

# The Life of Jacob

Birthright &

Blessing

Compiled by Dr. Harold Bollinger

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## Forward

Jacob's life stages, each marked by a personal encounter with God. In the first stage, Jacob lived up to his name, which means, "He grasps the heel" (figuratively, "he deceives"). He grabbed Esau's heel at birth, and by the time he fled from home, he had also grabbed his brother's birthright and blessing.

His life had four Phases

During his flight, God first appeared to him.

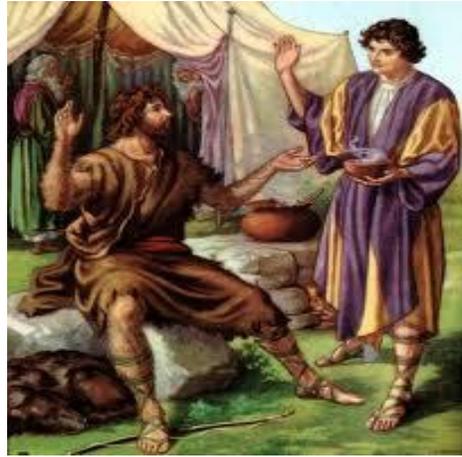
Not only did God confirm to Jacob his blessing, but also he awakened in Jacob a personal knowledge of himself.

In the second stage, Jacob experienced life from the other side, being manipulated and deceived by Laban. But there is a curious change: the Jacob of stage one would simply have left Laban, whereas the Jacob of stage two, after deciding to leave, waited six years for God's permission.

In the third stage, Jacob was in a new role as grabber. This time, by the Jordan River, he grabbed on to God and wouldn't let go. He realized his dependence on the God who had continued to bless him. His relationship to God became essential to his life, and his name was changed to Israel, "he struggles with God."

Jacob's last stage of life was to *be* grabbed—God achieved a firm hold on him. In responding to Joseph's invitation to come to Egypt, Jacob was clearly unwilling to make a move without God's approval.

## Chapter 1



### Significance of Jacob getting the birthright

Genesis 25:31

Jacob replied, "All right, but trade me your birthright for it."

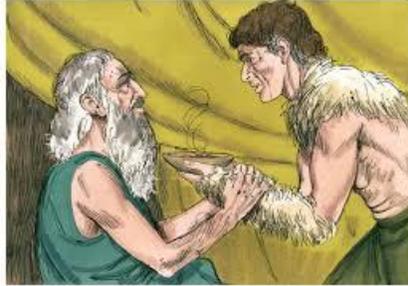
As Isaac pleaded with God for children, so the Bible encourages us to ask and even plead for our most personal and important requests. God wants to grant our requests, but he wants us to ask him. Even then, as Isaac learned, God may

decide to withhold his answer for a while in order to deepen our insight into what we really need,

Broaden our appreciation for his answers, or

Allow us to mature so we can use his gifts more wisely.

## Consequences of Jacob's deceit



### Gained the family blessing

Genesis 27:24

"Are you really my son Esau?" he asked.  
"Yes, of course," Jacob replied.

Although Jacob got the blessing he wanted, deceiving his father cost him dearly.

These are some of the consequences of that deceit: (1) he never saw his mother again; (2) his brother wanted to kill him; (3) he was deceived by his uncle, Laban; (4) his family became torn by strife; (5) Esau became the founder of an enemy nation; (6) he was exiled from his family. Imagine how different his life would have been had he and his mother waited for God to work his way, in his time! for years. Ironically, Jacob would have received the birthright and blessing anyway (Genesis 25:23).

Genesis 27:33-37

Isaac began to tremble uncontrollably and said, "Then who was it that just served me wild game? I have already eaten it, and I blessed him with an irrevocable blessing before you came."

When Esau understood, he let out a loud and bitter cry. "O my father, bless me, too!" he begged.

But Isaac said, "Your brother was here, and he tricked me. He has carried away your blessing." Esau said bitterly, "No wonder his name is Jacob, for he has deceived me twice, first taking my birthright and now stealing my blessing. Oh, haven't you saved even one blessing for me?" Isaac said to Esau,

"I have made Jacob your master and have declared that all his brothers will be his servants. I have guaranteed him an abundance of grain and wine—what is there left to give?"

