

Benjamin

Gen. 49:27 Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.

Joseph and Benjamin were the two sons of Jacob by his second and beloved wife Rachel. They were full brothers, whereas the other ten brothers were half-brothers. Benjamin was Jacob's youngest son, born in Canaan under sorrowful circumstances, **Gen. 35:16** And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. **17** And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. **18** And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni *I son of my sorrow*. but his father called him Benjamin *I right hand*. **19** And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

As Joseph was considered set apart from his brethren, so also was Benjamin, for example, Benjamin did not conspire with the ten elder brothers when they plotted against Joseph. Neither, because of his deep affection, did Jacob initially send Benjamin with the ten brothers to Egypt to seek food during the famine Lest peradventure mischief befall him (Gen. 42:4). When the brothers arrived in Egypt, Governor Joseph accused them of being spies. After imprisoning them for three days, he kept Simeon but freed the other nine on the agreement they would return with Benjamin, **Gen. 42:15** Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither. After initially refusing, the grieving Jacob very reluctantly agreed and the ten sons (including Benjamin) made the journey southwards to Egypt. At a special meal, Joseph instructed his servants to give five times more food and drink to Benjamin (Gen. 43:44), and when they set out to return to Canaan, Joseph had a silver cup placed in Benjamin's bag of grain (Gen. 44:1,2) ... and this was the catalyst for eventually bringing the whole family down to settle in Egypt (Gen. 45, especially, **14** And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck.)

While Benjamin is often represented as a genteel type of character, he had no shortage of sons, **Gen. 46:21** And the sons of Benjamin were Belah, and Becher, and Ashbel, Gera, and Naaman, Ehi, and Rosh, Muppim, and Huppim, and Ard. He had a strong presence, even though he was the youngest of the twelve.

Years later, as Jacob prepared to die, he blessed Benjamin, **Gen. 49:27** Benjamin shall ravine as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil. ... Far from being 'genteel', he is compared to as a 'ravenous wolf'. Next, he is accredited with two contrasting personalities, - in the morning and at night. "In the morning", - in the earlier part of their history, - the tribe's emphasis was on 'devouring their prey', i.e. belligerence and aggression. Then, 'at night', in the evening, when their plundering had ended, they will be settled, enjoying and distributing their spoil. In other words, there were two aspects relating to Jacob's blessing, containing the negative and the positive. ...

Evidence for its 'positive' can be seen in the judge Ehud, a mighty warrior who delivered Israel from the Moabites (Jdgs. 3:12-30). They were skilful in battle, benefiting from being ambidextrous, **I Chron. 12:2** They were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow, even of Saul's brethren of Benjamin. They proved themselves to be formidable when they fought bravely against Israel's enemies, for example, they helped defeat Sisera, **Judges 5:14** Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people. Saul, who God chose to become Israel's first king, came from the tribe of Benjamin, who he described as the smallest of tribes (I Sam. 9:15-27). In Babylon, Mordecai and Esther belonged to the tribe of Benjamin (Esther 2:5-7) ... and in the New Testament, Paul also came from the tribe of Benjamin (Rom. 11:1 and Phil. 3:4-5).

However, the tribe of Benjamin had its ‘negative’ side for like ravenous wolves, they also fought against their own brethren, leading to civil war among the Israelites, **Judges 20:20** And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah. **21** And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah, and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day twenty and two thousand men. **22** And the people the men of Israel encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day. **23** (And the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until even, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? And the LORD said, Go up against him.) ... And so, when a Levite concubine was cruelly abused and murdered, the eleven tribes turned against the Benjamites for refusing to relinquish the offenders. Consequently, the small tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped out (Judges 20, 21). Eventually, their remnant was restored to the remainder of the tribes, the civil war ceased, and they were all reunited.

Another example of this darker side was in their opposition to David’s coronation. They resented Saul, one of their own, being replaced by one from another tribe and they mounted great opposition to the appointment of David as king, **II Sam. 2:8** But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim; **9** And made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel. **10** Ishbosheth Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David.

This opposition increased under another Benjamite called Shimei (II Sam. 16:5-14), and again under Sheba, **II Sam. 20:1** And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel. **2** So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri: but the men of Judah clave unto their king, from Jordan even to Jerusalem. David

said of him, Now shall Sheba the son of Bichri do us more harm than did Absalom (v.6). They were like wild uncontrollable ‘ravenous wolves’ when started! However, they were pursued and defeated.

Then, when the kingdom of Israel was divided between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, the tribe of Benjamin would have been expected to join in the revolt against the house of David with Jeroboam, but instead, they remained with the tribe of Judah (I Kings 12:20,21). Their territory sits in between Judah and Jerusalem to the south and Ephraim to the north. It included Jericho (Joshua 18:21-27) and a major travel route running through it from north to south.

Eventually, Benjamin did settle to become a trusted people and in Moses’ blessing, there is no mention of ferocity or viciousness. Instead, Moses referred to him as ... **Dt. 33:12** *The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him; and the LORD shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders. God would keep and protect them ... not only against the enemy, but also against themselves. He would carry them ‘between His shoulders’, next to His heart. They would have destroyed themselves but for God’s staying hand upon them, - God kept them in the southern kingdom alongside Judah, from whom the Messiah would be born.*

The blessings of Jacob and Moses blossomed in the life of Saul of Tarsus, the apostle Paul. In the early days, he began like a ‘ravenous wolf’, as an uncompromising and cruel persecutor terrorising the Christians, - in the morning he shall devour the prey, - he hounded them, **Phil. 3:5** *Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church ... but when the Lord saved him, the ‘morning’ turned into the ‘evening’, and at night he shall divide the spoil ... God brought about in him a complete transformation which became a blessing to the early church and beyond. In the” morning” of Paul’s life, he “devoured”*

Christians, but ‘in the evening’ when the Lord saved him the Lord settled him, and he shared the ‘spoils’ of his Christian experience with many.

The tribe of Benjamin reminds us God does not give up on His people but brings them through every experience to achieve His goal for His glory. He changes our nature, taking us from the former paths of sin and warfare against Him and gives us a new nature founded upon faith and grace. The world’s ways do not guarantee a winning life but produces weakness, disorder, and strife.

As with the Benjamites, our hope is in Glory with the Lord Jesus, and that is what was promised them in Rev. 7:8, Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand ... **I Peter 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4** To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.

Even though the tribe of Benjamin began well and fell into defeat, nonetheless, the Lord did not leave them for He honoured His promises and delivered them. ... As Christians, we begin well but we often ‘hit a few bumps in the road’ which can ‘knock us off-course’ temporarily. But when God saves us, He promises to keep us, and in Christ we have our promised eternal inheritance, **Heb. 4:9** There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. **10** For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.