

וַיֵּחִי

VAYECHI/AND HE LIVED
Bereshith/Genesis 47:28-50:26

In our Torah portion this week, Ya'acov gathers together his children and gives them the gift of prophetic insight through the form of a blessing:

Bereshith/Genesis 49:1 And Ya'acov called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days: ² "Gather together and hear, you sons of Ya'acov, and listen to Israel your father.

Benjamin was the youngest son of Ya'acov and received the final blessing...although when you read it, the viciousness alluded to doesn't really sound much like a "blessing":

Bereshith 49:27 "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil."

"**Ravenous wolf**" hardly sounds consistent with the meaning of the name, **Benjamin** – "**Son of the Right Hand**." The "**right hand**" is the place of power, a position of ruling with the king of a nation. As it was said of Yeshua:

Acts 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of Elohim, and Yeshua standing at the right hand of Elohim

So how do we reconcile the "**son of the right hand**" with a "**ravenous wolf**?" What we could probably deduce from these two descriptions is that within the character traits of Benjamin is the potential for two totally opposite natures – one that is godly and exalted and the other that is animalistic and brutal! The "**ravenous wolf**" must, therefore, be tamed or subdued and blended together with the loyalty towards the one at whose hand he sits. If those traits are brought into balance, they are capable of a mighty work, and this is exactly what we will see as we follow "**Benyamites**" through the Scriptures.

In the book of **Judges**, due to their rebelliousness, the Israelites often found themselves under the oppression of various peoples. The 2nd judge יהודה raised up to rescue them from the Moabites was a **Benyamite**:

Judges 3:15 But when the children of Israel cried out to יהודה, יהודה raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benyamite...

The period of the judges was not good, summarized best by:

Judges 21:25 In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

The tribe of Benjamin would produce some very unfaithful men. In **Judges 19**, there is the ghastly episode when certain Benyamites raped a Levite's concubine, leading to her death. The authorities of the Benyamite tribe were unwilling to punish these evil men and compounded the rapists' sin when they rose to defend them (**Judges 19-21**). The horror of this story is its comparison with Sodom and Gomorrah. In a similar way, they beat on the "**doors**." Were not the people in both situations "**ravening like wolves**?" Did this behavior not describe the **Bereshith** prophecy of Ya'acov over his youngest son?

Judges 19:22 While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. **Pounding on the door**, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "**Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him**."

Bereshith 19:5 And they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? **Bring them out to us that we may have sex with them**." ... they pressed hard against the man Lot, and **came near to break down the door**.

All of the tribes of Israel arose at יהוה's command, and came against the tribe of their brother Benjamin in a heart-wrenching civil war that nearly decimated the entire tribe of Benjamin:

Judges 20:47 But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they stayed at the rock of Rimmon for four months. ⁴⁸ And the men of Israel turned back against the children of Benjamin, and **struck them down with the edge of the sword** -- from every city, men and beasts, all who were found. They also **set fire to all the cities they came to**.

All of the women of Benjamin were wiped out. And even the children! All that survived were 600 men. The rest of the tribes came up with a way of providing them with wives, but had they not done this, there would have been no Esther, Jeremiah, or King Sha'ul or Paul!

After the period of the Judges, יהוה gave Israel a Benyamite king named Sha'ul.

1 Samuel 9:16 "Tomorrow about this time I will send you a **man from the land of Benjamin**, and you shall anoint him commander over My people Israel, that he may save My people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon My people, because their cry has come to me."

Although initially reluctant, Sha'ul became a warrior king who over a period of 40 years would extend Israelite territory and unite the tribes. But his rebellious heart became evident and יהוה had in mind another king, David, who was from the tribe of Yehuda.

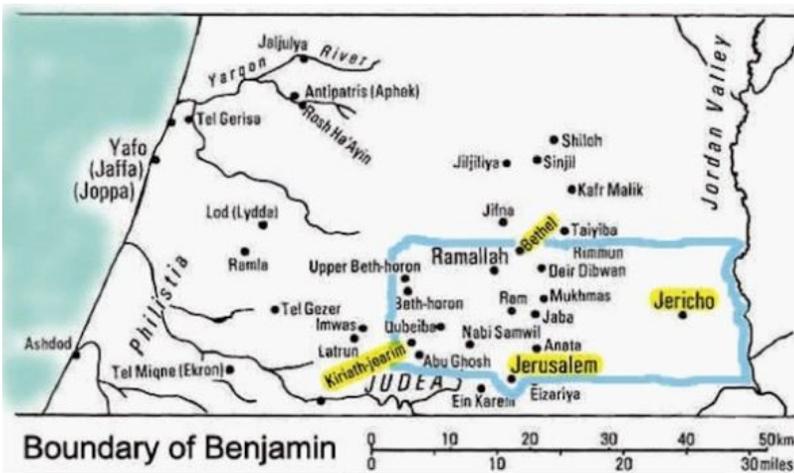
1 Samuel 16:12 So he sent and brought him in. Now he *was* ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And יהוה said, "Arise, **anoint him (David)**; for this *is* the one!"

