

Bible Study

DRAFT

Do 7 Tribes of Israel parallel the 7 Churches of Revelation 2 & 3?

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Version 1.1

““I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them.
I also established my covenant with them **to give them the land of Canaan**, the land in which they lived as sojourners.”(Ex 6:3-4)

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Our purpose and desire are to foster Biblical, historical and related studies that strengthen the Church of God's message & mission and provides further support to its traditional doctrinal positions.

Note: *English Standard Version (ESV)* used throughout unless otherwise indicated.

Associated studies

- *Amazing Temple Symbolism found in Revelation Chapter Three!*
- *Do Church Eras Exist?*
- *Seven Restorations of the Work of the Church of God*

Introduction

For some reason, the idea that there may be a parallel between the tribes of Israel and the seven church eras entered my mind many years ago. I do not know what stimulated such a thought, but it was probably simply that the Church of God is spiritual Israel and the parallels should be there. Or I probably read something somewhere that stimulated thinking on the subject.¹

It seemed to be an important enough subject to do a 'mind dump' and I wrote up my ideas over pages in 1991/92 which I now have the time to type up and extrapolate upon. Though, after all this time, I cannot recall all that I was trying to get at, but I shall give it a go.

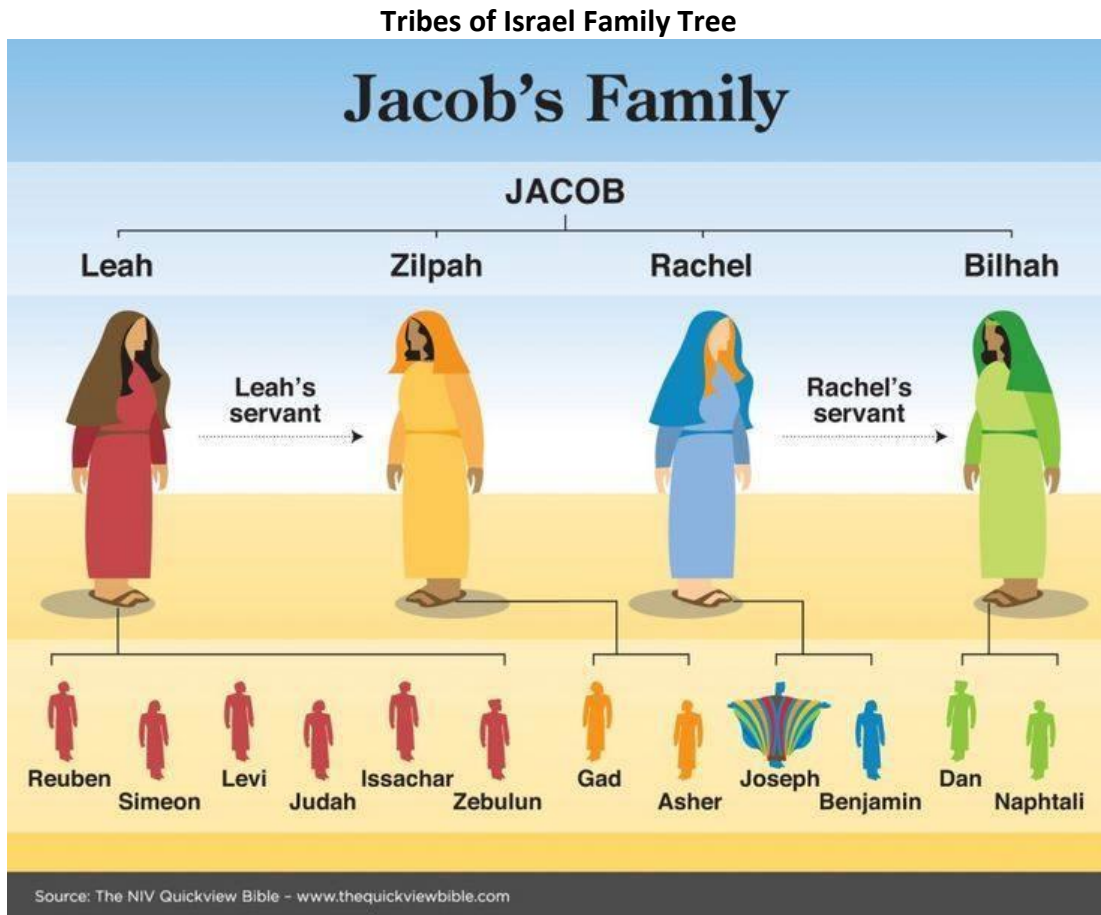


Diagram from the internet

¹ Concerning Old Testament symbols, figures of speech and typologies, J Walton & B Sandy warn: "... we frequently need to put the brakes on and ask whether we're reading the Bible in light of the original culture or in light of contemporary culture. While the Bible's values were very different from ancient cultures, it obviously communicated in the existing languages and within cultural customs of its days" (*The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority*, p. 13).

First Division of the Land

The land of Canaan was divided up among the tribes as an inheritance in accordance with the Lord's promise (see Joshua 13; Num 32:1-42).

