



# *Finding Christ in the Tabernacle*

## ORGANIZE THYSELF

*“As the Lord commanded Moses, so he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai.”  
(Numbers 1:19) “And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew  
them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do.”  
(Exodus 18:20)*

### *Organizing Israel to Reflect Heaven on Earth*

All things have their order, 1 Corinthians 14:40, 33. In preparing the children of Israel to meet Him, the Lord reveals shadows and mirrors of heavenly order, Hebrews 8:5, through the Tabernacle and the people themselves – “on earth as it is in heaven”, Matt 6:10, teaching His ways, Isaiah 55:8-9, and His holiness, Leviticus 19:2. The Lord instructs His covenant people in building holy places that they should “organize yourselves, and prepare every needful thing”, D&C 88:119, 109:8, in order to enter His presence, Exodus 19:10-11.

Once the children of Israel escaped

Egypt, they were organized into their ancestral tribes, Numbers 1:1-2; 18-19. Four key tribes, Reuben, Dan, Judah and Ephraim were to represent the four cardinal directions around the Tabernacle – Judah on the east, Numbers 2:3, Reuben on the south, Numbers 2:10, Dan on the north, Numbers 2:25, and Ephraim on the west, Numbers 2:18; and thus symbolically encompassing all the world. The remaining tribes were assigned to one of the cardinal tribes – with Judah, Issachar and Zebulun, Numbers 2:5-9; with Reuben, Simeon and Gad, Numbers 2:12-14; with

Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin, Numbers 2:20-22; and with Dan, Asher and Naphtali, Numbers 2:27-29.

Since Joseph's posterity received a double portion of inheritance, Genesis 48:21-22, in replacing Reuben's first-born status by Jacob's hands on Ephraim and Manasseh's heads, Genesis 48:15-20, they were adopted directly into Jacob's immediate family making them direct members of the twelve tribes, Genesis 48:5. The tribe of Levi later became the Lord's own, Numbers 3:12, through divine substitution in place of the first born which was traditionally the Lord's, Exodus 13:2, 12, due to their standing by the Lord during the golden calf incident, Exodus 32:26, 29.

With the High Priest (and Urim and Thummim stone under the Breastplate of Judgment, Exodus 28:30) representing his own tribe, Levi, and the remaining twelve tribes symbolically shown on his breastplate with the twelve stones, Exodus 28:15-30, 39:8-21, all thirteen tribes were represented to the children of Israel.

According to Hebrew custom and Biblical numerology, the number 12 symbolizes divine authority, perfect government, and complete organization. It represents a system or group that is entirely established and governed by God.



## *The Host of Heaven as the Tribes of Israel*

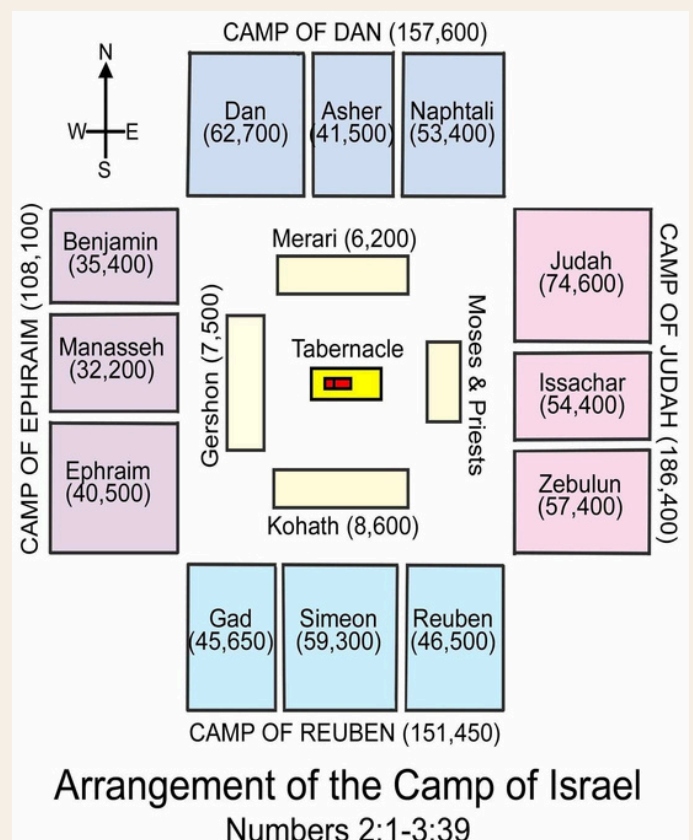
Since the Tabernacle represented the heavenly temple on earth, the tribes organization around the Tabernacle and specifically the Mercy Seat, Exodus 25:22, of the Ark of the Covenant – God’s presence – in the Holy of Holies, similar to the Throne of God in heaven, may have represented the hosts of heaven, Revelation 5:11, 1 Nephi 1:8, circling the Throne of God on earth.