King Sha'ul's personality would go from one who loved David to one who hated him fiercely. However, his warrior son, Yonatan, became best friends with David.

1 Samuel 18:1... the soul of Yonatan was knit to the soul of David, and Yonatan loved him as his own soul.

Everyone goes on a journey through life, with the Almighty molding and making each one of us into the person He desires us to be. The same is true of the Tribe of Benjamin. If we follow Benjamin's growth as a tribe from his birth until the very end of Revelation, we will notice that there was a turning point somewhere around the time of David. Perhaps it started with the deep love that Yonatan had for David.

Let's consider for a moment, the tribal inheritance of the Benjamites during the conquest of the Land in the book of **Yehoshua (Joshua)**. I'll try to shorten the passage with the relevant points I want to consider. These are always the kind of verses we like to skip over, but ones which often contain key information:

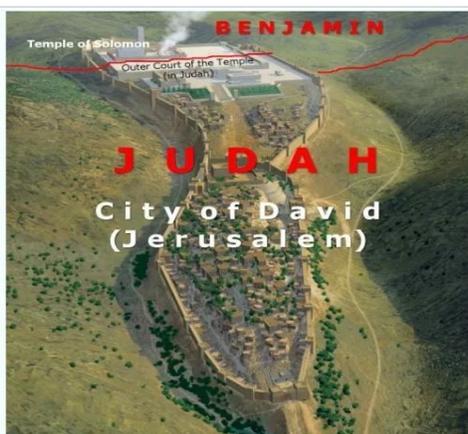


Yehoshua 18:11 Now the lot of the tribe of the children of Benjamin came up according to their families, and the territory of their lot came out between the children of Yehuda and the children of Yosef... ¹⁶ Then the border came down to the end of the mountain that *lies* before the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which *is* in the Valley of the Rephaim on the north, descended to the Valley of Hinnom, to the side of the

Jebusite city on the south... This was the inheritance of the children of Benjamin, according to its boundaries all around, according to their families. ²¹ Now the cities of the tribe of the children of Benjamin, according to their families, were Jericho, Beth Hoglah, ...**Jebus (which is Jerusalem)**, ... This was the inheritance of the children of Benjamin according to their families.

Key points:

- Their lot was between the children of Yehuda and the children of Yosef
- Jerusalem, then known as Jebus was in Benjamin's territory.
- The Hinnom Valley was the lowest spot in Jerusalem, a place where later there would be children sacrificed to Ba'al and Molech



The city of Jebus was captured by King David and this city was in Benjamin's territory. Therefore, in the future, Benjamin was set to host the holiest spot in all of Israel. As noted last week, many historians believe the Temple was situated on the border of these two tribes in such a way that the Holy places of the Temple were in the territory of Benjamin and the outer courtyard was in the territory of Yehuda.

We have come to a very important transition in the life of the tribe of Benjamin. From this time forward throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, only good things will be said about the tribe.

Moving on, we know that Solomon built the Temple and after his reign there was a squabble amongst the tribes over kingship. Because of some bad decisions by Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, there was a split in the kingdom, all prophesied by the prophet, Ahijah:

1 Kings 11:30 Then Ahijah took hold of the new garment that *was* on him, and tore it *into* twelve pieces. ³¹ And he said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says יהוה, the Elohim of Israel: 'Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you ³² '(but he shall have **one tribe** for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel)

The “**one tribe**” given to Rehoboam (tribe of Yehuda) was **Benjamin**:

1 Kings 11:34 'However I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, because I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of My servant David, whom I chose because he kept My commandments and My statutes. ³⁵ 'But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and give it to you -- **ten tribes**. ³⁶ 'And to his son I will give **one tribe**, that My servant David may always have **a lamp before Me in Jerusalem**, the city which I have chosen for Myself, to put My name there.