Even though Israel had complete military victory (Joshua 11:16-20), the Canaanites continued to live among them (Joshua 13:1-6; 15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13). Chapter 11 refers to military victory and not complete religious victory and co-existence with the pagans was essential given that they were not completely driven from the land.

Joshua 13-21 discusses the division of the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel.

The majority of Israelite tribes were settled to the west of the River Jordan however Gad, Reuban and the half-tribe of Manasseh were allocated lands to the east of the river (Joshua 22).

Only the tribe of Levi was not allocated any tribal lands because "to the tribe of Levi Moses gave no inheritance; the LORD God of Israel is their inheritance, just as he said to them" (Joshua 13:33) but they enjoyed pasture lands and towns throughout the lands of other tribes (Joshua 21).

"Now Joshua was old and advanced in years, and the LORD said to him, "You are old and advanced in years, and there remains yet very much land to possess. This is the land that yet remains: all the regions of the Philistines, and all those of the Geshurites (from the Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron, it is counted as Canaanite; there are five rulers of the Philistines, those of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron), and those of the Avvim, in the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, to Aphek, to the boundary of the Amorites, and the land of the Gebalites, and all Lebanon, toward the sunrise, from Baal-gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo-hamath, all the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth-maim, even all the Sidonians. I myself will drive them out from before the people of Israel. Only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you. Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh" (Joshua 13:1-7. Cf chapters 14-17).

They replaced the seven Canaanite nations they encountered:

"I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them **to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners**" (Ex 6:3-4).

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you” (Deut 7:1-2. See Gen 10:15-19).

“And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand” (Joshua 24:11).

“The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance.” (Acts 13:17-19)

As referred to above, the seven Canaanite nations were:

- Hittites
- Girgashites
- Amorites
- Canaanites
- Perizzites
- Hivites
- Jebusites

After the initial settlement of the land (Joshua 13-17), there were still seven tribes to be allocated lands and information about this can be found in Joshua 18:5-19:51 and listed below.

1. the first division was allocated to Benjamin, the second son of Jacob’s second wife, Rachel.
2. That was followed by Simeon, the second son of the first wife, Leah.
3. Zebulon, sixth son of Leah
4. Issachar, fifth son of Leah
5. Asher, second son of Zilpah (Leah’s handmaiden)
6. Naphtali, second son of Bilhah (Rachel’s handmaiden)
7. Dan, first son of Bilhah

The land was divided by lots at Shiloh (Jos 18:5-19:1; Ex 18:4). As the seven Canaanite nations were to be eliminated from the land (Acts 13:19; Deut 7:1; Joshua 24:11), so they were to be replaced by seven Israelitish tribes (Joshua 18:5-6):

Israelite Tribe	Canaanite nation
Benjamin	Heth
Simeon	Girgashites
Zebulun	Amorites
Issachar	Canaanites
Asher	Perizzites
Naphtali	Hivites
Dan	Jebusites

Division of the Promised Land to the Tribes of Israel (Joshua 12-14)



Diagram from the internet

Principle of the tribe of Dan

The final allotment was given to the tribe of Dan:

“This assumption ... proved as hollow as that of Judas Iscariot’s ... This fact becomes evident in a later pattern, in which all reference to Dan as a tribe of Israel is eliminated, and Manasseh, the firstborn son of Joseph, is substituted for him” (H Palmer, *The Algebra of the Bible*, p. 61).

Compare Gen 49:16; John 6:70-71; Rev 7:4-8; Acts 1:23-26.

Dan is associated with Joseph in the north and contrasted with Judah, who is linked to Benjamin in the south.²

Notice that the Pharisees are likened to serpents as is Dan. See Matt 3:7; 12:34; 23:33. Also Jer 9:1-8.

“Dan is the last member to be apportioned his lot. This allocation to one described as a ‘serpent’ must cast suspicion on this seventh position ...

“This latter arrangement likewise indicates that a defective component exists, and as foreshadowed by the previous pattern, it is the complement seventh part which carries the defect; for those of the Church of the Laodiceans are the ones to be rejected or ‘spued out’, in the same manner that Dan (as a serpent) was dissatisfied with his allocation of land” (ibid, p. 64).

Palmer further mentions that in Rev 7:4-8

“all references to Dan (the Serpent) has been eliminated. Dan’s place has been given to Joseph’s firstborn son, Manasseh, which confirms that Dan was indeed a serpent that would be rejected, and that Joseph would be rewarded with the double-portion” (ibid, p. 144).

He continues

“In turn, the Laodiceans are shown to bear similar characteristics of the occupants of the 7th division of the promised land in the time of Joshua ... the people classified as the Laodiceans are shown to exhibit similar characteristics to their counterpart Dan; and as a result prove unacceptable. The K.J.V. therefore informs us that they will be ‘spued out’, and thus substituted in the same way that all vestiges of Dan would be removed and replaced ...” (ibid, pp. 144-45).

