmael; much conflict with Sarah after his birth; even more after the birth of Sarah’s son, Isaac (16:1–21:21).

**Ishmael:** first-born son of Abraham, by Hagar (16:1–17:27); wife or wives never named, but has 12 sons (25:12-16), the ancestors of 12 tribes of **Ishmaelites** (37:25-28).

**Isaac:** second son of Abraham, by wife Sarah, despite her old age (17:15-21; 21:1–35:29); marries Rebekah, who has twin sons, Esau & Jacob.

**Bethuel:** youngest son of Nahor & Milcah; wife unnamed; father of Rebekah (22:23) and Laban (24:29).

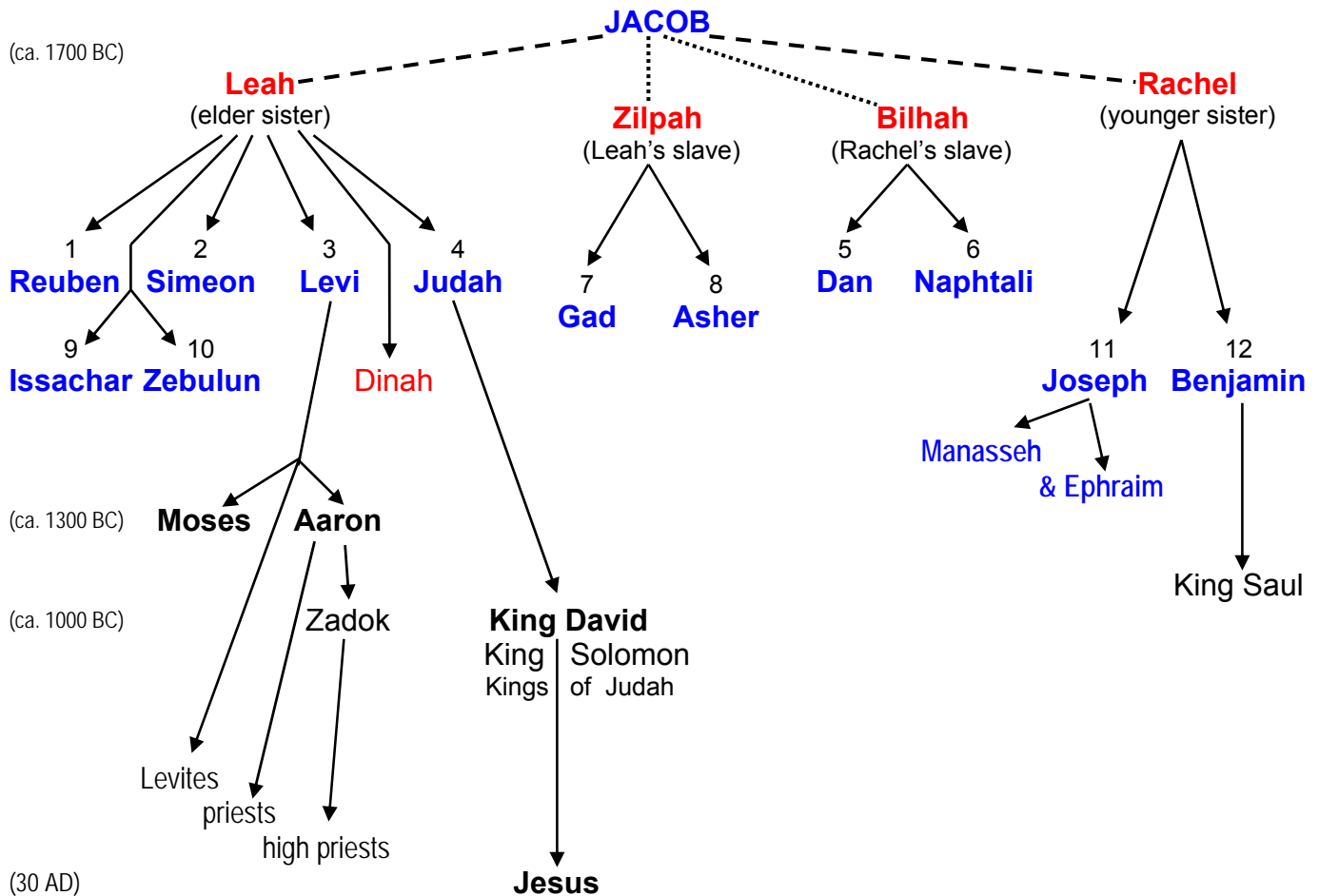
**Rebekah:** daughter of Bethuel (22:23); becomes wife of Isaac (24:15–25:20); favors their younger son.