It is very interesting to note that when the tribes split, ten tribes went with Jeroboam (Ephraimite), the main tribe of Yosef, (full brother of Benjamin). It would have seemed logical that Benjamin would have chosen to stay with those family members from the line of his mother, Rachel. In other words, the Benjamites turned their backs on their closest family members when they chose to stay with Yehuda and Jerusalem, those with the promised spiritual future, instead of the way of the flesh. Hmmm...

Digressing a moment to the blessing given to Benjamin later in the Torah by Moshe, we can perhaps see now what Moshe was pointing to:

Devarim/Deuteronomy 33:12 Of Benjamin he said: "The **beloved of יהוה shall dwell in safety by Him, Who shelters him all the day long; And he shall dwell between His shoulders.**"

It is all worded very mysteriously with the pronouns. “**Who**” is dwelling between “**whose**” shoulders? It could be interpreted that Benjamin is safely dwelling on the back of the Almighty “**between His shoulders,**” carried like a young child. OR as we have seen, the Temple of יהוה will be built in the territory of Benjamin, “**between the shoulder blades**” of the mountain ranges there. “**Between the shoulder blades**” is where the heart of יהוה is. I would say, both meanings have merit. Interesting.

Okay, so Benjamin, the tribe given to Yehuda, was to be “**a lamp before Me in Jerusalem**” (**1 Kings 11:36**). It implies that Benjamin is the gift of “**light**” to Yehuda. A light-bearer that would continually be there as a spiritual beacon for brother Yehuda.

The northern kingdom and the southern kingdom (Yehuda plus Benjamin) had their ups and downs, and the kingdom of Israel (north) was finally taken captive by the Assyrians. Later, near the end of the

southern kingdom's reign, a major Benyamite prophet named **Jeremiah** had a prophecy specifically for the Benyamites:

Jeremiah 6:1 "O you **children of Benjamin**, Gather yourselves to **flee from the midst of Jerusalem!** Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a signal-fire in Beth Haccerem; For disaster appears out of the north, And great destruction.

Jeremiah understood that the Babylonians were coming now for the southern kingdom. With exile looming in the near future, Jeremiah gave the Benyamites a way out. But in the end, the Benyamites once again chose to stay with brother, Yehuda. Together, Yehuda and Benjamin would suffer the same fate, being taken into exile to Babylon. The Babylonians were later conquered by the Persians and during that period almost all Jews were threatened once again with complete and utter destruction. We read this story in the book of **Esther** and notice the key part the Benyamites played.

The wicked Haman, an Amalekite, plotted to wipe out the entire tribe of “**Jews**” (both Yehuda and Benyamite):

Esther 3:13 And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to **annihilate all the Jews**, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth *month*, which *is* the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.¹⁴ A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province, being published for all people, that they should be ready for that day.

But two Benyamites, Mordecai and his niece, Esther, strategized to save the Jews (both Yehudim and Benyamites) from extinction. In fact, because of what they did, there was “**light**” for the “**Jews**”:

Esther 8:16 The Jews had **light** and gladness, joy and honor.

In approximately the same time period, the 70-year prophesied exile of the southern kingdom ended. Unlike the Babylonians, Persian policy was to allow captives to return to their homes and rebuild their government and religious systems. What we read is fascinating – **Yehuda and Benjamin**, returned to the Land **together** to rebuild:

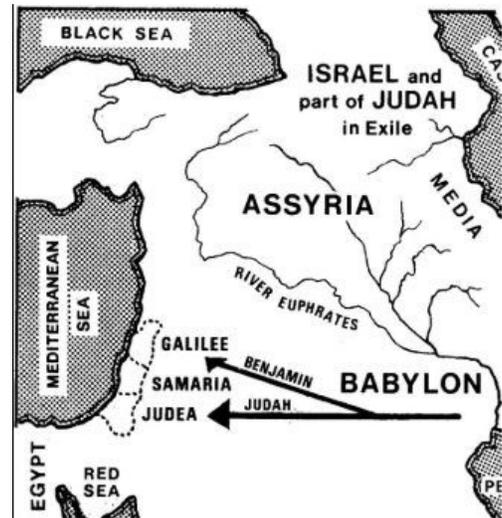
Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of יהוה by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, יהוה **stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia**, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying,² Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: **All the kingdoms of the earth יהוה Elohim of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Yehuda.**³ Who *is* among you of all His people? May his Elohim be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which *is* in Yehuda, and **build the house of יהוה Elohim of Israel (He is Elohim), which is in Jerusalem...**⁵ Then the **heads of the fathers' houses of Yehuda and Benjamin**, and the priests **and the Levites**, with all whose spirits Elohim had moved, arose to go up and **build the house of יהוה which is in Jerusalem.**

After going into captivity, a contingent of “**Benyamites returned with Yehudim**” and some Levites to “**rebuild the House of יהוה which is in Jerusalem.**” This is the subject of the books of **Ezra** and **Nehemiah**. A question I have is, what tribe is **Nehemiah** from?

