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Ephraim

Ephraim was the second son of Joseph and a grandson of Jacob. His name means “doubly fruitful.”

Genesis 41:52, *And the name of the second he called Ephraim: “For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.”*

When Ephraim was born to Joseph and Asenath (Joseph’s Egyptian wife), Joseph was a foreigner in Egypt, yet he had gained a high position in Pharaoh’s court.

Ephraim was the younger brother of Manasseh.

Jacob blessed Ephraim as an adopted son.

Genesis 48:5, *And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.*

Later, as Jacob’s health was failing, Joseph brought Manasseh and Ephraim to him for a patriarchal blessing. Being the

firstborn, Manasseh would normally have received the bigger blessing, but Jacob switched things up on purpose. As Joseph guided his two sons toward Jacob, he made sure Manasseh was on Jacob's right side and Ephraim, the younger of the two sons, was on Jacob's left.

Joseph received the birthright from Jacob, and instead of just one tribe, he is the ancestor of two (Manasseh is the other). He is also the great-great grandson of Abraham.

Genesis 48:13-19, *And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. ¹⁴Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. ¹⁵And he blessed Joseph, and said: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, ¹⁶The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." ¹⁷Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. ¹⁸And Joseph said*

to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."

¹⁹But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

Ephraim was given precedence over his older brother, Manasseh.

Descendants of Ephraim became known as the tribe of Ephraim, which is designated as one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Moses placed Ephraim (the younger son) before Manasseh (the older son).

Ephraim had at least 3 sons: Shuthelah, Beker, and Tahan. I Chronicles 7 also mentions two additional sons: Ezer and Elead. After they are killed, he has another son, Beriah, who is the ancestor of **Joshua**.

After Moses it was Joshua the tribe of Ephraim led them to the Promised Land.

The Territory of the Tribe of Ephraim

At the time of the first census in the wilderness this tribe numbered 40,500. Forty years later, when about to take possession of the Promised Land, it numbered only 32,500.

Numbers 1:32-33, *From the sons of Joseph, the children of Ephraim, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war: ³³those who were numbered of the tribe of Ephraim were forty thousand five hundred.*

During the march Ephraim's place was on the west side of the tabernacle.

Numbers 2:18-24, *"On the west side shall be the standard of the forces with Ephraim according to their armies, and the leader of the children of Ephraim shall be Elishama the son of Ammihud." ¹⁹And his army was numbered at forty thousand five hundred. ²⁰"Next to him comes the tribe of Manasseh, and the leader of the children of Manasseh shall be Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur." ²¹And his army was numbered at thirty-two thousand two hundred. ²²"Then comes the tribe of Benjamin, and the leader of the children of Benjamin shall be Abidan the son of Gideoni." ²³And his army was numbered at thirty-five*

thousand four hundred. ²⁴ *“All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces with Ephraim, one hundred and eight thousand one hundred—they shall be the third to break camp.*

They settled in central Canaan, just northwest of the Dead Sea. The tribe was bordered by Manasseh on the north and Dan and Benjamin on the south.

Joshua 19:50, *According to the word of the Lord they gave him the city which he asked for, Timnath Serah in the mountains of Ephraim; and he built the city and dwelt in it.*

Ephraim became the leading tribe of the northern kingdom.

Joshua 17:15, *So Joshua answered them, “If you are a great people, then go up to the forest country and clear a place for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and the giants, since the mountains of Ephraim are too confined for you.”*

Judges 3:26-27, *But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images and escaped to Seirah.* ²⁷ *And it happened, when he arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mountains; and he led them.*



The boundaries of the portion of the land assigned to Ephraim are given in **Joshua 16:1-10**.

Ephraim located in the centre of all traffic, from north to south, and from Jordan to the sea, and was about 55 miles long and 30 miles wide.

After the kingdom divides, the Northern Kingdom's capital is in Ephraim's territory, and the prophets sometimes refer to the entire nation as "Ephraim". The capital, Samaria, was located in Ephraim's territory.

Throughout the Old Testament, the name Ephraim often refers to the ten tribes comprising Israel's Northern Kingdom, not just the single tribe named after Joseph's son.

Ezekiel 37:16, *As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: 'For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.' Then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions.'*

Hosea 5:3, *I know Ephraim, And Israel is not hidden from Me; For now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry; Israel is defiled.*

The Northern Kingdom, also referred to as "Israel," was taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 BC (Jeremiah 7).

The Southern Kingdom, also known as Judah, was conquered by the Babylonians nearly 140 years later (586 BC).

Scripture sometimes refers to Israel as simply “Ephraim,” due to the size of the tribe.

Isaiah 11:13, *Also the envy of Ephraim shall depart, And the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, And Judah shall not harass Ephraim.*

Jeremiah 31:6, *For there shall be a day When the watchmen will cry on Mount Ephraim, ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, To the Lord our God.’”*

Notable figures from the tribe of Ephraim:

Joshua (Joshua 19:50).

Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1)

Jeroboam I, the first king of the divided kingdom in the north (**1 Kings 12:25**).

After the Babylonian captivity, some of the descendants of Ephraim resettled in Jerusalem (**1 Chronicles 9:3**).

Characteristics of the Tribe of Ephraim

During the time of the judges and the first stage of the monarchy this tribe manifested a domineering and haughty and discontented spirit.

