

The Doctrine of the Tribe of Benjamin

1. Jacob, who is not known for his spirituality or for his morality, fell in deeply love with his cousin Rachel, whom he met prior to going to work for his uncle Laban (this is if the strictest understanding of the relationships are to be taken—Gen. 28:2). The Hebrew words *brother*, *father*, *son*, etc., often do not always connote the precise relationship that we would have them mean in the English. Laban had Jacob work for him for seven years for the hand of his daughter, and then gave him Leah, the older sister of Rachel. She was given to him on their wedding night and Jacob consummated the marriage without realizing that he was with Leah and not Rachel. Once he had slept with her, Jacob realized that Leah must remain his wife. However, he was still in love with Rachel and worked another seven years for her, although with considerably less enthusiasm than the first seven years. Laban, a crook, a liar and a swindler, just like Jacob, rationalized that everyone knows that the older sister must get married before the younger (Gen. 29:20–28). Jacob had four sons by Leah, even though he loved Rachel more, as God had temporarily closed up her womb (Gen. 29:30–35). Then God gave Jacob four sons through the handmaids of Rachel and Leah (Gen. 30:6–13) and then three more children by Leah (Gen. 30:17–21). Finally, Rachel bore Jacob's two youngest sons, Joseph and Benjamin, who were clearly his favorites.
2. Benjamin actually received two names at birth, both of which refer to the two natures of Christ Jesus (as does His own name).
 - a. Jacob named him Benjamin, which means *son of my right hand*. This name stands for the deity of our Lord, who, after His death and resurrection, would sit at the right hand of God. We find this predicted in Psalm 110:1: **Y^ehowah says to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."** Our Lord confirms his position in Mark 14:62: **"I am [the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One]. You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven."** (Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1 and Dan. 7:13).
 - b. Rachel named him Ben-oni, which means *the son of my sorrow*, after which she died, having gone through a very difficult labor. The parallels to this and our Lord's humanity are incredible. Rachel, whom Jacob loved far more than any of the other three women, did not have children for a long time. Although she and Jacob were both disappointed in this, this gave them a maximum amount of time together, which is grace. The name which she gave her son shadowed our Lord's humanity, being born of the woman. When Rachel delivered her son, it was with great pain and misery, resulting in death, which was analogous to Jesus on the cross. From her death came life, just as from Christ's death came our life. To further tie Rachel's death and Ben-oni's birth to our Lord's birth, **Rachel was buried on the road to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)** (Gen. 35:19b). Recall Micah's prophecy by the Lord: **"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah—too little to be among the clans of Judah. From you One will go forth for Me to be a ruler in Israel. His appearances are from long ago, from the days of eternity."** (Micah 5:2). This was of course fulfilled in the New Testament: **And Joseph also went up to Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judæa, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem...in order to register...and while they were there, she gave birth to her first-born Son...Jesus** (Luke 2:4–7, 21). Finally, our Lord was called *Man of Sorrows* in Isa. 53:3, which reads: **He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised and we esteemed Him not.**
3. The older sons were jealous of Jacob's preferential treatment of Joseph and sold him into slavery, which eventually landed him in a position of great authority in Egypt. Joseph is reunited with his family again under unusual circumstances and it is apparent that he feels closest to Benjamin, his younger brother (Gen. 43:29–30). Benjamin had become Jacob's next favorite son (thinking that Joseph was dead) and Jacob would have flipped to lose Benjamin as well (Gen. 44:19–34). We mustn't think of Benjamin still as a lad; by the time he moved to Egypt with the rest of his family, he had 10 sons, a larger brood than any of his brothers. Population growth being what it is, this positioned the tribe of Benjamin to be much larger than any of the other eleven tribes.
4. When the first census was taken, Benjamin had the second smallest army (35,400—Num. 2:22–23). However, by the time of the census of the second generation, the numbers reflected a population which was pretty much a mid-range of the other tribes (45,600—Num. 26:41).
5. Interestingly enough, whereas many of the patriarchs of these tribes (and the derivations of their names) are mentioned 40–50 times in Scripture, Benjamin's name is mentioned nearly 200 times.

