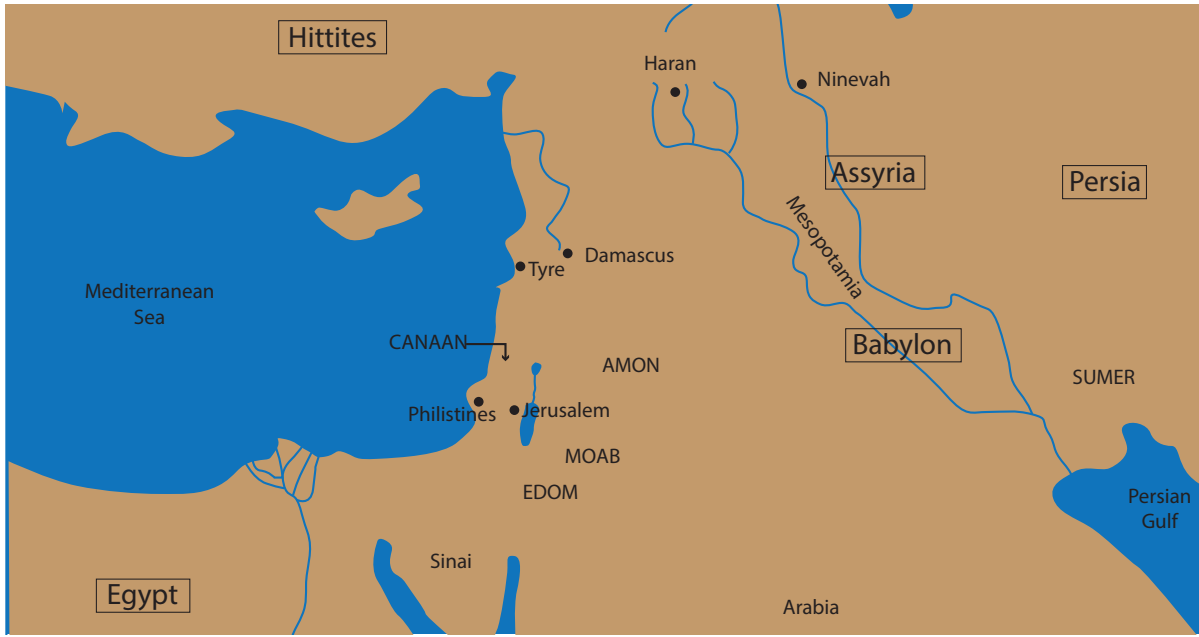


# *A Tour of the Bible*

An Introduction for the Unfamiliar

by Tom Pumphrey

## The Ancient Near East



## Ancient Israel and Judah



## Books of the Old Testament

Torah ("the Law")	Writings	The Prophets		
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <b><u>History:</u></b>                              Joshua                              Judges  <sup>w</sup>Ruth                              1 &amp; 2 Samuel                              1 &amp; 2 Kings                              1 &amp; 2 Chronicles                              Ezra                              Nehemiah                         </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <b><u>Wisdom and Poetry</u></b>  <sup>w</sup>Esther  <sup>w</sup>Job  <sup>p</sup>Psalms  <sup>w</sup>Proverbs  <sup>w</sup>Ecclesiastes  <sup>p</sup>Song of Songs  <sup>w</sup>Wisdom literature  <sup>p</sup>Poetry                         </td> </tr> </table> <p><i>Ruth and Lamentations are shown in the order they appear in the Bible ("canonical order").</i></p> <p><i>Ruth and Esther easily cross genres between History and Wisdom</i></p>	<b><u>History:</u></b> Joshua Judges <sup>w</sup> Ruth 1 & 2 Samuel 1 & 2 Kings 1 & 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah	<b><u>Wisdom and Poetry</u></b> <sup>w</sup> Esther <sup>w</sup> Job <sup>p</sup> Psalms <sup>w</sup> Proverbs <sup>w</sup> Ecclesiastes <sup>p</sup> Song of Songs <sup>w</sup> Wisdom literature <sup>p</sup> Poetry	Isaiah Jeremiah <sup>p</sup> Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zepheniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi
<b><u>History:</u></b> Joshua Judges <sup>w</sup> Ruth 1 & 2 Samuel 1 & 2 Kings 1 & 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah	<b><u>Wisdom and Poetry</u></b> <sup>w</sup> Esther <sup>w</sup> Job <sup>p</sup> Psalms <sup>w</sup> Proverbs <sup>w</sup> Ecclesiastes <sup>p</sup> Song of Songs <sup>w</sup> Wisdom literature <sup>p</sup> Poetry			
<p><i>Traditionally, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are included in the Prophets, while Daniel, Ruth and Esther are included in the Writings.</i></p>		<div style="font-size: 3em;">}</div> 12 "Minor Prophets"		

