



Tapestry of the Twelve Tribes

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The Twelve Tribes of Biblical history will come to life artistically at 8 o'clock Friday evening, October 3, when a needlepoint tapestry, six feet by seven feet, will be dedicated and placed in the sanctuary of Congregation B'nai Jehudah as a memorial to Sarlee Hoffman. The tapestry (right) was given by her children, John Hoffman, Andrew Hoffman and Stephanie Wolff who directed the project together with a selected group of women. Sarlee Hoffman was the chair person of the Art Committee charged with the beautification of the Sanctuary when it was constructed in 1967.

At the worship service, echoing through the millennia of time, a narrator will speak as the voice of Jacob blessing his sons:

*Reuben, thou art my first son,
My might and the first fruits
of my strength . . .
Simeon and Levi are brethren;
Weapons of violence their kinship
Judah, thee shall thy brethren
praise . . .*

It is estimated that creation of the tapestry required about 4,000 hours over a period of 19 months. Stephanie Wolff, who conceived the symbolism, spent four months in preliminary biblical research. Artist Eva Knight assisted Mrs. Wolff with the painting of the entire design on canvases during the next three months. The following 37 women then did the needlepoint work over an additional period of eight months:

Mrs. Deborah Agron, Mrs. Diane Arnell, Mrs. Larry Ann Bernstein, Mrs. Myrna Breuerman, Mrs. Marsha Cambern, Mrs. Dorothy Fromm, Mrs. Jacqueline Golden, Mrs. Marian Greiper, Mrs. Reta Hans, Mrs. Sharon Hoffman, Mrs. Joyce Kaplan, Mrs. Barbara Katz, Mrs. Dorothy Katz, Mrs. Sally Lapin, Mrs. Beverly Lewis, Mrs. Sylvia Lewis, Mrs. Mary Edith Lillis, Mrs. Natalie Litman, Mrs. Esther Loeb, Mrs. Dorothy Margolin, Mrs. Barbara Marsh, Mrs. Louise Mayer, Mrs. Joan McGee, Mrs. Suzanne Parelman, Mrs. Martha Phillips, Mrs. Esther Printz, Mrs. Barbara Rahm, Mrs. Katherine (Kay) Rieger, Mrs. Jean Rubenstein, Mrs. Ida Scharf, Mrs. Patty Schrader, Mrs. Pearl Silverman, Mrs. Hortense Starr, Mrs. Julia Terte, Mrs. Marjorie Vogel, Mrs. Marsha Wang, Mrs. Stephanie Wolff.

Finally, it took four months to assemble the individually stitched squares into the finished work.



Colorful symbols of the tapestry are observed by Mrs. Wolff and Dr. Silverman.

Holy Scripture describes the origin of the Twelve Tribes in Genesis 49:1-27, Genesis 35:22-28 and Numbers 2:1-34. Faithful to biblical and rabbinic source material, the unique tapestry depicts some of the characteristics or insignia of the tribes by means of fruits, flowers, precious jewels, a serpent, fowl, animals, trees and other objects such as a ship, breastplate and a camp of tents.

The term, Twelve Tribes of Israel, refers to the divisions of the Children of Israel as they moved out of bondage in Egypt and through the Sinai desert under their leader, Moses. Their designation, which they eventually reached, was what they regarded as the Promised Land, the Land of Canaan. A small part of what was then known as Canaan is now the state of Israel.

The Twelve Tribes were led by the twelve sons of Jacob. In the Book of Genesis, Jacob is referred to frequently as Israel. Thus, the nation of Israel today is named after Jacob (Israel). Jacob was a grandson of Abraham and a son of Isaac. Jacob's 12 sons, leaders of the Twelve Tribes, were great grandsons of Abraham.

The Insignia of The Tribes:
REUBEN—Ruby. Eagle or man-drakes.

SIMEON—Topaz. Town of Shechem and Tower of Shechem.
GAD—Ligure (turquoise). Camp of tents.

JUDAH—Emerald. Lion.
ISSACHAR—Amethyst. Sun and moon or heavy-burdened ass.

ASHER—Agate. Olive tree.
DAN—Sapphire. Serpent.
NAPHTALI—Hind or fawn female fallow deer.

ZEBULUN—Beryl. Ship.
LEVI—Carbuncle. Breastplate of Urim and Thummim.
JOSEPH—Onyx. Bullock (wild) or fountain with vine.
BENJAMIN—Jasper. Wolf.

For the sake of historical accuracy it should be noted that the tribe of Levi was originally a part of the tribe of Simeon. What is referred to as the tribe of Joseph ultimately became the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

Those who view this unusual tapestry will be reminded of the impact of the Twelve Tribes not only upon the colorful and graphic history of the people of Israel, but

upon the religions of Christianity and Islam, as well as upon the culture of both Eastern and Western civilizations.