6. At Jacob's death, Jacob said a few words about each of his sons, and you would expect his words to be kind if not gushing concerning Benjamin. They were not; he said, "[Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey and in the evening he divides the spoil.](#)" (Gen. 49:27). However, we must bear in mind that Benjamin was a spoiled son, and therefore, probably developed attributes which were not befitting a grown man. Jacob, his father, either recognized these traits, or looked down the corridors of time, and spoke of Benjamin's future.
7. The several mentions of the tribe of Benjamin in the writings of Moses and Joshua were always in the context of all of the tribes of Israel.
8. Benjamin was of the tribes which stood on Mount Gerizim and blessed the people (Deut. 27:12).
9. Moses, like Abraham, spoke of Benjamin near the end of his life, albeit more favorably. [Of Benjamin, he said, "The beloved of Jehovah pitches a tent in security by Him Who shields him all the day. And he pitches a tent between His shoulders."](#) (Deut. 33:12). It is unclear whether the tribe of Benjamin pitches a tent between the shoulders of Jehovah or whether Jehovah pitches a tent between the shoulders of Benjamin. If it is the former, it is not unlike a father carrying his son upon his back, which indicates love and protection. ["And in the wilderness where you saw how Y^howah your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked, until you came to this place."](#) (Deut. 1:31). Given the degeneracy of the tribe indicated by Judges 19, and the vicious attack upon Benjamin by his brothers, it is surprising that the tribe survived at all. In fact, it is only because God carried Benjamin on His shoulders that protected and preserved the tribe of Benjamin.
10. Furthermore, we have another parallel—recall how Benjamin represented both the humanity and the deity of our Lord; Jesus functioned on this earth not in the power of His own Deity, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is essentially a son being carried on the back of his father.
11. The territory given to the tribe of Benjamin was sandwiched between Judah and Ephraim and contained the cities Jerusalem, Jericho, Gibeon (or, Gibeah), Bethel and the valley of Aijalon (Joshua 18:11–28). In square miles, it was among the smallest four territories (along with Dan, Issachar and Zebulun). Apparently, the plains of Jericho represents the nicest, most usable area in Benjamin. It's hills are stony, mountainous and lacking in water, with better land on the western slopes.¹
12. Although the tribe of Benjamin was located directly above Judah, the only tribe to vigorously pursue the total control of her territory, Benjamin did nothing to remove the Canaanites from her land (Judges 1:21). This was undoubtedly a factor in their quick and deep degeneration noted in Judges 19–20.
13. In our passage, Judges 19–20, we noticed that the tribe of Benjamin had quickly fallen into a state of great degeneracy to where homosexual rape was apparently a common occurrence, particularly with those who traveled through Gibeah. Of even greater concern, the tribe of Benjamin was willing to protect these men, which resulted in almost the complete destruction of their tribe.
14. As we have seen, there were two famous battles fought in the territory of Benjamin, with a host of similarities (most likely, the Israelite generals re-used the old plan). The stronger of the forces attacked the weaker, which held a well-fortified city on a hill. The outside forces had to lure the men from the city and then quickly burn the city in order to prevail against them (Joshua 8 and Judges 20).
15. In Judges 21, the men of Israel vow never to give any of their daughters to the men of Benjamin. Then they began to rethink their position. There were only 600 Benjamite males remaining from the tribe and no Benjamite females. Since they had vowed not to give any of their daughters to Benjamin, they could not go back on this vow. The solution was rather unusual. All of Israel was to have participated in this strike against Benjamin, but the family of Jabesh-gilead did not. This was wrong for Israel to go to war and for various families to choose to opt out of the war—therefore, all of the men, women and children of this family were executed with the exception of 400 virgin women who were given over to the tribe of Benjamin. Since their men had not participated in this war, they also had not vowed before God to withhold their women from marrying Benjamites. Therefore, the tribe of Benjamin was perpetuated through these 600 men and 400 women. There were another 200 women who came from Shiloh, an incident we will explore in Judges 21.
16. It is only moderately a tough call as to whether Ehud, the left-handed Benjamite, came before or after this incident in Judges 19–20. We have the death of Joshua (Judges 2:8), some intervening time, and then a period of 66 years (Judges 3:8, 11, 14) until Ehud delivers Israel from subjugation to Moab (Judges 3:15–30). Given that Joshua died at the age of 110, we would estimate the age of Phinehas at this time to be over 110.