## Books of the New Testament

<b><u>Gospel Accounts:</u></b> Matthew Mark Luke John	<b><u>Letters:</u></b> Romans 1 & 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 & 2 Thessalonians 1 & 2 Timothy Titus Philemon Hebrews James 1 & 2 Peter 1, 2 & 3 John Jude	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <b>Revelation</b> </div>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <b>Acts of the Apostles</b> </div>	<div style="font-size: 3em;">}</div> Letters of Paul	

### The Apocrypha (or "Deuterocanonical Books") see page 38

Tobit Judith Additions to Esther Wisdom Ecclesiasticus ( <i>Sirach</i> ) Baruch	Letter of Jeremiah Additions to Daniel: -Song of the Three Jews -Susanna -Bel and the Dragon 1 & 2 Maccabees	<i>The Orthodox sometimes add:</i> Prayer of Manasseh 1 & 2 Esdras Psalm 151 3 Maccabees
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# Part I: Orientation

## Introduction: Why and How to Use this Book

### A Tour Guide

Many people are unfamiliar with the Bible or are mystified by its contents. Once the staple of Western culture, fewer people now read the Bible or have much exposure to it. Even churchgoers hear segments of scripture on Sunday morning, but often do not know the context or how to follow the story line. Who are these people with strange names? How do we read and understand the Bible and how can we hear God speaking to us today through this book of ancient books? On a trip to a foreign country, with different languages, climate and culture, many of us are confused until we get a tour, a map, a taste of the food and some orientation about how to approach this new land. The same is true when we read the Bible.

### An Overview

This book seeks to provide that orientation to Holy Scripture and to help people hear the voice of the living God from its pages. This book can be a reference book to help you get your bearings, or it can provide a systematic introduction. We start with a “50,000 Foot Fly-by,” and continue with outlines of the basic story line in the Bible, section by section. Along the way, you will also find references to specific passages that provide a taste of each section, without requiring reading the whole thing. These appetizers are called “The Bible’s Greatest Hits” because they are the most interesting and influential passages. These lists help you to find the gems amidst the genealogies.

**Part I provides a basic orientation:** This section provides brief introductions of how the Bible is used, how it is structured and how to start to read the Bible. You then find a “50,000 Foot Fly-by” to get a sense of the big picture and the basic story line of the Bible. There is also a section on a handful of key words to understand when reading the Bible.

**Part II begins a section-by-section tour of the Bible.** For each section, you will find an outline, a list of “Greatest Hits” to read, an overview of the basic story line in that section, and a helpful summary of each Biblical book in that section—reviewing the story and the message.

**Part III then provides resources for further learning,** including guides to different translations and editions of the Bible, a section on how the Bible became the Bible, discussions of analytical methods, and worldviews that impact how we understand the Bible. There is also a section on strategies for daily or weekly reading of the Bible, and lists of additional resources for how you can learn more. The inside covers provide conveniently located references: a chart of the Bible’s books facing the inside front cover, and maps of Bible lands inside front and back covers.

