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## Q&A#40 Why is the Tribe of Dan Excluded in Revelation 7?

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Today's question: "Why is the tribe of Dan excluded in Revelation 7's list of Israel?"

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## Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, why is the Tribe of Dan excluded in Revelation 7's list of Israel? I'll read out that particular list. And I heard the number of those who were sealed.

Of the tribe of Issachar, 12,000 were sealed. Of the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 were sealed. Of the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 were sealed.

Of the tribe of Benjamin, 12,000 were sealed. So there are a number of interesting things about this list of the tribes that we should note at the outset. First of all, Dan is omitted, as is mentioned.

Ephraim is also omitted. Ephraim is replaced by Joseph. So we have Joseph and his son Manasseh, rather than Ephraim and Manasseh together as Joseph's sons.

So Joseph got, as it were, the firstborn portion, the double portion in the inheritance. So his two sons were included in that blessing. And so when we list the tribes, usually Levi is omitted and we have Ephraim and Manasseh.

What we have here is Ephraim removed, Joseph put in, Levi put in, and Dan removed.

And so it's a different set of tribes than we're used to. Other things to notice about the tribes more generally is they can be listed in a number of ways.

They can be listed in birth order. They can be listed according to their mothers. They can be listed according to their position within the land or their position around the camp of Israel.

And so these different orderings occur in different ways in different places. And these orderings are significant. It's worth paying attention to them.

Now, Pharaoh has suggested that we should connect this list of tribes with the gates of Israel, of the gates of the city. And that makes good sense. That's something that you see in a number of occasions in scripture, not least in Revelation 21, where we are told that in Revelation 21, verse 12, we read, And she had a great and high wall with twelve gates and twelve angels at the gates and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel.

Having names of the tribes of Israel associated with gates of the city is not new. We see the same thing in Ezekiel. These are the exits of the city in verse 48.

On the north side, measuring four thousand four or five hundred cubits, the gates of the city shall be named of the tribes of Israel. The three gates northward, one gate for Reuben, one gate for Judah, one gate for Levi. On the east side, four thousand five hundred cubits, three gates, one gate for Joseph, one gate for Benjamin and one gate for Dan.

On the south side, Issachar, Simeon and Zebulun. And then just abbreviating here, Gad, Asher and Naphtali at the west side. And so another symbolic city, another symbolic city that has twelve gates that are associated with the twelve tribes.

Now, the tribes are ordered in particular ways here. The northern tribes are all the older sons of Leah. Then they're all on the north side.

On the east side, you have Benjamin, Joseph and Dan. Dan was the son of Bilhah, the handmaid of Rachel and Rachel's two sons associated with them. Then we have Issachar, Simeon and Zebulun, the younger sons of Leah.

And then we have Asher, Gad and Naphtali. The two sons of Zilpah and the other son of Bilhah. So handmaid's sons.

And so we have the ordering of the city in this particular way. Now, what we see in Revelation 21 is the list of the gates is different. It's, I'm trying to remember, I think it's east, north, south, west in that order.

And so it should not surprise us if the tribes listed in Revelation 7 are listed in a similar

sort of order. It's listed in a way that's associated with those particular gates. Now, I've noted already in Ezekiel the connection with the sons being clustered, not according to birth order, but according to their mothers.

So you have the three sons of the handmaid, of the handmaidens. And then you have the three sons associated with Rachel and made up with Dan, who's one of the sons of Bilhah. And then you have the two sets of Leah's sons, the three older and the three younger.

What we see within that particular account is Levi is in the foremost rank, along with Reuben and Judah. In Revelation, we have Simeon in that position instead. And so Levi is lower down, which might suggest that he is somehow demoted because the priesthood no longer has the same significance that it had in the past.

If it's ordered according to the gates of Israel, and I think David Chilton has some helpful remarks on this and diagrams, it connects quite closely with the pattern of Ezekiel. What you do have as significant change is the raising up of or the removal of Dan and the raising up of another son of Joseph to fill out the number. So you have three sons associated with Rachel now, not just two sons and one of the sons of the handmaid, Bilhah.

Rather, what you have are the three sons, Joseph, who represents Ephraim, the one who had the firstborn portion, even though he wasn't firstborn, and then Manasseh and Benjamin. The ordering of the tribes is also such that Judah is at the foremost. He leads the way.