Though it is not mentioned in the Bible, the Book of Mormon notes that all the tent doors were facing the temple when King Benjamin addressed the Nephites, Mosiah 2:6, perhaps mirroring a similar pattern they were familiar with from the Tabernacle.

The priestly tribe of Levi was to be closest in surrounding the immediate Tabernacle, Numbers 2:17, with its subset clans – Gershon (west), Numbers 3:23, Kohath (south), Numbers 3:29, Merari (north), Numbers 3:35, and Moses and Aaron (east and specifically at the entrance into the Tabernacle), Numbers 3:38 – representing the cardinal directions on each side of the Tabernacle. Their Tabernacle assignments included:

- Gershon – maintain, transport (with wagons/carts and oxen), set-up and tear down curtains, coverings and screens/veils, Numbers 3:25-26.

- Kohath – maintain and transport (on their shoulders) the sacred vessels including the Ark of the Covenant, Table of Shewbread, Menorah, Altar of Incense, Altar of Sacrifice, Numbers 3:31.
- Merari – maintain, transport (with wagons/carts and oxen), set-up and tear down the structural framework of the Tabernacle, Numbers 3:36-37.
- Moses, Aaron and his sons presided over all activities concerning the Tabernacle, its maintenance and administration, Numbers 3:38; 18:1-7.



Similar to the cherubim that guarded the Tree of Life and entrance into the east gate of the Garden of Eden, Genesis 3:24, and the four angels that guarded the heavenly temple, Revelation 4:6-7, the four cardinal, sub-tribes/families of Levi, guarded the Tabernacle to protect its sanctity and prevent unauthorized access, Numbers 3:38, 2 Chronicles 23:19, allowing only those who were worthy and prepared, and provided the appropriate information to enter, Psalm 24:3-6, of walking uprightly, working righteousness and speaking the truth, Psalm 15:1-3, Revelation 21:7. As a subset of the tribal organization and application of priestly power, the Lord called seventy elders (six from each tribe according to Jewish tradition) to guide and judge Israel, as well as assist Moses, Numbers 11:16-30.

Once called, they were to stand around the Tabernacle to allow the "Spirit" to rest upon them, Numbers 11:25, suggesting their ordination process. These seventy elders were directed to climb partially up Mount Sinai with Aaron and his sons to worship the Lord, Exodus 24:1-2, demonstrating a level of priesthood authority. Perhaps there was a symbolic connection when Jacob and his posterity joined Joseph and his family in Egypt. The scriptures note there were seventy of them, Genesis 46:27, Exodus 1:5, Deuteronomy 10:22.

In modeling the structure of Israel, the Savior called and ordained twelve apostles as well as seventy elders, Luke 10:1. The Seventy elders were to assist the Twelve in doing missionary work – the gathering of Israel – to the world. The Sanhedrin noted in the New Testament also modeled this organization (having 70 elders/judges) and was considered the Rabbinical high court for Israel. In Hebrew customs and traditions, the number 70 symbolizes completeness, fullness, and a comprehensive set or totality.

With Abraham being promised that "All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you", Genesis 18:18; 22:18, the Seventy were emblematic of the divine council in which the earth's seventy nations were assigned to the sons of God – "When the Most High divided the gentiles [nations], when He scattered the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the gentiles according to the number of the sons of God," (Dead Sea Scrolls and confirmed in the Septuagint and Samaritan translations) – Deuteronomy 32:7-8, with Yahweh assigned to Israel, Deuteronomy 32:9. This suggests the world (gentile nations) would be blessed by the heavenly assembly/council of seventy. Even today the Seventy priesthood office is ordained to both bless and testify of Christ to the world, D&C 107:25.

## Identity of the Tribes

On a cosmic scale, the four angelic beasts or cherubim/angels, Revelation 4:7, D&C 77:2, Ezekiel 1:10, that guarded God's throne in the books of Revelation and Ezekiel may have mirrored the four cardinal tribes' (Reuben, Dan, Judah and Ephraim) banners.

The symbols (similar to the cherubim descriptions in Ezekiel and Revelation) of the four cardinal tribes were of a man, eagle/serpent, lion, and ox, that emanated out of their status with or blessings by Jacob and later Moses, Genesis 49:1-28, 48:15-20, Deuteronomy 33:1-29.

