

בן-ימיני או בנימיני ?

אבנר רמו



After the goblet was found in Benjamin's sack he is brought back to Joseph. Morgan Bible. Ca 1250.

In the Book of Kings we read:

מִן-הַיַּרְדֵּן מִזְרָח הַשָּׁמֶשׁ, אֶת כָּל-אֶרֶץ הַגִּלְעָד, הַגָּדִי וְהַרְאוּבֵנִי וְהַמְנַשִּׁי
“From the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites” (2 Ki 10:22).

As is shown in this verse, a person that belongs to a place or a group of people could be represented by a specific variant of their name. This is particularly common for names that end with the letter “n.” For example: **וְכָל-הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַצִּידוֹנִי** - “and all the Canaanites, and the Zidonians” (Jud 3:3).

The names of four tribes of Israel end with the letter “n.” These are: **רְאוּבֵן** - “Reuben”, **שִׁמְעוֹן** - “Simeon”, **זְבֻלוֹן** - “Zebulun”, and **בְּנִימִין** - “Benjamin.” Accordingly we find in the Bible: **רְאוּבֵנִי** (*reuveni*) - “Reubenites” (Num 26:7; see also: Num 34:14; Deu 3:12, 16; 4:43; 29:7; Jos 1:12; 12:6; 13:8; 22:1; 2 Ki 10:33; 1 Ch 5:6, 26; 11:42; 12:38; 26:32; 27:16); **שִׁמְעֹנִי** (*shimeo'ni*) - “Simeonites” (Num 26:14; see also: Num 25:14; Jos 21:4; 1 Ch 27:16); and **זְבֻלוֹנִי** (*zevuloni*) - “Zebulunites” (Num 26:27; see also: Jud 12:11, 12).

Yet although the name **בְּנִימִין** - “Benjamin” appears in the bible more times than Reuben, Simeon, and Zebulun combined, there is only one verse that relates to its people as “Benjaminites”:

הַתְּשִׁיעִי לַחֹדֶשׁ הַתְּשִׁיעִי, אַבְיָעָזֵר הָעֲנָתוֹתִי לְבְנֵימִינִי (לְבֵן יְמִינִי); וְעַל מַחְלַקְתּוֹ עֶשְׂרִים וָאַרְבָּעָה אֶלֶף.

“The ninth captain for the ninth month was Abiezer the Anathothite, of the Benjaminites; and in his course were twenty and four thousand” (1 Ch 27:12).

The English translation to "Benjamites" partially follows the Massoretic editor's correction, but it seems that there is no justification for correcting here the word **בְּנֵי־יָמִין** (*binyamini*) - "Benjaminite."

In the Book of Samuel we read:

וַיְהִי-אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי יָמִין (מִבְּנֵי־יָמִין), וְשֵׁמוֹ קִישׁ בֶּן-אַבְיָאל בֶּן-צְרוּר בֶּן-בְּכוֹרַת בֶּן-אַפְיָח בֶּן-אִישׁ יָמִינִי: גִּבּוֹר חַיִל.

"Now there was a man of **Benjamin**, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a **Benjamite**, a mighty man of valor" (1 Sam 9:1; see also: Jud 19:16; 1 Sam 22:7; Est 2:5).

Here, the Massoretic editor, and the Greek (and English) translators believed that **בְּנֵי יָמִין** (*ben-yamin*) is an erroneous division to words of: **בְּנֵי־יָמִין** (*benyamin*) - "Benjamin." However, at the end of this verse, it is only the English translator that realized that here **יָמִינִי** (*yemini*) is a letter-deletion error of **בְּנֵי־יָמִינִי** (*benyemini*) - "Benjaminite."

Twenty verses later we find:

וַיַּעַן שָׂאוּל וַיֹּאמֶר, הֲלוֹא בֶן-יָמִינִי אָנֹכִי מִקְטָנֵי שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וּמִשְׁפַּחְתִּי הַצְּעִרָה מִכָּל-מִשְׁפַּחֹת שְׁבֵטֵי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל; וְלָמָּה דִּבַּרְתָּ אֵלַי כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה.

"And Saul answered and said: Am not I a **Benjamite**, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And my family the least of all the families of the tribe of **Benjamin**? Wherefore then speak you to me after this manner" (1 Sam 9:21; see also: Jud 3:15; 1 Sam 9:4; 2 Sam 16:11; 19:17; 20:1; 1 Ki 2:8; Ps 7:1).

Here again, it is only the English translator that believed that **בְּנֵי־יָמִינִי** (*ben-yemini*) is an erroneous division to words of **בְּנֵי־יָמִינִי** (*binyamini*) - "Benjaminite." The content of this verse supports the English translator's assumption.