I hope that this book will be a helpful reference to you as you read the Bible prayerfully, listening for God’s voice and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## How Do We Use the Bible?

Perhaps that is an odd question, but it is an important place to start. Some people use the Bible as a list of rules. Others use it as a book of quaint stories, others as an archaeological artifact, and still others as a geological record. Perhaps these descriptions paint caricatures too dramatically, but with such different expectations of the Bible, readers are even more easily confused. The Bible is a complex text—a collection of numerous ancient texts, each of them complex in their own right. We read English translations from ancient and extinct languages (even modern Hebrew and Greek are new constructions of the old languages). The characters and contexts are so different from our own time. And the *kinds* of literature are varied and serve different purposes. The task of understanding the Bible is not so simple.

### A Theological Text

Understanding how we *use* the Bible makes a huge difference in the task of *understanding* the Bible. **This book takes the approach of treating the Bible as a theological text**—a text of religious claims and accounts of experiences of God in history. This may sound like an obvious approach, but many studies of the Bible operate on far more secular assumptions. Secular study of the Bible tends to focus on reconstructing the events with secular criteria, including the assumption that God never is involved in the world—that supernatural events simply *can't* take place.

This may be a helpful assumption in the secular world that seeks an objective view outside of religious conversation. But the Bible is indeed a religious text. The Bible has been influential in the world precisely as a religious text—as the “Word of God.” Secular scholarship has yielded some important insights to the Bible, and this book will make use of those insights. But the concerns of secular introductions often miss the basic story of what the text says and what it means to Christians (and in the case of the Old Testament—to Jews as well). I hope that the reader (atheist and believer alike) will find this introduction helpful as a way of understanding how the Bible is read and understood and influential to Christians. Such an endeavor will help mutual understanding among religions more than an archeological reconstruction.

### So How Do Christians Use the Bible?

- **The primary use of the Bible for Christians is to hear the voice of the living God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, revealing Jesus Christ, the true “Word of God,” who himself reveals God the Holy Trinity.**
- The Bible is the primary historical witness to Israel’s experience of God, to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to the early church’s experience of Jesus, the Holy Spirit and God the Father.
- Since the early days of the church, the Bible is the “canon of Holy Scripture,” the authoritative body of texts for Christians, and the sacred basis for our theology and living.
- The Bible is authoritative on the character and identity of God and our relationship with God.
- The Bible is authoritative on our character and identity as people and as God’s people.
- We call the Bible “the Word of God” because its writers were uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is very complex and reflects different times and contexts, but we still believe that God speaks to us today through the Bible.
- Notice that we do not, for instance, use the Bible as a geology textbook, though we recognize history where the writer has an historical purpose.

**The best way to read the Bible is prayerfully, together with other Christians, listening for the voice of the living God. The Holy Spirit speaks through the church—the community of Christians around us and from Christian history too, helping us to listen and read rightly.**

# Part II: Section by Section Tour

## The Old Testament: The Torah

### Outline of the Torah: the First Five Books

#### **Genesis: Beginnings and Patriarchs: creating, relating, and choosing**

- 1-6: Creation and Fall
- 6-11: Noah and Ancestors
- 11-25: Abraham, Sarah and Isaac
- 25-36: Jacob
- 37-50: Joseph

#### **Exodus: God saving and making a covenant with his people**

- 1-15: Moses and the Exodus
- 15-18: In the Wilderness
- 19-24: The Ten Commandments and Covenant Making
- 25-40: Details for Worship (32-34: wilderness trouble)

#### **Leviticus: The Laws of sacrifice and holiness**

#### **Numbers: Journey in the Wilderness (with lists of people)**

- 1-10: Census
- 11-25: Wilderness Journey and some Laws; Balaam: 22-24
- 26-36: Census, Inheritance Details, some Laws

#### **Deuteronomy: Torah laws and review of the covenant**

- 1-3: Preface
- 4-11: Ten Commandments and Exhortations
- 12-26: Law Codes
- 27-34: Epilogue

Referred to as “The Law” in the New Testament, the word “torah” means “instruction.” It is the core of the covenant between God and his people.