Before the father died, he performed a ceremony of blessing, in which he officially handed over the birthright to the rightful heir.

Although the firstborn son was entitled to the birthright, it was not actually his until the blessing was pronounced. Before the blessing was given, the father could take the birthright away from the oldest son and give it to a more deserving son.

But after the blessing was given, the birthright could no longer be taken away. This is why fathers usually waited until late in life to pronounce the blessing. Although Jacob had been given the birthright by his older brother years before, he still needed his father's blessing to make it binding.



## **Jacob was trying to bargain with God?**

Genesis 28:20-22

Then Jacob made this vow: "If God will be with me and protect me on this journey and give me food and clothing, and if he will bring me back safely to my father, then I will make the Lord my God.

This memorial pillar will become a place for worshiping God, and I will give God a tenth of everything he gives me."

Was Jacob trying to bargain with God? It is possible that he, in his ignorance of how to worship and serve God, treated God like a servant who would perform a service for a tip. More likely, Jacob was not bargaining, but pledging his future to God.

He may have been saying, in effect, "Because you have blessed me, I will follow you." Whether Jacob was bargaining or pledging, God blessed him. But God also had some difficult lessons for Jacob to learn.

**Rachel was worth waiting for.**

## Genesis 29:23-28

So Laban invited everyone in the neighborhood to celebrate with Jacob at a wedding feast. That night, when it was dark, Laban took Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her. And Laban gave Leah a servant, Zilpah, to be her maid.

But when Jacob woke up in the morning—it was Leah! "What sort of trick is this?" Jacob raged at Laban. "I worked seven years for Rachel. What do you mean by this trickery?"

"It's not our custom to marry off a younger daughter ahead of the firstborn," Laban replied. "Wait until the bridal week is over, and you can have Rachel, too—that is, if you promise to work another seven years for me."

So Jacob agreed to work seven more years. A week after Jacob had married Leah, Laban gave him Rachel, too.

to see from God's perspective.

People often wonder if working a long time for something they desire is worth it. Jacob worked seven years to marry Rachel. After being tricked, he agreed to work seven more years for her (although he did get to marry Rachel shortly after he married Leah)! The most important goals and desires are worth working and waiting for.

Movies and television have created the illusion that people have to wait only about an hour to solve their problems or get what they want. be trapped into thinking the same is true in real life. Patience is hardest

when we need it the most, but it is the key to achieving our goals.

Jacob was enraged when he learned that Laban had tricked him. The deceiver of Esau was now deceived himself. How natural it is for us to become upset at an injustice done to us while closing our eyes to the injustices we do to others. Sin has a way of coming back to haunt us.

Although Jacob was tricked by Laban, he kept his part of the bargain. There was more at stake than just Jacob's hurt. There was Rachel to think about, as well as God's plan for his life.

When we are tricked by others, keeping our part of the bargain may still be wise. Nursing our wounds or plotting revenge makes us unable to see from God's perspective.

## Chapter 2



### **Jacob prospered despite unfair treatment**

Genesis 31:4-13

Jacob called Rachel and Leah out to the field where he was watching the flocks, so he could talk things over with them. "Your father has turned against me and is not treating me like he used to," he told them. "But the God of my father has been with me.

You know how hard I have worked for your father, but he has tricked me, breaking his wage agreement with me again and again. But God has not allowed him to do me any harm.

For if he said the speckled animals were mine, the whole flock began to produce speckled lambs. And when he changed his mind and said I could have the streaked ones, then all the lambs were born streaked.

In this way, God has made me wealthy at your father's expense. During the mating season, I had a dream and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled, and spotted.

Then in my dream, the angel of God said to me, 'Jacob!' And I replied, 'Yes, I'm listening!' The angel said, 'Look, and you will see that only the streaked, speckled, and spotted males are mating with the females of your flock.

For I have seen all that Laban has done to you. I am the God you met at Bethel, the place where you anointed the pillar of stone and made a vow to serve me.

Now leave this country and return to the land you came from.' "

Although Laban treated Jacob unfairly, God still increased Jacob's prosperity. God's power is not limited by lack of fair play. He has the ability to meet our needs and make us thrive even though others mistreat us. To give in and respond unfairly is to be no different from your enemies.