Nehemiah 1:1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.

That is all we know of Nehemiah's heritage. Strong's data for "**Hachaliah**" tells us that his name means "**whom יהיה enlightens.**" Again, the theme of "**light.**" Perhaps Nehemiah was a Benyamite?

After the end of the Jewish exile in Babylon, we further learn from Nehemiah that most of the Yehudim returned to their ancestral homeland in the south around Jerusalem and absorbed the historical Benyamite territory. But most of the Benyamites went to the north to the region of the **Galilee** (**Nehemiah 11:31-35**). They occupied the land which previously had been settled by the small tribes like Asher, Naphtali, Zebulun, Issachar and parts of Manasseh who had long since been deported during the Assyrian exile and who did not return. This is the very important point – The **Benyamites took over the Galilee!** The map shows the three different regions as they appeared during the time of Yeshua.



Why is all that relevant? Because Yeshua was known as a "**Galilean.**" Yeshua was a man from "**Yehuda**" living alongside "**Benyamites.**" "**Galilee,**" which became the Land of Benjamin was where Yeshua spent most of the years of His ministry, teaching and doing miracles.

Matthew 3:13 Then Yeshua came from Galilee to Yochanan at the Jordan to be baptized by him.

Matthew 27:55 And many women who followed Yeshua from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar

Prophecy was also fulfilled in the area of the "**Galilee.**" Yeshua was the source of their "**light**":

Matthew 4:13 And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, *By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,* Galilee of the nations: ¹⁶ The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned."

The Sermon on the Mount was taught from the **Galilee**. The first miracle of the water into wine was at Cana in **Galilee**. Even the transfiguration occurred in the **Galilee**. It is true that Yeshua was sometimes in Jerusalem. He went there for the festivals. He was taken captive there during the feast of Pesach (Passover) and He was killed there. But most of His teaching took place outside of Jerusalem, in the area of the Galilee.

So now a question...were Yeshua's disciples Benyamites? We know that Yeshua's disciples were often associated with the Galilee. It is the opinion of the Temple Dictionary of the Bible that 11 of the 12

disciples were Galileans/Benyamites. Only Judas Iscariot was from Yehuda (from Keriioth, a town in southern Judea).

Matthew 4:18 And Yeshua, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

John 21:2 ... Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the *sons* of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.

So closely associated with **Galilee** were the disciples, that Jews from Jerusalem identified them by their speech. Notice that in the **Acts 2:9**, "**Judea**" is listed separately from "**Galilee**":

Mark 14:70 But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, "Surely you are *one* of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it."

Acts 2:7 Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?"⁸ "And how *is it that* we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?"⁹ "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia

Why do I spend so much time making the point that Yeshua was in the Galilee, and his disciples may have been Benyamites? Because Yeshua (from Yehuda) was there to be a light to Israel, and the Benyamites were the tribe given to Yehuda to be the light bearers. Remember this verse?

1 Kings 11:36 'And to his son I will give one tribe, that My servant David may always have a lamp before Me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen for Myself, to put My name there.

But how does it all fit together? Was not Benjamin declared to be a "**ravenous wolf**" in **Bereshith 49:27**? In the Scriptures, we have the perfect example of one who went from being a "**ravenous wolf**" to a "**bearer of light**." He is the Benyamite known in the Brit Chadasha as Saul, otherwise known as Paul. This is his story –

On the road to Damascus a man by the name of **Saul** was traveling to apprehend believers. He was going about his job with a great deal of fury and zeal, putting them into prison and hoping to kill all who put their trust in Yeshua the Messiah, King of Yehuda. He was a "**ravenous wolf**":

Acts 9:1 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of Adonai, went to the high priest² and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

But Yeshua stopped Saul on the road and revealed Himself to him:

Acts 9:3 As he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"⁵ And he said, "Who are You, Adonai?" Then Adonai said, "I am Yeshua, whom you are persecuting. It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads."