**Exhortation** is a kind of speech that strongly encourages and urges the listener to a specific course of action.

### Greatest Hits of the Torah!

- \* **Genesis 1:1-2:3:** Creation
- Genesis 2:4-25:** God makes man and woman in his image
- Genesis 3:** “The Fall.” Adam and Eve sin against God
- Genesis 6:5-9:17:** Noah and the flood, and God’s covenant
- Genesis 12:1-7:** The Call of Abram  
(See the whole Abraham saga, Genesis 12-25)
- Genesis 22:1-18:** The “sacrifice” of Isaac
- \* **Genesis 32:22-32:** Jacob wrestles with God and becomes “Israel”  
(See also the whole Joseph saga, Genesis 37-50)
- \* **Exodus 3:1-15** [and more in 3:16-4:17]: Moses and God at the burning bush
- Exodus 12:1-14:** The first Passover
- \* **Exodus 20:1-20:** The Ten Commandments
- Numbers 11:4-30:** Grumbling in the wilderness and God providing for them (this is hilarious)  
(see also Numbers 22-24: Balaam refuses to curse Israel; Balaam’s donkey)
- Deuteronomy 5:1-21:** A second rendition of the Ten Commandments
- \* **Deuteronomy 6:1-9:** The Great Commandment (also the “Shema,” Israel’s basic creed)
- Deuteronomy 30:11-20:** “See, I have set before you life and death...choose life”

## Overview of the Torah

The first five books of the Bible are known as The Torah (also called “**The Law**” in the New Testament, the “**Pentateuch**” by some scholars, and sometimes “**the five books of Moses**”). The Torah is the central body of holy scriptures for Jews (the other Old Testament books are important, but secondary). Starting with creation, **Genesis** then describes God establishing the people of Israel from their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Genesis ends with Jacob’s extended family moving to Egypt to join Jacob’s son, Joseph. Generations later, the Hebrews are enslaved in Egypt, and **Exodus** tells the story of God saving them out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses. This is the first act of the covenant God makes with them. Their part of the covenant is to keep the torah—the law. They receive the Ten Commandments and the law from God, and wander in the wilderness before coming to the Promised Land. **Leviticus** and **Deuteronomy** expand on the law, and **Numbers** expands on the story of their time in the wilderness (Numbers also includes a lot of census information). See the review of each book below.

The text of the Torah took shape in ancient oral and literary traditions. A close reading of the text suggests that there may have been multiple traditions that were carefully preserved and woven together in the text we have now. The final form of the Torah may have involved compiling and editing before and after the Exile (587 BC). See Source Criticism, page 62.

### Genesis

**Beginnings:** Genesis begins with creation. Other ancient religions described the sun, moon and stars as gods themselves. In Genesis, these are merely lights in the sky that God creates. All creation is pronounced good, and human beings (in contrast to claims of other pagan religions) are the pinnacle of God’s creation—in relationship with God. But soon things fall apart, as the man and woman rebel against God and sin mars this creation. Cain (Adam and Eve’s son) kills his brother Abel, and the generations that follow continue their evils. God sends a destructive flood, and calls Noah to build an ark to preserve mating pairs of animals to start anew. When the waters recede, God makes a covenant with Noah never again to destroy the world in flood, with the rainbow as a sign of this covenant.

**Patriarchs:** The narrative then shifts to the account of the Hebrew patriarchs and matriarchs: the first ancestors of Israel. God calls Abraham and Sarah out of Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan (present day Israel). God promises that their descendants will become a great nation. Decades later, they are still childless, but God renews this promise several times. Abraham has a son by Sarah’s servant Hagar, but finally their son Isaac is born to Sarah. They send Hagar and her son Ishmael away, and God promises to make them a great nation as well (they are described as the ancestors of the Arabs). God asks Abraham to be willing to give up even Isaac, and Abraham proves willing, almost sacrificing his son. But God intervenes, clarifying that no human sacrifice shall be made to the LORD (unlike in other religions).