### **Jacob's rash vow**

Genesis 31:32

But as for your household gods, let the person who has taken them die! If you find anything that belongs to you, I swear before all these relatives of ours, I will give it back without question." But Jacob didn't know that Rachel had taken them.

Do you remember feeling absolutely sure about something? Jacob was so sure that no one had stolen Laban's idols that he vowed to kill the offender.

Because Rachel took them, this statement put her safety in serious jeopardy. Even when you are absolutely sure about a matter, it is safer to avoid rash statements. Someone may hold you to them.



## **Jacob's diligence paid off**

Genesis 31:38-42

"Twenty years I have been with you, and all that time I cared for your sheep and goats so they produced healthy offspring. In all those years I never touched a single ram of yours for food.

If any were attacked and killed by wild animals, did I show them to you and ask you to reduce the count of your flock? No, I took the loss! You made me pay for every animal stolen from the flocks, whether the loss was my fault or not.

I worked for you through the scorching heat of the day and through cold and sleepless nights.

Yes, twenty years—fourteen of them earning your two daughters, and six years to get the flock.

And you have reduced my wages ten times! In fact, except for the grace of God—the God of my grandfather Abraham, the awe-inspiring God of my father, Isaac—you would have sent me off without a penny to my name.

But God has seen your cruelty and my hard work. That is why he

appeared to you last night and vindicated me."

Jacob made it a habit to do more than was expected of him. When his flocks were attacked, he took the losses rather than splitting them with Laban.

He worked hard even after several pay cuts. His diligence eventually paid off; his flocks began to multiply.

Making a habit of doing more than expected can pay off. It

- (1) Pleases God,
- (2) Earns recognition and advancement,
- (3) Enhances your reputation,
- (4) Builds others' confidence in you,
- (5) Gives you more experience and knowledge, and
- (6) Develops your spiritual maturity.

## Chapter 3



### **Jacob's encounter with angels**

Genesis 32:1

As Jacob and his household started on their way again, angels of God came to meet him.

Why did angels of God meet Jacob?

In the Bible, angels often intervened in human situations. Although angels often came in human form, these angels must have looked different, for Jacob recognized them at once. The reason these angels met Jacob is unclear; but because of their visit, Jacob knew God was with him.



### **Jacob feared his meeting with Esau.**

Genesis 32:3

Jacob now sent messengers to his brother, Esau, in Edom, the land Seir.

The last time Jacob had seen Esau, his brother was ready to kill him for stealing the family blessing (Genesis 25:29-27:42). Esau was so angry he had vowed to kill Jacob as soon as their father, Isaac, died (Genesis 27:41).

Fearing their reunion, Jacob sent a messenger ahead with gifts. He hoped to buy Esau's favor.



## **Jacob's persistence**

Genesis 32:26

Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is dawn."

But Jacob panted, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

Jacob continued this wrestling match all night just to be blessed. He was persistent.

God encourages persistence in all areas of our lives, including the spiritual. Where in your spiritual life do you need more persistence?

Strong character develops as you struggle through tough conditions.

## **Significance of his name change**

Genesis 32:27-29

"What is your name?" the man asked.

He replied, "Jacob."

"Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "It is now Israel, because you have struggled with both God and men and have won."

"What is your name?" Jacob asked him.

"Why do you ask?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

God gave many Bible people new names (Abraham, Sarah, Peter). Their new names were symbols of how God had changed their lives.

Here we see how Jacob's character had changed. Jacob, the ambitious deceiver, had now become Israel, the one who struggles with God and overcomes.



### **Why Jacob was so fond of Benjamin.**

Genesis 42:4

Jacob wouldn't let Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin, go with them, however, for fear some harm might come to him.

Jacob was especially fond of Benjamin because he was Joseph's only full brother and—as far as Jacob knew—the only surviving son of his beloved wife, Rachel. Benjamin was Jacob's youngest son and a child of his old age.

### **Jacob learned about God' reassurance.**

Genesis 46:3-4

Pharaoh asked them, "What is your occupation?"

And they replied, "We are shepherds like our ancestors. [4] We have come to live here in Egypt, for there is no pasture for our flocks in Canaan. The famine is very severe there. We request permission to live in the land of Goshen."

