

# FOUR LIVING CREATURES – A METAPHOR FOR THE LAST GENERATION

An amazing display of God's fiery glory was seen by Ezekiel coming out of the north (cf. Psalm 48:2 – symbolic location of His throne). Emanating from its very center he saw four living creatures (Ezekiel 1:5-10) – all like the appearance of a man, except for their faces. Each had four different faces – a man in front, a lion to the right, an ox to the left and an eagle to the back (the last through intimation). This imagery introduces an amazing paragon of angelic leaders. These were the closest created beings to the center of all – God's throne. But – those faces are earthly and are dramatic end-time metaphors. They explain significant apocalyptic prophecies, elaborated in Revelation.

At Mount Sinai God directed Moses how to organize that vast mobile city of Israel. It was highly structured, with lead tribes organized right down to the smallest units (Numbers 1–2, Joshua 7:14). God appointed key individuals to head tribal and sub-tribal divisions. This meant that even the family units had preserved their tribal integrity during the long period of wanderings!

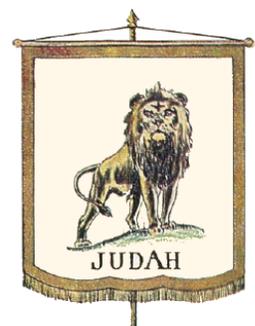


There was more to this geographic structure. Four tribes were appointed as **lead tribes**. The four living creatures were similarly the lead angels around God's throne (more on that later). In turn, the four lead tribes around the tabernacle were positioned around God's presence, enthroned in the Most Holy Place. Glory of that "dwelling place" was seen day and night. God had told Moses, "My presence shall go *with thee*, and I will give thee rest" (Exodus 33:14).

Those living creatures represented God's throne to planet earth. The lead tribes represented the theocracy to Israel's smaller units. Those tribes were Judah, Ephraim, Reuben and Dan. Most intriguing, God instructed Moses: "Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own **standard**, with the **ensign** of their father's house: far off about the tabernacle of the congregation shall they pitch" (Numbers 2:2).

Each tribe had an insignia or flag standard. Intrigue and end-time prophecy lie within the "standards" of those four lead tribes.

**Judah** (Genesis 49:8-12): *"Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white*



with milk.” The ensign associated with Judah is a lion. Jesus – Shiloh – would be called the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5).

**Ephraim:** The bearing of Ephraim is probably derived from Deuteronomy 33, often referred to as the Blessing of Moses. Verse 17 reads: “His glory *is like* the firstling of his bullock, and his horns *are like* the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth.” The symbol of Ephraim is a bullock or ox (the firstling of a bullock). This imagery is of a world power controlling individuals.



**Reuben** (Genesis 49:3-4): “*Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch.*” An occasional emblem for Reuben shows waves of the sea (unstable as water), but **usually** shows a man (my firstborn) as characterizing this tribe. Thus the figure or head of a man is usually depicted on its flag. It represents people passively dependent on other influences, having lost his birthright. He did repent – thus, a group that is “ready” at the end.



**Dan** (Genesis 49:16-17): “*Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.*” The ancient bearing for Dan was a snake biting the heels of a horse, whose rider is about to fall. That changed. According to many Bible commentators, such as Rabbi Ibn Ezra (1092-1167), a Jewish tradition altered the standard of Dan to bear an eagle. Sometimes the eagle has a serpent in its talons. The Jews today use such an eagle, carrying a serpent in its talons, as the key representation for Dan (snake – supreme evil, eagle – seeking its prey).