### SIMEON

**STONE:** Topaz/Peridot  
**SYMBOL:** The city of Shechem or a sword, Genesis 34:25-26, 49:5.



### ZEBULUN

**STONE:** Diamond/Pearl  
**SYMBOL:** a ship, Genesis 49:13.



### JUDAH

**STONE:** Turquoise/Garnet  
**SYMBOL:** A lion, Genesis 49:9.



### LEVI

**STONE:** Emerald\*  
**SYMBOL:** The Urim and Thummim or the breastplate, Deuteronomy 33:8-10.

### RUBEN

**STONE:** Ruby/Carnelian  
**SYMBOL:** Mandrake flower (which he brought to his mother as a child) or a man (due to being the firstborn), Genesis 30:14, 49:3-4.



### ISSACHAR

**STONE:** Sapphire/Lapis  
**SYMBOL:** A donkey or sun and moon, Genesis 49:14-15, 1Chronicles 12:33.



## ASHER

### STONE:

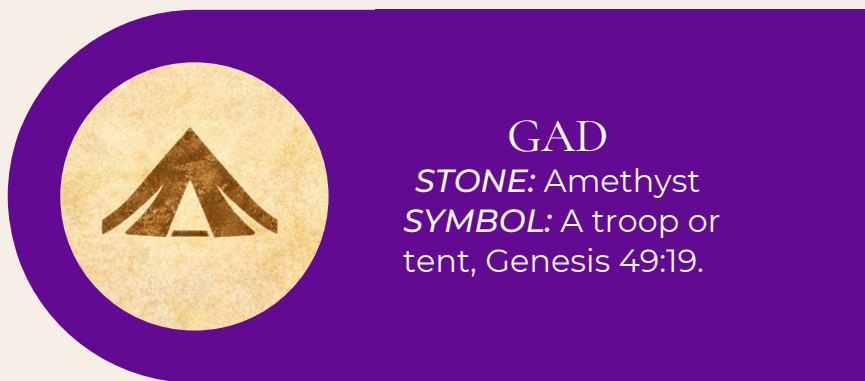
Beryl/Chrysolite

**SYMBOL:** An olive tree,  
Genesis 49:20.



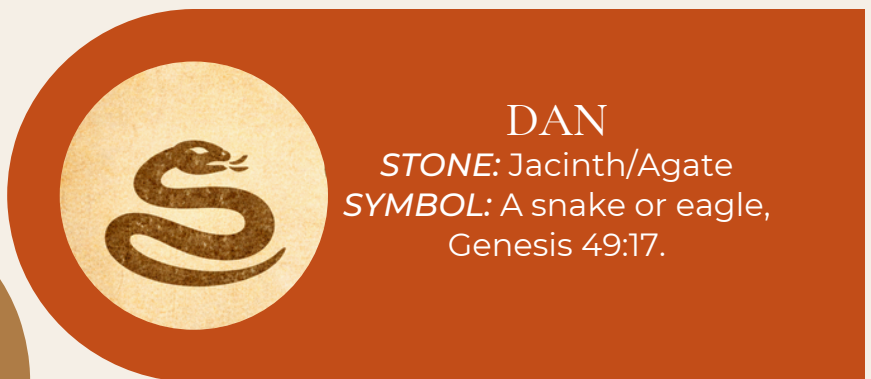
## GAD

**STONE:** Amethyst  
**SYMBOL:** A troop or  
tent, Genesis 49:19.



## DAN

**STONE:** Jacinth/Agate  
**SYMBOL:** A snake or eagle,  
Genesis 49:17.



## NAPHTALI

### STONE:

Agate/Turquoise

**SYMBOL:** A deer,  
Genesis 49:21.



## JOSEPH

**STONE:** Onyx



## BENJAMIN

**STONE:** Jasper

**SYMBOL:** A wolf,  
Genesis 49:27.



## EPHRAIM

**SYMBOL:** A young  
bull or ox,  
Deuteronomy  
33:17.



## MANASSEH

**SYMBOL:** A  
unicorn or wild  
ox, Deuteronomy  
33:17.

\*Based on Josephus and Jewish midrash (commentary) because the scriptures do not specify a tribe with a stone – translation of the stones and their relative types/colors are challenging based on the context of translation, Numbers 2:2.

The naming of each son of Jacob was provided by the mother according to Hebrew tradition, Genesis 4:25, which began with Eve, symbolizing the mother's role in defining the child's identity based on birth circumstances. Wordplay was often incorporated into the naming process. With the twelve sons of Jacob, due to Joseph receiving the birthright (multi-colored coat) and lost and then found was given a double portion of blessing and honor within the tribes of Israel by having his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh grafted into the immediate family of Jacob .