The Israelites did become a great nation, and Jacob's descendants eventually returned to Canaan.

The book of Exodus recounts the story of Israel's slavery in Egypt for 400 years (fulfilling God's words to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-16), and the book of Joshua gives an exciting account of the Israelites entering and conquering Canaan, the Promised Land.

God told Jacob to leave his home and travel to a strange and faraway land. But God reassured him by promising to go with him and take care of him.

When new situations or surroundings frighten you, recognize that experiencing fear is normal. To be paralyzed by fear, however, is an indication that you question God's ability to take care of you.

Jacob never returned to Canaan. This was a promise to his descendants that they would return. "Joseph's own hand will close your eyes" refers to Joseph attending to Jacob as he faced death.

It was God's promise to Jacob that he would never know the bitterness of being lonely again.

## Chapter 4



### **Jacob moves to Egypt.**

Genesis 46:31-34

And Joseph said to his brothers and to all their households, "I'll go and tell Pharaoh that you have all come from the land of Canaan to join me.

And I will tell him, 'these men are shepherds and livestock breeders. They have brought with them their flocks and herds and everything they own.'

So when Pharaoh calls for you and asks you about your occupation, tell him, 'We have been livestock breeders from our youth, as our ancestors have been for many generations.'

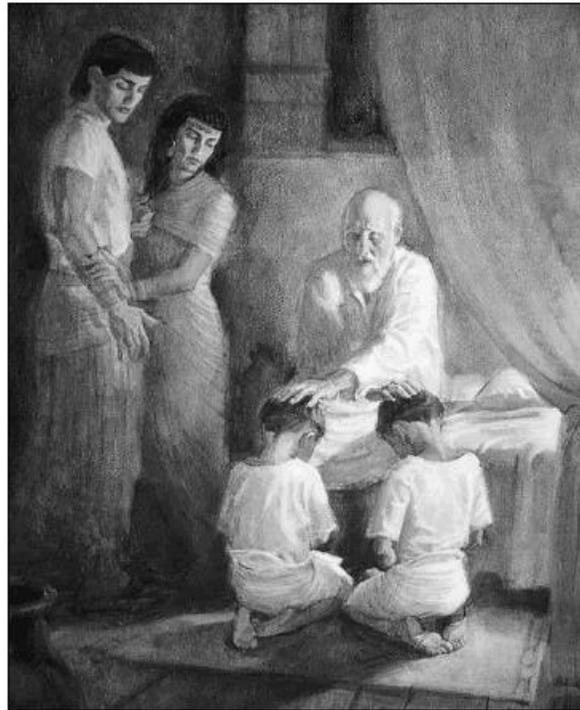
When you tell him this, he will let you live here in the land of Goshen, for shepherds are despised in the land of Egypt."

Jacob moved his whole family to Egypt, but they wanted to live apart from the Egyptians. To ensure this, Joseph told them to let Pharaoh know they were shepherds.

Although Pharaoh may have been sympathetic to shepherds (for he was probably descended from the nomadic Hyksos line), the Egyptian culture would not willingly accept shepherds among them.

The strategy worked, and Jacob's family was able to benefit from Pharaoh's generosity as well as from the Egyptians' prejudice.

**Jacob gave Ephraim greater blessing.**



Genesis 48:8-20

Then Jacob looked over at the two boys. "Are these your sons?" he asked.

"Yes," Joseph told him, "these are the sons God has given me here in

Egypt."

And Jacob said, "Bring them over to me, and I will bless them."

Now Jacob was half blind because of his age and could hardly see. So Joseph brought the boys close to him, and Jacob kissed and embraced them.

Then Jacob said to Joseph, "I never thought I would see you again, but now God has let me see your children, too."

Joseph took the boys from their grandfather's knees, and he bowed low to him. Then he positioned the boys so Ephraim was at Jacob's left hand and Manasseh was at his right hand.

But Jacob crossed his arms as he reached out to lay his hands on the boys' heads. So his right hand was on the head of Ephraim, the younger boy, and his left hand was on the head of Manasseh, the older.

Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May God, the God before whom my grandfather Abraham and my father, Isaac, walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life, and the angel who has kept me from all harm—may he bless these boys.

May they preserve my name and the names of my grandfather Abraham and my father, Isaac. And may they become a mighty nation."