**Laban:** son of Bethuel, brother of Rebekah; has extensive interactions with Jacob (24:29–31:55).

**Esau:** elder twin son of Isaac & Rebekah (25:25); names of wives differ in two traditions (26:34 & 28:9 vs. 36:2-3); one is a daughter of Ishmael; his sons are ancestors of the **Edomites** (36:1-43).

**Jacob:** younger twin son of Isaac & Rebekah (25:26); conflicts with Esau (25:27–27:46); marries Leah and Rachel, daughters of his uncle Laban (27:43–29:30); name changed to **ISRAEL** (32:28); has 12 sons (w/ 2 wives + 2 slave-girls), ancestors of the **Israelites** or “12 Tribes of Israel” (29:31–49:33).

## Sons of Jacob / Tribes of Israel



In the **Hebrew Bible**, the Israelites are described as descendants of the *twelve sons of Jacob* (whose name was changed to *Israel* in Gen 32:28), the *son of Isaac*, the *son of Abraham*. The phrase "Twelve Tribes of Israel" (or simply "Twelve Tribes") sometimes occurs in the Bible (OT & NT) without any individual names being listed (Gen 49:28; Exod 24:4; 28:21; 39:14; Ezek 47:13; Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30; Acts 26:7; and Rev 21:12; cf. also "Twelve Tribes of the Dispersion" in James 1:1).

The Bible also contains two dozen listings of the twelve sons of Jacob and/or tribes of Israel (Gen 29:31–30:24; 35:22–26; 46:8–27; 49:1–27; Exod 1:1–5; Num 1:5–15; 1:20–54; 2:3–29; 7:1–88; 10:11–28; 13:4–15; 26:5–50; 34:19–28; Deut 27:12–13; 33:1–29; Josh 13–19; 21:4–8; 1 Chr 2:1–2; 2–7; 12:24–38; 27:16–22; Ezek 48:1–29; 48:30–34; cf. Rev 7:5–8). Some are very brief lists, while others are spread out over several paragraphs or chapters that discuss the distribution of the land or name representatives of each tribe. Surprisingly, each listing is slightly different from all the others, either in the order of the names mentioned or even in the specific names used (e.g., the two sons of Joseph are sometimes listed along with or instead of their father; and sometimes a name is omitted for various reasons). A few texts actually have more than 12 names! Close analysis shows several principles for the ordering and various reasons for the omission or substitution of some names, as explained on <http://www.catholic-resources.org/Bible/History-12Tribes.htm>.

**Jacob's twelve sons** are first mentioned in the order of their births, in Genesis 29:31–30:24 & 35:16–20.

- **Leah** (elder wife): 1) **Reuben**, 2) **Simeon**, 3) **Levi**, 4) **Judah**; later also 9) **Issachar**, 10) **Zebulun**
- **Bilhah** (Rachel's slave): 5) **Dan**, 6) **Naphtali**
- **Zilpah** (Leah's slave): 7) **Gad**, 8) **Asher**
- **Rachel** (younger wife): 11) **Joseph**, 12) **Benjamin**

**Manasseh & Ephraim** – sons of Joseph, whose descendants figure prominently in the later history of Israel

**Moses and Aaron** – leaders of the Israelites at the time of their migration out of Egypt and wandering in the Sinai desert

**Kings David & Solomon** – the two greatest rulers of the united Kingdom of Israel, from about 1100 to 930 BCE

**Tribe of Levi** – becomes known as the "priestly tribe," since all cultic & temple officials had to belong to this tribe

**Tribe of Judah** – becomes known as the "royal tribe," since all later Kings of Judah were descendants of King David

## Twelve Sons of Jacob / Twelve Tribes of Israel

In the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), the Israelites are described as descendants of the *twelve sons of Jacob* (whose name was changed to *Israel* in Gen 32:28), the *son of Isaac*, the *son of Abraham*. The phrase "Twelve Tribes of Israel" (or simply "Twelve Tribes") sometimes occurs in the Bible (OT & NT) without any individual names being listed (Gen 49:28; Exod 24:4; 28:21; 39:14; Ezek 47:13; Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30; Acts 26:7; and Rev 21:12; cf. also "Twelve Tribes of the Dispersion" in James 1:1). More frequently, however, the names are explicitly mentioned.