Isaac and his wife Rebecca have two sons: Esau and Jacob. Jacob cheats his brother of his birthright, and runs away to stay with a relative. He prospers there and marries two women, Rachel and Leah (monogamy had not yet become the standard). Jacob’s craftiness continues until he leaves to return to Canaan and face his brother. On the way, Jacob wrestles with God and God changes Jacob’s name to Israel, meaning, ‘one who wrestles with God.’ Jacob and his brother are then reconciled.



**The Twelve Tribes and Joseph:** Jacob/Israel has twelve sons—these are the ancestors of the “twelve tribes of Israel.” The story of these sons, Joseph in particular, then fills the last 14 chapters of Genesis. The brothers despise Joseph as his father’s favorite, and they sell him into slavery in Egypt. But “The LORD was with Joseph” and he prospers, becoming chief of Egypt’s grain storehouses. When famine hits Canaan, his brothers go to Egypt to buy grain. With great drama, the brothers are eventually reconciled. The family all relocates to Egypt, setting the stage for the Exodus.

### **Exodus:**

Generations later, Israel’s descendants have become numerous, and are enslaved by Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Moses grows up in Pharaoh’s palace, but later flees Egypt. He encounters God in a bush that burns, yet is not consumed. Here the LORD tells Moses to go to Pharaoh and lead his people out. Moses is rather reluctant at first, yet he goes. Pharaoh will not relent until, after ten plagues afflict Egypt, he finally tells them to go. The last plague is death. The angel of death passes over the houses of the Hebrews, as they eat the first “Passover” meal. As the people flee, Pharaoh sends his army in pursuit. God separates the waters of the sea to let the Hebrews pass through to Sinai, and he drowns the Egyptian army when they try to follow.

**Wilderness and Covenant:** The people then wander in the wilderness for a generation. The wilderness journey is not easy. Despite God delivering them from slavery, the people often grumble. God provides for them water and “manna” (bread from heaven) and quail. God makes a covenant with them—he will be their God and they will be his people. The core of the covenant is the “Shema” (see **Deuteronomy** below) and the Ten Commandments (listed in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5), but the law is expanded in Exodus, **Leviticus** and **Deuteronomy**. See the outlines for more information. The law can be very detailed, in part because it contains case law—how to solve disputes about cattle, etc. The law also serves the purpose of distinguishing the people as God’s people.

### **Leviticus:**

This book, dealing with the laws of the Levites (the tribe of priests), concerns the laws of sacrifice and holiness—what is “clean” and “unclean” in preparation for worship, or in general as a people set apart to be God’s people.