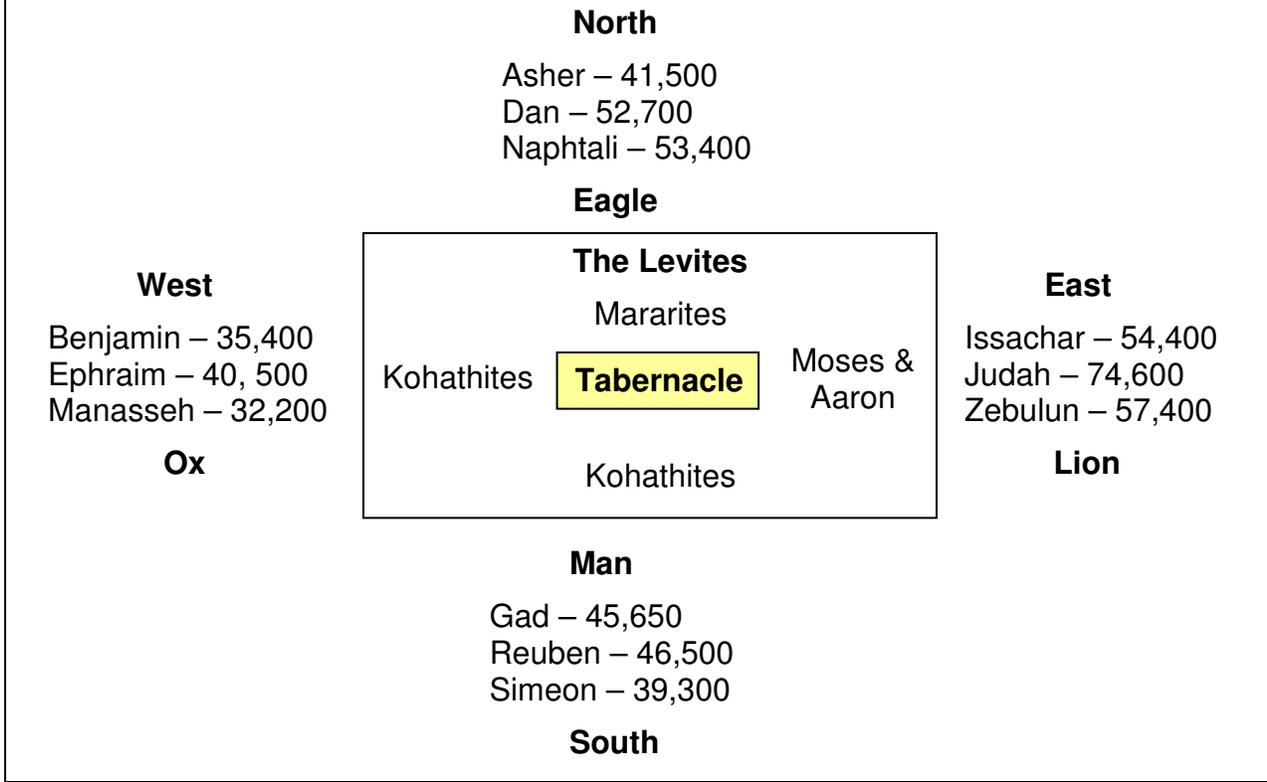


Since God assigned locations for these lead tribes, the compass direction from the tabernacle became itself symbolic of the people whom it represented.

- |                                      |                                 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| East – deliverance – Judah           | Lion of the tribe               |
| West – apostasy – Ephraim            | Golden calf                     |
| North – antichrist – Dan             | Snake/eagle                     |
| South – waiting deliverance – Reuben | Man awaiting call from the east |

All of the faces of Ezekiel’s living creatures were symbols of those lead tribes.

## How the Tribes of Israel were Positioned in the Wilderness



In Revelation John is permitted to see the judgment throne (Revelation 4:2). God is on that throne in a courtroom scene. This is a continuation of the Daniel 7:9-10 vision, where those legal proceedings first began. Shortly thereafter John notes that in the middle and around that throne are four beasts (living creatures). They were full of eyes, meaning that they had insight into God's dealings and judicial decisions emanating from that throne. Then came the exciting identity clues: *“And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle”* (Revelation 4:7). There they are again – the same symbols from Ezekiel and those lead tribes.

Those creatures are present when each of the first four of seven Seals is broken on a God-authored judgment scroll (Revelation 6). As Lamb Jesus breaks each Seal, the sequenced creature tells John, “Come and see.” Each horse represents people who are symbolized by that living creature and ancient tribe!