<b>Name</b>	<b>Wordplay Meaning</b>	<b>Mother's Name</b>	<b>Scripture</b>
Reuben	"Look, a son"	Leah	Genesis 29:32
Simeon	"hearer"	Leah	Genesis 29:33
Levi	"joined"	Leah	Genesis 29:34
Judah	"He will praise"	Leah	Genesis 29:35
Issachar	"There is recompense"	Leah	Genesis 30:18
Zebulun	"To exalt, honor"	Leah	Genesis 30:20
Dan	"judge"	Bilhah	Genesis 30:5-6
Gad	"troop"	Zilpah	Genesis 30:5-6
Asher	"happy, blessed"	Zilpah	Genesis 30:12-13
Naphtali	"my wrestling"	Bilhah	Genesis 30:7-8
*Joseph	"he will add"	Rachel	Genesis 30:23-24
Ephraim	"doubly fruitful"	Asenath	Genesis 41:52
Manasseh	"who makes forget"	Asenath	Genesis 30:51-52
Benjamin	"son of my right hand"	Rachel	Genesis 35:18

According to Jewish tradition (Jewish midrashim – commentaries), each tribe’s banner/flag (standard) color corresponded with their respective gemstone on the High Priest’s breastplate, Exodus 28:15-20, in addition to their tribal symbol.

With the “heavens declaring the glory of God”, Psalm 19:1, as well as the creation defining the times and seasons in the creation, Genesis 1:14, Abraham learned the importance of the stars and their constellations, Abraham 3:2-10. Joseph’s dream of his brothers bowing down to him was in the form of the sun, moon and eleven stars, Genesis 37:9. Stars were symbolic of the sons/angels of God, Job 38:7, Isaiah 14:12-14, Revelation 1:20, Judges 5:20. Even a great star was used to identify Christ at his birth,

Numbers 24:17, Matthew 2:2. Subsequently, the twelve star constellations that the sun followed in its twelve-month trajectory may symbolically represent the twelve tribes of Israel and their course leading to God in the heavens according to Hebrew tradition.

### *The Gathering of Israel in the Latter Days*

Symbolically, the tribes’ configuration around the Tabernacle signaled the divine center or gateway to God’s presence. Similar to the tribes’ representation under baptismal fonts as the twelve oxen in temples today, they symbolically provide support/direction or passage for our deceased ancestors – the gathering of Israel – to return to our



*“We are also children of the covenant. We have received, as did they of old, the holy priesthood and the everlasting gospel. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are our ancestors. We are of Israel. We have the right to receive the gospel, blessings of the priesthood, and eternal life. Nations of the earth will be blessed by our efforts and by the labors of our posterity. The literal seed of Abraham and those who are gathered into his family by adoption receive these promised blessings—predicated upon acceptance of the Lord and obedience to his commandments.” (President Russell M. Nelson, April 1995 General Conference)*

Father in Heaven through His Son, Jesus Christ, via the instrument of vicarious baptism, D&C 110:11-12, 128:15-18.

It is interesting to note the twelve tribal oxen supporting modern-day temple baptismal fonts are missing a tribe given there were thirteen due to Joseph receiving a double portion through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, Genesis 48:21-22. The missing tribe is Levi, who similarly to the Tabernacle encampment configuration was closest to the center. Today, Levi is represented by Aaronic Priesthood holders in the temple font itself, administering the ordinance of baptism for the dead.

Similar to the blessings given to each son of Jacob to form and guide the thirteen tribes of Israel and later by Moses, Patriarchal Blessings today are offered by Melchizedek High Priests ordained to the office of Patriarch, D&C 124:91-93 – modeling the ancient patriarchs, D&C 107:39-42 – for those seeking the “blessings of the fathers”, Abraham 1:2, to understand they belong to Heavenly Father and through His Son, Jesus Christ, are claimed through the covenant, Galatians 3:8-9, 29. They learn who they are, sons and daughters of God, Moses 1:13. They also learn which of the tribes they are adopted into to further cement their link to the Abrahamic Covenant with their individual as well as tribal blessings, opportunities and responsibilities as children of the covenant. This is the





cosmic, covenantal effect of applying the tribal gathering of Israel in returning God's children to Him.

## *Summary*

Similar to the Tabernacle, the organization of the children of Israel mirrored heavenly order and sanctification. It taught the children of Israel who they were as the covenant children of God and how they are the "jewels" of the universe in serving all mankind in returning all to God. It symbolizes the power of holy worship and gives us greater understanding of the visions and symbolism of later prophets' and apostles' teachings in revealing the hosts of heaven, the throne of God, and the gathering of Israel in the past, present and future.

*"...the heavens were again opened unto us; and Moses appeared before us, and committed unto us the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north." (D&C 110:11)*