The Bible contains *two dozen listings* of the twelve sons of Jacob and/or tribes of Israel. Some of these are in very brief lists, while others are spread out over several paragraphs or chapters that discuss the distribution of the land or name certain representatives of each tribe, one after another. Surprisingly, however, each and every listing is slightly different from all the others, either in the order of the names mentioned or even in the specific names used (e.g., the two sons of Joseph are sometimes listed along with or instead of their father; and sometimes one or more names is omitted for various reasons). A few of the texts actually have more than 12 names! Upon closer analysis, one can discover several principles for the ordering and various reasons for the omission or substitution of some of the names, as explained in the notes below the following tables. In some cases, however, the reasons are not so obvious, leaving us to wonder about the many variations.

**Jacob's twelve sons** are first mentioned in the order of their births (to four different mothers) in the Book of Genesis (29:31–30:24 & 35:16-20). For easier analysis, they are distinguished by colored highlighting in the table below:

- **Leah** (elder wife): 1) Reuben, 2) Simeon, 3) Levi, 4) Judah; later also 9) Issachar and 10) Zebulun – (shades of red)
- **Bilhah** (Rachel's slave): 5) Dan, 6) Naphtali – (light blue)
- **Zilpah** (Leah's slave): 7) Gad, 8) Asher – (light green)
- **Rachel** (younger wife): 11) Joseph, 12) Benjamin – (shades of yellow)  
Manasseh & Ephraim, sons of Joseph, are often listed separately; in some later texts, the half-tribe of Manasseh is further divided into its eastern and western halves.]

### Meanings of the Names:

NAME	Meaning in Hebrew	Ref.	Explanation (NRSV translation)
Reuben	"see, a son"	Gen 29:32	Leah: "Because the Lord has looked on my affliction; surely now my husband will love me."
Simeon	shama = "heard"	Gen 29:33	Leah: "Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also."
Levi	lawah = "joined"	Gen 29:34	Leah: "Now this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons."
Judah	hodah = "praise"	Gen 29:35	Leah: "This time I will praise the Lord."
Dan	"he judged"	Gen 30:6	Rachel: "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son "
Naphtali	niphtal = "wrestled"	Gen 30:8	Rachel: "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed."
Gad	"fortune"	Gen 30:11	Leah: "Good fortune."
Asher	"happy"	Gen 30:13	Leah: "Happy am I! For the women will call me happy."
Issachar	sakar = "hire; reward"	Gen 30:18	Leah: "God has given me hire because I gave my maid to my husband."
Zebulun	zabal = "honor"	Gen 30:20	Leah: "God has endowed me with a good dowry; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons."
Joseph	"he adds"	Gen 30:24	Rachel: "May the Lord add to me another son."
Benjamin	"son of the right hand" or "son of the South"	Gen 35:18	Rachel calls the baby "Ben-oni" ("son of my sorrow"); but Jacob calls him "Ben-jamin"
Manasseh	"making to forget"	Gen 41:51	Joseph: "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house."
Ephraim	"to be fruitful"	Gen 41:52	Joseph: "God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes."

### Notes:

- **Gen 29:31–30:24 and 35:16-20** – births of the first eleven sons are mentioned in chronological order, along with meanings of their names; last son, Benjamin, is born much later.
- **Gen 35:22-26** – briefly lists the names of the 12 sons of Jacob, grouped by their respective mothers: Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah.
- **Gen 46:8-27** – lists 70 members of Jacob's family who went to Egypt: his sons (grouped by the mothers: Leah, Zilpah, Rachel, Bilhah), along with their sons and a few grandsons; aside from the mothers, only three other women are named (Leah's daughter Dinah, Asher's daughter Serah, Joseph's Egyptian wife Asenath); total 70 is "not counting the wives of Jacob's sons" (46:26)
- **Gen 49:1-27** – just before dying, Jacob blesses his twelve sons with various words, in a slightly different order than the previous lists.
- For notes on each of the 25 passages (24 in OT & 1 in NT), please see <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/History-12Tribes.htm>