² As there over 50 million Irish in the USA contrasted with 3 million fervent Irish Catholics in Ireland, could there be a parallel that many apostate Christians (possibly typified by Dan) will repent and only a few losing out on salvation? Perhaps somewhat like the Pharisees?

Comparing 7 tribes with the 7 churches

There appears to be a certain amount of parallels between the aforementioned tribes of Israel and the seven Churches discussed in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

Israelite Tribe	Tribal characteristics	Congregations of Revelation	Congregational characteristics
Benjamin	= son of my right hand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong people (Gen 49:27) • Kept safe by God (Deut 32:12a) • Dwelt around Jerusalem, in the main • Dearly beloved (Gen 42:4) 	Ephesus	= desirable or firstborn <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertakes a brave work in defiance of enemies • Initially concentrated mainly around Jerusalem • Fled to Pella etc and kept safe by God
Simeon	= hearing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A violent people (Gen 49:5-6) • Many dispersed or died (cp Num 1:23 with 26:14) • Relatively poor today 	Smyrna	= bitter, strong, death (from <i>myrrh</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A people who sometimes fought and were persecuted (Rev 2:10) • Were poor but spiritually rich (v 9)
Zebulon	= exalted, honoured; dwelling or habitation ³ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dwelt near the sea (Gen 49:13) • A haven for ships (v 13) • A people who travel (Deut 33:18) • Some handled the rod of the numberer or scribe • Jeopardised their lives in the high places unto death (v 18) 	Pergamos	= high or exalted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Near the sea • Christ's rod is two-edged sword • Were martyred
Issachar	= reward, recompense, hire, wages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between two burdens (Gen 49:14) • Good land (v 15) • Was servant and became a tribute or sort of servant to others (v 15) • Called people to God (Deut 33:19) • Makes sacrifices (v 19) • Has treasures (v 19) 	Thyatira	= perfume, sacrifice of labour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have immense spiritual burdens • Have works, charity, service • Undertaken a work for God • Ate things sacrificed to idols • Has spiritual treasures

³ Or "Heb. Dwelling, or habitation. An Assyrian word, *to honour*, brought out of Ur" (E.W. Bullinger, *Companion Bible*, p. 43)

Israelite Tribe	Tribal characteristics	Congregations of Revelation	Congregational characteristics
Asher	= happy, blessed	Sardis	= that which is left
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good food, royal dainties (Gen 49:20) • Feet in oil (Deut 34:24) • Secure (v 24) • Shoes of iron and brass (v 25) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little persecution • Walk in white
Naphtali	= my wrestling/struggle	Philadelphia	= brotherly love
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hind let loose (freedom) (Gen 49:21) • Goodly words (v 21) • Satisfied with favour (Deut 34:23) • “full with the blessing of the Lord” (v 23) • Possesses south and west (v 23) • Jeopardised their lives to death (Jud 5:18) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free, intellectual spirit • Open door to spread the Gospel • Favoured by God • Most blessed Church era • Fights for truth • Will not let anyone take their crown
Dan	= God is my judge	Laodicea	= judgment on the people, ruling, justice ⁴
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A judging people (Gen 49:16; 30:6) • A serpent by the way (v 17) (“Beguiling to idolatry. The first tribe to do so [ie to go into apostasy]. See note on Judg 18.30. Hence omitted from Rev. 7:4. (Cp Deut. 29.18-21; Lev. 24.10-16; IKings 12.29-30; IIKings 10.29.” <i>Companion Bible</i>, p. 70) • They ‘wait for God’s salvation’ (Gen 49:18; Hos 12:6. Cp Ps 37:7; Is 25:9; 26:8; 33:2. Cf Mark 15:43; Luke 2:25; 23:51. Refers to people in tribulation awaiting God’s salvation) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes wrong judgments on God’s doctrines • Many go off the track (cp Jer 9; 5:26-31; 37:12, 14, 32; Is 29:12-14; Ps 69:8-12) • Go so far off the track that they must be purified in tribulation • During the tribulation they await God’s fathomless mercy • A people who hassle others • An unstable people

⁴ Various prophecies such as Jer 9; 5:26; Is 66:5 possibly refer. The issues associated with this church permits more tares than usual and demon influence. Particularly slander. *Devil* has dual meaning of “slanderer” and “one who trips up [others]” (See C. Dickason, *Angels. Elect and Evil*, p. 122).

Israelite Tribe	Tribal characteristics	Congregations of Revelation	Congregational characteristics
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suddenly leap and attack like an obstreperous young lion. Moved from Bashan and changed territory they moved to (Jud 18:1, 27-31; Deut 33:22)• A sea-fairing people (Jud 5:17)		

Conclusions

This ‘article’ is more of a ‘mind dump’ which I hope will lead to further thinking which results in conclusions that add to the overall thesis and consequently an enlarged article.

In the meantime, as far as I can make out, there seems to be some sort of parallel between the last seven tribes that were allocated territory in the promised land and the seven churches of Revelation.

If this is indeed the case, then this adds another dimension to typology. In addition, we might discover additional insights into Revelation 2 & 3, helping us to develop a deeper understanding of these two chapters.

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