These four throne-related beings represent the four lead groups **claiming** to be God's people at the end of time. They introduce those key players in that apocalyptic prophecy. When the first four Seals are broken (those Seals are another study), four horses in stunning battle readiness appear. These are the lead prophetic groups that are choreographed on earth's final stage:

1. White horse – 144,000 – from the east, bringing deliverance (Judah)
2. Red horse – apostate Protestantism – from the west, bringing persecution and abominations (Ephraim)

3. Black horse – those in Babylon/darkness waiting to be called out (truth now costly) – standing in the south with no activity (Reuben)
4. Pale horse – Roman Catholicism – from the north, wanting to be like God. Casts God’s people and truth to ground and stomps on them (Daniel 8:10-12) (Dan)

### Focus on the Tribe of Ephraim

There’s more – much more – to these stories! Note on the map where Ephraim was located, and the split area of Dan.

When Moses died, Joshua led Israel across the Jordan River and directed the location of tribal areas. He was from the tribe of Ephraim. Their projected location in Canaan is described in Joshua 16:5-10.

The ensign represented by Ephraim was noted as *moschus* (G). This is translated “calf” (e.g., Revelation 4:7). Most ancient imagery sees this masculine word here as a young bull. In the Old Testament, wayward Ephraim is seen as an untamed bull (*egel* – H ) (Jeremiah 31:18). “His glory is like the firstling of his bullock” (H – ox). The latter word is used for the ox face (Ezekiel 1:10).

Thus, Ephraim was depicted by the most valuable possession the ancient world had. That related to its power (Proverbs 14:4; cf. Job 39:9-11). A young bull was seen as not only powerful but full of energy given by God.

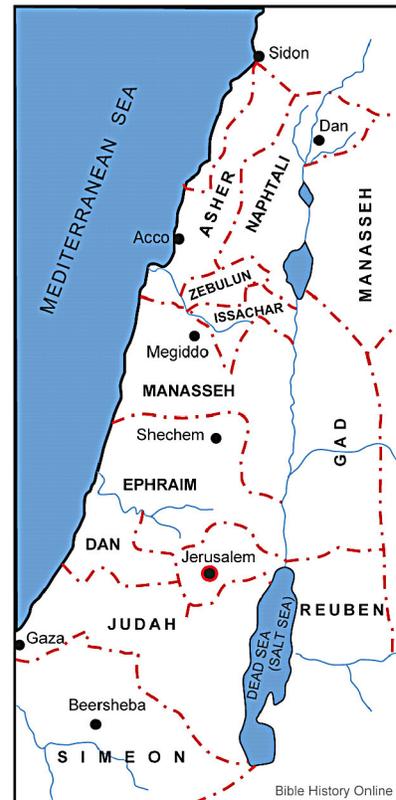
Ephraim was an influential force in Israel – even being commended by Gideon (Judges 8:2).

He was not the firstborn, but through divine mysterious reasons, Jacob was led to bless him instead of Manasseh (Genesis 48:17-20). When they entered their Canaanite territory, they did not drive out the Canaanites. Thus their cohabitation brought apostasy (Joshua 16:10, Judges 1:29) into their camp. God was very displeased and predicted that they would be a thorn and their gods a snare (Judges 2:2b-3). This was tragic, because the tabernacle was initially located at Shiloh, within Ephraim’s borders (Joshua 18:1, 19:51). In time, this rebellious tribe made coalitions with pagan nations (Isaiah 7:2-17) and gradually took over the northern tribes.

The red horse, introduced by the young bull-headed creature, symbolizes people who had power to kill. Ephraim began as a strong tribe, honored by God, but apostatized. The imagery is similar to that of the earth beast of Revelation 13. It came up as a peaceful power, but the prophecy fast-forwards to tyranny, persecution and death.

The harlot of Revelation 17 gives wine (falsehood) to the kings of the earth – they, in turn, become drunk. Ephraim, especially, becomes the crown of drunkards, and her glorious beauty fades like a flower (Isaiah 28:1). The metaphor of this end-time group of people from the west

MAP OF ISRAEL DURING JOSHUA’S TIME



is best represented as apostate Protestantism. By Revelation 13's visionary material it will give support to the sea beast, the papacy (as derived from Revelation 17).

This now leads us to our next link to understand number four of the "living creatures": Dan.

### **The Tribe of Dan**

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt (~1483 B.C.), this tribe had 62,700 men 20 years old and upward (Numbers 1:38-39). When Moses gave his final blessing to the children of Israel, *"of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan"* (Deuteronomy 33:22) – similar to Judah. But Jacob had long ago called him a serpent. Dan would be a tribe of warriors (anticipated after their arrival in Canaan). He would be restless and not "sit still" ("shall leap from Bashan").