Saul was violating the role of the ancient Benyamites whose job it was to be a “**light**” to Yehuda. But on that road, a revelation of Yeshua changed everything. Saul was converted in an instant. At that moment he turned his back on power, wealth, prestige...in order to be a “**light bearer.**” Saul’s nature was changed by יהוה Elohim from a murderous Pharisee to the Apostle of grace. Saul is the example of the power of Elohim at work when He chooses to reveal Himself.

In my research for this commentary, I ran into something that surprised me. Page after page of websites who have a view based on faulty logic. And what was worse, most of the writers on these sites came to the following conclusions as Messianic, Hebrew Roots people. This is what they say:

- **Benjamin** was destined to be a “**ravenous wolf**” (**Bereshith 49:27**)
- Yeshua said, “Beware of **false prophets**...inwardly they are as **ravenous wolves**” (**Matthew 7:15**)
- **Saul** is a **Benyamite** (**Romans 11:1**)
- **Saul** persecuted and hunted down believers (**Philippians 3:4-6, Acts 9:1**)
- **Saul** preached against the Torah
- **Saul** is, therefore, a **ravenous wolf** and a **false prophet**

The purpose of this commentary has been to show that yes, these tendencies of a “**wolf**” are in the seed of Benjamin’s descendants. But יהוה had a plan for the tribe which included attaching themselves to Yehuda and being the “**light bearer.**” In Benyamite Saul, that ravenous passion and zeal took a turn for the good after he was converted and sought out by the resurrected Messiah. To call Saul a false prophet is to deny the power of Messiah and the work He did in him. And context will prove that he never preached against the Torah.

Messiah is able to turn what may be perceived to be a negative character trait into a positive. A wolf’s appetite will drive it to consume at all costs, especially when it is “**ravenous.**” Its desire is to satisfy the flesh. Is not that the definition of “**covetousness?**” The dictionary lists synonyms for **covet** - desire, yearn for, crave, have one's heart set on, want, wish for, long for, hanker after/for, hunger after/for, thirst for. The focus of Saul’s desires definitely changed. As a Benyamite, a follower of Yeshua, Saul/Paul now:

- Changed his passionate desires... he was still fierce, yet loyal to Yeshua. Saul tore things up and turned things upside down for Yeshua in the first century. As a believer in Yeshua, he “**divided the spoil**” with all who would hear:
 - **Bereshith 49:27** "Benjamin is a **ravenous wolf**; In the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall **divide the spoil.**"
- Knew where his safety lay:
 - **Devarim 33:12** Of Benjamin he said: "The **beloved of יהוה shall dwell in safety by Him, Who shelters him all the day long; And he shall dwell between His shoulders.**"
- Became a **light bearer** of the Gospel for Yehuda and all of Israel, fulfilling the prophecy of **1 Kings**:
 - **1 Kings 11:36** ... **a lamp before Me in Jerusalem**, the city which I have chosen for Myself, to put My name there.
- Was willing to give up his life as a true, faithful, matured Benyamite for brother Yehuda:

- **Romans 9:1** I tell the truth in Messiah, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. ³ For **I could wish that I myself were accursed from Messiah for my brethren**, my countrymen according to the flesh, ⁴ who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Torah, the services, and the promises; ⁵ of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Messiah *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed Elohim. Amen.

To conclude, the tribe of Benjamin has been a mystery from the beginning. It appears from the blessing of Ya'acov that he was somewhat of a wild child. The Benyamites showed their Sodom and Gomorrah traits in the period of the Judges. But something happened as they entered into adulthood as a tribe. When the temple was to be built in their territory, יהוה got a hold of the heart of the Benyamites. They turned their backs on the things of this world, even their family of the northern tribes, and they became a light bearer to brother Yehuda. During the time of the Persian Empire, through Benyamite Esther and Mordecai, יהוה used them to bring physical salvation to the Jews. And through Saul/Paul, brother Yehuda was exposed to the spiritual light of the Gospel of Yeshua. Are we finished with the Benyamites? I doubt it. My personal belief is that you'll find Benyamites doing their job until Yeshua returns. They will be fierce and bold as they spread the good news, always bearing the "light" with loyalty and love for brother Yehuda until as Saul/Paul said:

Romans 11:26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob

Shabbat Shalom!

Ardelle

Be Strong! Be Strong! And may we be Strengthened!

חזק חזק ותנחזק