## Twelve Sons of Jacob / Twelve Tribes of Israel

Gen 29-30, 35	Gen 35:22-26	Gen 46:8-27	Gen 49:1-27	Exod 1:1-5	Num 1:5-15	Num 1:20-54	Num 2:3-29	Num 7:1-88	Num 10:11-28	Num 13:4-15	Num 26:5-50	Num 34:19-28
Reuben	Reuben	Reuben	Reuben	Reuben	Reuben	Reuben	E: Judah	[ Levi ]	Judah	Reuben	Reuben	[ Reuben ]
Simeon	Simeon	Simeon	Simeon	Simeon	Simeon	Simeon	E: Issachar	Judah	Issachar	Simeon	Simeon	[ Gad ]
Levi	Levi	Levi	Levi	Levi	Judah	Gad	E: Zebulun	Issachar	Zebulun	Judah	Gad	[ Manasseh-E ]
Judah	Judah	Judah	Judah	Judah	Issachar	Judah	S: Reuben	Zebulun	[ Levi-G+M ]	Issachar	Judah	Judah
Dan	Issachar	Issachar	Zebulun	Issachar	Zebulun	Issachar	S: Simeon	Reuben	Reuben	Zebulun	Issachar	Simeon
Naphtali	Zebulun	Zebulun	Issachar	Zebulun	Ephraim	Zebulun	S: Gad	Simeon	Simeon	Manasseh/Js	Zebulun	Benjamin
Gad	Joseph	Gad	Dan	Benjamin	Manasseh/Js	Js/Ephraim	[ Mid: Levi ]	Gad	Gad	Ephraim	Js/Manasseh	Dan
Asher	Benjamin	Asher	Gad	Dan	Benjamin	Manasseh	W: Ephraim	Ephraim	[ Levi-K ]	Benjamin	Ephraim/Js	Manasseh-W
Issachar	Dan	Joseph	Asher	Naphtali	Dan	Benjamin	W: Manasseh	Manasseh	Ephraim	Dan	Benjamin	Ephraim
Zebulun	Naphtali	Benjamin	Naphtali	Gad	Asher	Dan	W: Benjamin	Benjamin	Manasseh	Asher	Dan	Zebulun
Joseph	Gad	Dan	Joseph	Asher	Gad	Asher	N: Dan	Dan	Benjamin	Naphtali	Asher	Issachar
[ Benjamin ]	Asher	Naphtali	Benjamin	Joseph	Naphtali	Naphtali	N: Asher	Asher	Dan	Gad	Naphtali	Asher
.	.	.	.	.	omit: Levi	[ Levi ]	N: Naphtali	Naphtali	Asher	omit: Levi	omit: Levi	Naphtali
.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Naphtali	.	.	omit: Levi

Deut 27:12-13	Deut 33:1-29	Josh 13-19	Josh 21:4-8	Judg 5:12-22	1 Chr 2:1-2	1 Chr 2-7	1 Chr 12:24-38	1 Chr 27:16-22	Ezek 48:1-29	Ezek 48:30-34	Rev 7:5-8
BI-Simeon	Reuben	Reuben	Judah	Ephraim	Reuben	Judah	Judah	Reuben	Dan	N: Reuben	Judah
BI-Levi	Judah	Gad	Simeon	Benjamin	Simeon	Simeon	Simeon	Simeon	Asher	N: Judah	Reuben
BI-Judah	Levi	Manasseh-E	Benjamin	Machir/Manasseh	Levi	Reuben	Levi	Levi	Naphtali	N: Levi	Gad
BI-Issachar	Benjamin	Judah	Ephraim	Zebulun	Judah	Gad	Benjamin	Aaron !	Manasseh	E: Joseph	Asher
BI-Joseph	Joseph	Ephraim	Dan	Issachar	Issachar	Manasseh-E	Ephraim	Judah	Ephraim	E: Benjamin	Naphtali
BI-Benjamin	Zebulun	Manasseh-W	Manasseh-E	Reuben (neg.)	Zebulun	Levi	Manasseh-W	Issachar	Reuben	E: Dan	Manasseh
Cr-Reuben	Issachar	Benjamin	Issachar	Gad/Gilead (neg.)	Dan	Issachar	Issachar	Zebulun	Judah	S: Simeon	Simeon
Cr-Gad	Gad	Simeon	Asher	Dan (neg.)	Joseph	Benjamin	Zebulun	Naphtali	[ Levi ]	S: Issachar	Levi
Cr-Asher	Dan	Zebulun	Naphtali	Asher (neg.)	Benjamin	Dan	Naphtali	Ephraim	Benjamin	S: Zebulun	Issachar
Cr-Zebulun	Naphtali	Issachar	Manasseh-W	Naphtali	Naphtali	Naphtali	Dan	Manasseh-WE	Simeon	W: Gad	Zebulun
Cr-Dan	Asher	Asher	Reuben	.	Gad	Manasseh-W	Asher	Benjamin	Issachar	W: Asher	Joseph
Cr-Naphtali	.	Naphtali	Gad	omit: Judah	Asher	Ephraim	Reuben	Dan	Zebulun	W: Naphtali	Benjamin
.	.	Dan	Zebulun	omit: Simeon	.	Asher	Gad	omit: Gad	Gad	.	.
.	omit: Simeon	omit: Levi	omit: Levi	omit: Levi	.	omit: Zebulun	Manasseh-E	omit: Asher	.	.	omit: Dan