Dan's Palestine portion was to the north – just south of a line drawn between Sidon and Damascus. But Dan was unable and unwilling to conquer the heathen in his area because of his spiritual weakness. Many of the tribes settled between Manasseh and Ephraim and in the area of Judah. This weakness led to concourse with the Phoenicians, intermarriage and finally idolatry (Judges 18:30-31).

Though seen as a serpent (symbolically tied to Satan), as previously noted, the standard of an eagle was later adopted. That also became the insignia of the city of Rome (which remains to this day). Because Dan renounced his spiritual leadership and became like a pagan cult, little is written about this group in Scripture. It was the first tribe to plunge into true pagan idolatry. It was from the north symbolically, where God had his throne. It represents the ultimate apostasy to idolatry (Ezekiel 8:5-6). The Roman Catholic Church was the first Christian group to "Christianize" pagan symbols. In end-time imagery, that church is symbolized by this tribe and is portrayed as the antichrist.

### **The Ten Tribes**

Intriguing is the beast of Revelation 17 and 13. They have ten horns that are apostate powers in support of Babylonian ways. The Ephraimite history merges with the northern ten tribes (Isaiah 7:2-5, 8; Hosea 5:3, 9; 6:4).

The scribes chronicled the secession of Ephraim (II Chronicles 15:8-11) and their forsaking of God and His laws as being after the revolt of the northern kingdom following Solomon's rule (I Kings 12:25-33). Finally, its mocking of the emissaries of Hezekiah parallel the earth beast's rejection of the Sabbath with the emergence of the "mark of the beast" (II Chronicles 30:1, 10, 18).

As Protestantism heralded the Reformation, the tribe of Ephraim was to be special in the theocracy of Israel. Apostasy, however, described her final end. Yet, God mourns its loss (Hosea 11:1-3).

The first king of that northern kingdom was Jeroboam. He set up two calves of gold (I Kings 12:28) and located them in Tel Dan (tribe of Dan) and Bethel (tribe of Ephraim). Ephraim the ox directed in worshipping the calf.

Amos warned, “Thus saith the Lord, ... Israel shall surely go into captivity” (Amos 7:12-13). Between Tiglathpileser, King of Assyria (II Kings 15:29) and later Shalmaneser (II Kings 18:9-12), the populace of the north was eventually taken into captivity (II Kings 17:7-23).

Since Ephraim joined with the northern tribes, they all came to an end. This is a symbol of the false prophet joining with the beast (Revelation 13:15) and Satan to form the final kingdom of apostasy, Babylon. This, too, comes to an end (Revelation 16:19).

Thus, in this brief exposé, two of those living creature symbols, tied to the lead tribes of Ephraim and Dan, represent the key apostate groups at the end who call themselves Christian. Those tribes are missing in the great spiritual divisions of the 144,000 (Revelation 7:4-8).

White horse – Judah – 144,000 – east

Red horse – Ephraim – apostate Protestantism – west (missing)

Black horse – Reuben – in south, waiting

Pale horse – Dan – Roman Catholicism – in north, wanting to be like God (missing)

In turn, the white and black horses represent the two final groups witnessing for Jesus. They have the “testimony of Jesus.” The four living creatures represent the key players in the endgame – two loyal to God – two in rebellion.

In the great end-time prophecies of Ezekiel, the temple represents God’s last-day church. Ezekiel saw a wall/window covering with palm trees alternated with cherubim within its fabric. Each cherub had two faces – one on either side. One was of a man and the other a lion – both facing a palm tree. The palm tree symbolizes a time of peace within the realm of God’s people. The temple represents the place where redeemed man associates with God. The *man* represents the great multitude and the *lion*, the 144,000. These are the only ones left. Where are those associated with Dan and Ephraim? They are lost – forever.

These prophecies open to our understanding not only the key players in earth’s final conflict, but also reveal that Catholicism and Apostate Protestantism will come to its eternal end. This invites us to grasp the great meaning of Babylon – composed especially of those two in association with Satan. It is also a pointed warning that any coalition with them will lead to eternal loss!

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