But Joseph was upset when he saw that his father had laid his right hand on Ephraim's head. So he lifted it to place it on Manasseh's head instead.

"No, Father," he said, "this one over here is older. Put your right hand on his head."

But his father refused. "I know what I'm doing, my son," he said.

"Manasseh, too, will become a great people, but his younger brother will become even greater. His descendants will become a multitude of nations!"

So Jacob blessed the boys that day with this blessing:

"The people of Israel will use your names to bless each other. They will say, 'May God make you as prosperous as Ephraim and Manasseh.' "

In this way, Jacob put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

Jacob gave Ephraim, instead of his older brother Manasseh, the greater blessing. When Joseph objected, Jacob refused to listen because God had told him that Ephraim would become greater.

God often works in unexpected ways. When he chooses people to fulfill his plans, he always goes deeper than appearance, tradition, or position. He sometimes surprises us by choosing the less obvious person, at least by human reasoning.

God can use you to carry out his plans, even if you don't think you have all the qualifications.

When Joseph became a slave, Jacob thought he was dead and wept in despair (Genesis 37:30). But eventually God's plan allowed Jacob to regain not only his son, but his grandchildren as well. Circumstances are never so bad that they are beyond God's help. Jacob regained his son. Job got a new family (Job 42:10-17).

Mary regained her brother Lazarus (John 11:1-44). We need never despair because we belong to a loving God. We never know what good he will bring out of a seemingly hopeless situation.

Jacob spoke of God as his shepherd throughout his life. In his old age, he could clearly see his dependence upon God.

This marks a total attitude change from that of his scheming and dishonest youth. To develop an attitude like Jacob's, let God shepherd you as you trust in his provision and care.

When you realize that every good thing comes from God, you can quit trying to grab them for yourself.

Jacob was giving these young boys land occupied by the Philistines and Canaanites. His gift became reality when the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh occupied the east and west sides of the Jordan River (Joshua 16).



## **Mourning over Jacob's death**

Genesis 50:1-11

Joseph threw himself on his father and wept over him and kissed him.  
Then Joseph told his morticians to embalm the body.

The embalming process took forty days, and there was a period of national mourning for seventy days.

When the period of mourning was over, Joseph approached Pharaoh's advisers and asked them to speak to Pharaoh on his behalf.

He told them, "Tell Pharaoh that my father made me swear an oath. He said to me, 'I am about to die; take my body back to the land of Canaan, and bury me in our family's burial cave.' Now I need to go and bury my father. After his burial is complete, I will return without delay."

Pharaoh agreed to Joseph's request. "Go and bury your father, as you promised," he said.

So Joseph went, with a great number of Pharaoh's counselors and advisers—all the senior officers of Egypt.

Joseph also took his brothers and the entire household of Jacob. But they left their little children and flocks and herds in the land of Goshen.

So a great number of chariots, cavalry, and people accompanied Joseph.

When they arrived at the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan River, they held a very great and solemn funeral, with a seven-day period of mourning for Joseph's father.

The local residents, the Canaanites, renamed the place Abel-mizraim, for they said, "This is a place of very deep mourning for these Egyptians."

When Jacob died at the age of 147, Joseph wept and mourned for months.

When someone close to us dies, we need a long period of time to work through our grief. Crying and sharing our feelings with others helps us recover and go on with life.

Allow yourself and others the freedom to grieve over the loss of a loved one, and give yourself time enough to complete your grieving process.

Embalming was typical for Egyptians but unusual for nomadic shepherds. Believing that the dead went to the next world in their physical bodies, the Egyptians embalmed bodies to preserve them so they could function in the world to come. When Jacob died at the age of 147, Joseph wept and mourned for months.

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Jacob's family allowed him to be embalmed as a sign of courtesy and respect to the Egyptians.

Joseph had proven himself trustworthy as Pharaoh's adviser. Because of his good record, Pharaoh had little doubt that he would return to Egypt as promised after burying his father in Canaan.

Privileges and freedom often result when we have demonstrated our trustworthiness. Since trust must be built gradually over time, take every opportunity to prove your reliability even in minor matters.