### **Numbers:**

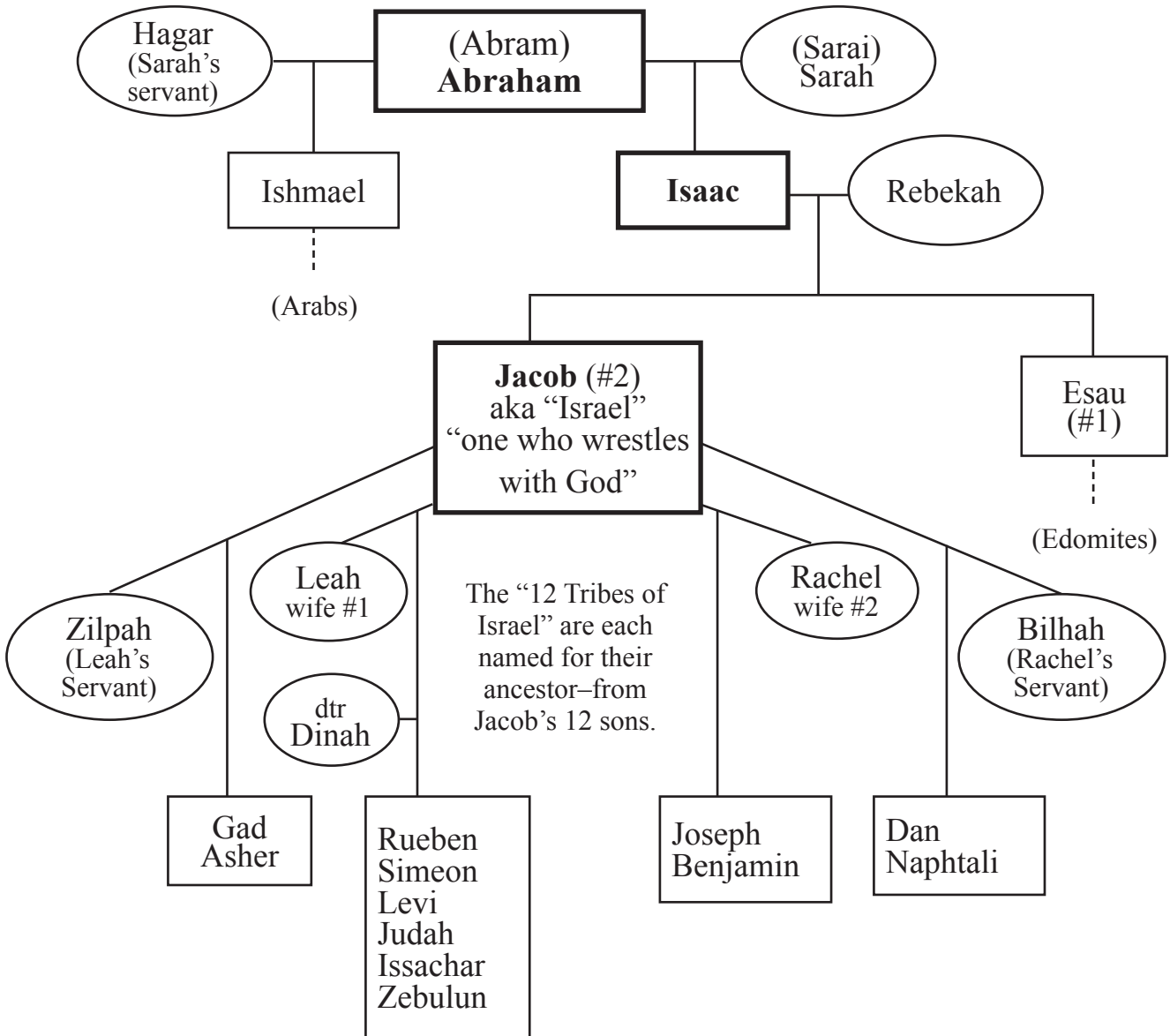
This book is named Numbers because of long census lists, detailing the twelve tribes. The middle section of Numbers contains an excellent narrative describing the wilderness wanderings—where the people grumble against God, yet God provides for them anyway. They follow a pillar of fire by night, and a pillar of smoke by day as God leads them.

### **Deuteronomy:**

The title of this book means “second law.” This is a re-telling of the covenant making, and a review of the law. See in particular, chapters 5 and 6—the Ten Commandments and the Shema—the central creed for Jews (The LORD your God is one, and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul and strength). The Torah ends with a renewal of the covenant before the entry into the Promised Land (which starts in Joshua).

## Chart of Abraham's Family Tree

The Old Testament is primarily the story of God and the descendants of Abraham, his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob (also known as Israel). Here is Abraham's Family Tree:



**Jacob ("Israel"):**  
 2 wives: Leah & Rachel (Jacob favored Rachel)  
 2 surrogate wives—each a servant of a wife  
 12 sons => the "Twelve Tribes of Israel" (and a daughter Dinah)  
 Most beloved: sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin  
 Tribe of Judah: ...David...Jesus  
 Tribe of Levi: ...Moses and Aaron...priests