¹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. I; p. 438.

Therefore, the incidents recorded in Judges 19–20 would have occurred prior to Judges 3. Therefore, one of Israel's deliverers came from the tribe of Benjamin *after* this tribe had been decimated.

17. The warriors of Benjamin were both fierce and known for being ambidextrous or left-handed (Judges 3:15 20:16 I Chron. 12:2).
18. By the time of I Sam. 4, the tribe of Benjamin was again a part of Israel, participating in their war against the Philistines (I Sam. 4:12).
19. The first king of Israel, King Saul, came from the tribe of Benjamin (I Sam. 9–10), who lived in the rebuilt city of Gibeah (I Sam. 10:26). Saul confirms that the tribe of Benjamin was the smallest in the land (I Sam. 9:21).
20. The reference to Benjamin in Psalm 68:27 as ruling over the other tribes would mean that David wrote this psalm while Saul was still king over Israel.
21. At the time that David was made king over Israel, one of Saul's sons became a ruler over a small portion of Israel, including Ephraim and Benjamin (II Sam. 2:8–9). This caused the outbreak of another civil war, essentially between Benjamin and the rest of Israel again (II Sam. 2).
22. There was apparently some animosity between the House of David and the tribe of Benjamin, as we have Shimei, a Benjamite, cursing and throwing rocks at David as he is escaping from Absalom (II Sam. 16:5–14). David does not make an issue of this, reasoning that his own son is seeking his life (II Sam. 16:11).
23. Sheba, a worthless Benjamite, rises up to oppose David (II Sam. 20:1–2).
24. Interestingly enough, in David's honor guard, the only tribe of the original twelve mentioned is Benjamin (II Sam. 23:29).
25. We have to be careful about some of the statements that we make regarding Scripture. I Kings 12:20 tells us that only Judah followed the house of David; however, in just the next verse, we have a coalition of Judah and Benjamin. This would indicate that there was probably a split in the tribe of Benjamin and that many did not stand with the house of David. This is not a contradiction of any sort. We use this kind of expression all of the time. We might say, "Nobody likes her; her only friend is..." The expression *nobody likes her* does not mean that *nobody likes her*; it means that she is vastly unpopular. When the writer of I Kings tells us that only Judah followed the house of David, it does not preclude portions of one or two other tribes from also following the house of David.
26. Benjamin is mentioned fewer than a half dozen times in I Kings and not at all in II Kings. In I Kings 12 and II Chron. 11:1, the tribes of Benjamin and Judah unite to restore the kingdom (it had become two nations at this point). From thereon, in contrast to their previous history, these two adjacent tribes were often united (II Chron. 11, 15, 17, 25 Ezra 1:5 4:1 10:9).
27. Jeremiah, although a Levite, lived in the land of Benjamin (Jer. 1:1). Therefore, Jeremiah mentions the tribe of Benjamin comparatively frequently (Jer. 6:1 17:26 20:2 32:8, 44 33:13 37:12–13 38:7).
28. Both Mordecai and Esther were from the tribe of Benjamin (Esther 2:5–7).
29. The greatest believer of the Church Age, Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, came from the tribe of Benjamin (Acts 13:21 Rom. 11:1 Philip. 3:5).