He's associated with the line of the tribe of Judah, Christ as the victorious king. But also you have Benjamin at the end. So the whole of the order of the tribes is ordered around the two southern tribes of the southern kingdom.

Further things to notice, if it's ordered in this particular way, what you have are arguably, and this Farrer's suggestion and Chilton's suggestion here, I think is helpful, that you go down the side from the north or you go down from east, north, south, west. And as you go down east, east, north and then south, west on the other side, what you have are clusters. So although they're unclustered here, you have two sons of Leah beginning it.

Then you have two, three sons of two sons of Zilpah and one son of Bilhah. Then you have a son who's associated, the son of Joseph, who's associated with Rachel. And then you start off with sons of Leah again.

Rather, if you're going down one side and then down the other, what you have are clusters of three. You have a cluster of three at the head, which are Judah, Reuben and in the second set of six, Simeon. Then in the next set, you have Gad, Asher, Naphtali.

And then in the next set, you have Manasseh, Joseph and Benjamin at the bottom. And

on the other side, you have Simeon, Levi and Issachar. And so I think that works out quite neatly.

And one of the reasons this suggests that the exclusion of Dan is in part for the order, symbolic ordering, that there are three sons of Rachel. Three sons directly associated with Rachel, not just one of the sons of Bilhah. So one of the sons of Bilhah is removed and we have Joseph and Manasseh included.

And Levi is included and Levi is placed in a lower rank, the lower tier of the sons of the sons of Rachel. And so you have Judah put at the top, even though Judah was the fourth born. You have Judah or you have Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah.

And then Judah is placed at the top and Levi drops from that top list. Then you have the other sons of Leah at the other end. So the two sets of the three sons of Leah and then one associated with the handmaids and then one associated with Rachel.

Other things to notice here that the ordering of the tribes around the tabernacle, around the city walls with the gates or in this sort of ordering, often can be associated with astral symbolism, associated with maybe the signs of the zodiac, not in the sense of astrology, but in the sense that Israel are like the stars of the heavens as they're oriented around the tabernacle, which is associated with the symbolism of the sun in the Psalms and elsewhere. What you have are the tribes that represent these different creatures, that represent these different, this assembled troop of Israel's might around the central location. And Israel is being prepared like the stars in the heavens.

And so they're symbolic constellations in the firmament or signs in the heavens. And what you have here is the projection of that particular pattern that you have developed in a number of occasions in the Old Testament. And the tribes have symbolism that's associated with them.

And that develops out into this fuller portrait and how it fits into the Book of Revelation. And you have a number of references to the tribes at various points. And we need to pay attention to that because the symbolism of the tribes is quite developed by this point, particularly from the Book of Numbers, places like the song of Moses at the end of his life, or we have the blessing of Jacob, of his sons.

All of these things are quite developed. And so when we reach Revelation 7, we should have some idea of what these different tribes mean and their significance. What are some further reasons why Dan might be excluded? Dan was associated with idolatry, the setting up of an idolatrous image and setting up a Micah and his sons to minister there in the Book of Judges, Chapter 18.

That is associated with the Danites. Elsewhere, we have, and that's something that continued until the time of the captivity. Elsewhere, we see that the two calves of

Jeroboam, one of them is set up in Dan.

Dan becomes a site of idolatrous worship and it continues that way. And so the association of Dan with idolatry and even within Genesis 49 in the blessings of Jacob, there is this association of Dan with a serpent, the one who bites the heel. Now, that's significant.

The serpent imagery can be played upon in various ways. Jacob is the one who takes the heel of his brother, bruises the heel in some senses. He's the supplant.

He's the one who deceives. And yet that imagery is used in a positive way about Jacob in many respects. Whereas Dan, and it's a sort of ambivalent imagery, it could be taken in both ways.

Being shrewd like the serpent is a good thing or it could be a bad thing. And what we see is Dan eventually becomes a serpent within Israel in a very bad way, someone who leads Israel into sin and idolatry. And so his exclusion from the list may in part be as a result of that, not just establishing the neat order of the tribes.

So I'm not sure exactly why. Those are some suggestions and some of the ways we might think about the question. There's a lot more that could be said.

There's a lot more going on with the symbolism of the tribes. And we can maybe get into that in another question if someone has one. There are ways that these are played out within the narratives and ways that they are played out within the lists and the genealogies in places like First Chronicles and in places like Numbers.

And so, yeah, it's a huge question. I can give that for the time being. There's a lot more to look into.

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