Joshua the first conqueror, Gideon the greatest of the judges, and Saul the first king, belonged to one or other of the three tribes.

When the ark was removed from Shiloh to Zion the power of Ephraim was humbled.”

Psalm 78:67-68, *Moreover He rejected the tent of Joseph, And did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, ⁶⁸But chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved.*

Among the issues that disrupted Israel was Ephraim’s jealousy of the growing power of Judah.

From the settlement of Canaan till the time of David and Solomon, Ephraim had held the place of honour among the tribes.

The Tribe of Ephraim occupied the central and some of the best portions of the land and had Shiloh (Israel’s spiritual capital at that time) and Shechem within its borders.

But when Jerusalem became the capital of the kingdom, and the centre of power and worship for the whole nation of Israel, Ephraim declined in influence and power.

The discontent came to a head when Rehoboam's refused to grant certain amends that were demanded (**1 Kings 12**).

After the division, "Ephraim" is accused of forsaking God, and its attempts to establish another altar are considered an act of apostasy.

Scholars describe the Tribe of Ephraim as being dominant, arrogant, envious, and filled with discontent.

Ephraim complete the picture of the wide range of human behaviour. We see Ephraim turning away from God and doing wicked things (**Isaiah 28:1–3**), yet we also find the tribe recognizing the need to repent and obey by following the prophet Oded's instructions (**2 Chronicles 28:12**).

The tribe of Ephraim was chastised for idolatry (**Hosea 4:17**) and their partnership with heathen nations (**Hosea 12:1**).

Lessons from The Tribe of Ephraim

We are all sinners. The history of the early Israelites (particularly The Tribe of Ephraim), reflects our overall flawed and sinful nature.

Romans 3:23, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

1. When God calls you then YOU must Answer

While God gifted the tribe as warriors and valiant fighters, Ephraim failed to follow God's order to remove the Canaanites from the Promised Land. No matter the cost, struggle, or difficulty, we should always follow what God asks of us.

Exodus 23:23-25, *For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off.* ²⁴*You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars.* ²⁵*“So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you.* ²⁶*No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfil the number of your days.*

2. Display Godly Kindness, Always!

During the time of the judges, the Ephraimites became angry with Gideon because he had not initially called for their help in battling the Midianites.

Judges 8:1, *Now the men of Ephraim said to him, “Why have you done this to us by not calling us when you went to fight with the Midianites?” And they reprimanded him sharply.*

Gideon wisely displayed godly kindness and extolled the tribe’s commitment and willingness to serve the Lord, thus diffusing what could have become an ugly situation.

Judges 8:2–3, *So he said to them, “What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? ³God has delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. And what was I able to do in comparison with you?” Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.*

3. Glory and Honour Belong to God, Not You.

However, ugliness did arise later, and again it can be linked to Ephraim’s pride, jealousy, and self-centeredness.

When Jephthah chose to fight the Ammonites without the aid of the proud Ephraim warriors, a civil war erupted, and 42,000 warriors from Ephraim were killed.

As Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, we are to seek first the kingdom of God. Do not seek glory for yourself all honour and glory always belong to God, not to man.

Matthew 6:33, *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

4. Learn to accept God's will for You!

Often, God chooses to use us in a manner less glamorous or spectacular than we would like.

Do we pout?

Do we yearn for glory?

Do we control our pride and jealousy and accept God's will?

Many of us, like the Ephraimites, have difficulty learning those lessons well. God says that we should accept what happens to us as His will, regardless of how good or bad those circumstances seem to us.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, *Rejoice always,¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

5. God Loves Us as Only He Can

The biggest lesson from the history of Ephraim is that God loves us as the Perfect Father despite our failings.

He is patient and merciful beyond our understanding. He hears our cries of anguish, disciplines and guides us, knows our moments of repentance, and yearns for us to be in perfect communion with Him.

Jeremiah 30:22, *'You shall be My people, And I will be your God.'* ”

Jeremiah 31:18-20, *“I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: ‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained bull; Restore me, and I will return, For You are the Lord my God. ¹⁹Surely, after my turning, I repented; And after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, Because I bore the reproach of my youth.’ ²⁰Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord.*

Hosea 11:8-11, *“How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart ¹¹ churns within Me;*

My sympathy is stirred. ⁹I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, The Holy One in your midst; And I will not ucome with terror. ¹⁰“They shall walk after the Lord. He will roar like a lion. When He roars, Then His sons shall come trembling from the west; ¹¹They shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, Like a dove from the land of Assyria. And I will let them dwell in their houses,” Says the Lord.

Conclusion.

Where are the descendants of Ephraim now?

Many biblical scholars agree that the descendants of Ephraim settled in Britain.

The British Empire fulfilled part of the blessings of Joseph to civilize the world.

The name Angle from whom came the name Anglo-Saxon and Angle-land (i.e. England) in Hebrew means “bull-calf”. Ephraim was called a bull-calf.

Jeremiah 31:18, *“I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: ‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained bull; Restore me, and I will return, For You are the Lord my God. I have heard Ephraim grieving,*

We learn from the tribe of Ephraim (and the other tribes) about our human essence, who we are as people. The history of the early Israelites reflects our universally flawed and sinful nature.

Jeremiah 31:9, *They shall come with weeping, And with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, In a straight way in which they shall not stumble; For I am a Father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn.*