All the sons of Jacob collectively were called Israel, or the children of Jacob. The Book of Genesis gives an account of their matrilarchal lineage:

The sons of Leah were:
Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun.
The sons of Bilhah (concubine) were: Dan and Naphtali.
The sons of Zilpah (concubine) were: Gad and Asher.
The sons of Rachel were: Joseph and Benjamin.

According to the Bible, the brothers left Egypt and wandered 40 years in the desert under Moses. Then the Twelve Tribes penetrated the land of Canaan and lived with the Canaanites. There was no pre-determined pattern of leadership.

On the flight out of Egypt, the Children of Israel advanced toward the promised land. Levi marched in the middle through the wilderness with the Ark of the Covenant. To the West of the Ark

are seen in needlepoint art, to be
of Congregation B'nai Jehudah



The Twelve Tribes, and the symbol for each in tapestry above:

Reuben—Eagle	Judah—Lion	Dan—Serpent	Levi—Jeweled Breastplate
Simeon—Tower of Shechem	Issachar—Sun and Moon	Naphtali—Hind	Benjamin—Wolf
Gad—Camp Tents	Asher—Olive Tree	Zebulun—Ship	Joseph—Ox

were Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. To the North were Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. To the East were Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. To the South marched Reuben, Simeon, and Gad.

The town of Shiloh was the sacral center for all of the Children of Israel. The Ark was kept at Shiloh under the care of the priestly family of Eli.

After the Children of Israel arrived in the Land of Canaan, the United Kingdom of the Twelve Tribes came to an end because of King Solomon's cavalier disregard of time-honored tribal and individual rights and excessive taxation, especially in the northern part of the country, where blood ties and rewards of empire were much less effective than in the south. Hardly had Solomon died, 932 B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) when rebellion flared up against his son, Rehoboam.

The revolt was headed by Jeroboam, an Ephraimite from Zeredah, southwest of Shechem. Jeroboam had been an official employed by Solomon and charged with fortifying Jerusalem, but was forced to flee to the protection of Shishak, king of Egypt. The Kingdom of the Ten Tribes in the north, sometimes called Samaria, came to an end in 722 B.C.E. after the conquest by the Assyrians. The Ten Tribes were among the original Twelve, but without the Tribes of Benjamin and Judah. The Tribes of Benjamin and Judah had stayed in the southern part of Canaan.

According to the Bible, Tiglath-pileser (II Kings XV. 29) or Shalmanaser, after the defeat of Israel, transported the majority of the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom of Assyria, and placed them in Halah and Habor, on the stream of Gozan, and in the town of Media. In their stead a mixed

multitude was transported to the plains and mountains of Israel.

Judah (the tribes of Benjamin and Judah) came to an end as a sovereign kingdom in 586 B.C.E. when Nebuchadnezer, King of Babylon (north of present-day Israel), achieved a military victory. Many notables were condemned to die, the city of Jerusalem was sacked, the walls torn down, the Temple burned and the inhabitants exiled in Babylonia.

With the tapestry to be dedicated at Congregation B'nai Jehudah, we revisit history. The Twelve Tribes — past, present, and future — merge, fuse and blend into a mystic unity. Ancient Israel and Judah and Judea are reborn in the geography, the literature and mystique of the modern State of Israel. Shiloh, the sacral center: Jerusalem, the Golden City of David and Haifa and Jaffa offer evidence of an in-

Visiting Hours
After October 3
The public will be invited to view the needlepoint tapestry of the Twelve Tribes after its dedication Friday evening, October 3, in the sanctuary of Congregation B'nai Jehudah, 69th Street at Holmes Road. Visiting hours will be Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:45 p.m., Saturdays from 8:30 to 10:45 a.m., and Sundays from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

The tapestry is at eye level, immediately inside the sanctuary entrance doors.

credible continuity that mingles the dust of the past with the industrial smog of the present.

To look upon the tapestry of the Twelve Tribes is to stand upon the threshold of mysterious, baffling and unanswered questions that have intrigued scientists, historians and students of the Bible for thousands of years: "Were the Twelve Tribes really historical? Were they localities, tribal gods or just names of a mythological character, having some connection with the 12 months of the year and the 12 signs of the zodiac? What really happened to the Ten Tribes of Israel?"

We know that Benjamin and Judah were exiled to Babylon, but the Ten Tribes in the north — were they exiled beyond the supernatural and mystical river called Sambatyon? Did they assimilate the cultures of their exile and just disappear, or have some of the scholars guessed correctly when they theorized that the "Lost Tribes" are to be identified with the Afghans, the outlying colonies in China, in India, and even in the Sahara, as well as with England, Ireland, Japan, the aboriginal inhabitants of Central and South America? Are they just specious hypotheses or did the scholars come close to the truth when they associated the Ten Tribes with Peru, the Eskimos and the American Indians?

Perhaps some day we will have reasonable and scientifically and anthropologically supported evidence to sustain one or more of these interesting and quasi-educated guesses. In the meanwhile members of the community are invited to visit Congregation B'nai Jehudah's Sanctuary at 69th, and Holmes, and view a modern tapestry of the ancient Twelve Tribes of Israel and Judah. ☒