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## **God promised to lead Jacob's descendants from Egypt.**

Genesis 50:24

"Soon I will die," Joseph told his brothers, "but God will surely come for you, to lead you out of this land of Egypt. He will bring you back to the land he vowed to give to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Joseph was ready to die. He had no doubts that God would keep his promise and one day bring the Israelites back to their homeland. What a tremendous example! The secret of that kind of faith is a lifetime of trusting God. Your faith is like a muscle—it grows with exercise, gaining strength over time.

After a lifetime of exercising trust, your faith can be as strong as Joseph's. Then at your death, you can be confident that God will fulfill all his promises to you and to all those faithful to him who may live after you.

This verse sets the stage for what would begin to happen in Exodus and come to completion in Joshua. God was going to make Jacob's family into a great nation, lead them out of Egypt, and bring them into the land he had promised them.

## Chapter 5



### **How Jacob's family grew into a nation.**

Numbers 1:20-46

This is the number of men twenty years old or older who were able to go to war, each listed according to his own clan and family:

Tribe — Number

- Reuben (Jacob's oldest son) — 46,500 [21]
- [22] Simeon — 59,300 [23]
- [24] Gad — 45,650 [25]
- [26] Judah — 74,600 [27]
- [28] Issachar — 54,400 [29]
- [30] Zebulun — 57,400 [31]
- [32] Ephraim son of Joseph — 40,500 [33]
- [34] Manasseh son of Joseph — 32,200 [35]
- [36] Benjamin — 35,400 [37]
- [38] Dan — 62,700 [39]
- [40] Asher — 41,500 [41]
- [42] Naphtali — 53,400 [43]

These were the men counted by Moses and Aaron and the twelve leaders of Israel, all listed according to their ancestral descent.

They were counted by families—all the men of Israel who were

twenty years old or older and able to go to war. The total number was 603,550.

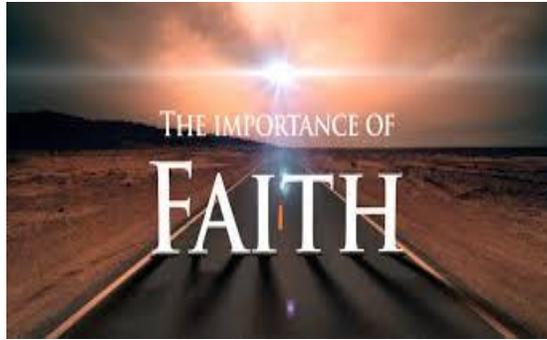
If there were 603,550 men, not counting the Levites or women and children, the total population must have numbered more than two million Israelites.

How could such a large population grow from Jacob's family of 70 who moved down to Egypt? The book of Exodus tells us that the Israelites who descended from Jacob's family "multiplied greatly" (Exodus 1:7).

Because they remained in Egypt more than 400 years, they had plenty of time to grow into a large group of people.

After leaving Egypt, they were able to survive in the desert because God miraculously provided the food and water they needed.

The leaders of Moab were terrified because of the large number of Israelites (Numbers 22:3).



**Jacob is an example of faith.**

Hebrews 11:21

It was by faith that Jacob, when he was old and dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons and bowed in worship as he leaned on his staff.

Jacob was Isaac's son and Abraham's grandson. Jacob's sons became the fathers of Israel's 12 tribes. Even when Jacob (also called "Israel") was dying in a strange land, he believed the promise that Abraham's descendants would be like the sand on the seashore and that Israel would become a great nation (Genesis 48:1-22). True faith helps us see beyond the grave.



## CHART: Jacob's Children

### JACOB'S SONS AND THEIR NOTABLE DESCENDANTS

Jacob's 12 sons were the ancestors of the 12 tribes of Israel. The entire nation of Israel came from these men.

REUBEN	none
SIMEON	none
LEVI	Aaron, Moses, Eli, John the Baptist
JUDAH	David, Jesus
DAN	Samson
NAPHTALI	Barak, Elijah (?)
GAD	Japhthah (?)
ASHER	none
ISSACHAR	none
ZEBULUN	none
JOSEPH	Joshua, Gideon, Samuel
BENJAMIN	Saul, Esther, Paul

**References:**

**Holy Bible: King James Translation**

**Holy Bible: New Living Bible translation.**

**Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print**