

## Searching For Israel (Part Eight): The Scattering Of Ten-Tribed Israel

by Charles Whitaker  
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*"So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"*  
(Hebrews 3:11)

Assyria conquered the ten-tribed Kingdom of Israel in 718 BC. According to II Kings 17:6, Assyria "carried Israel away to Assyria." She deported the Israelites *en masse*, to what is now northern Iran, just south of the Caspian Sea.

Conquering Israel was not easy; the siege of Samaria, Israel's capital, lasted three years. Assyria may have "overextended" herself in the effort. Whatever the reason, Assyria began her decline almost immediately after she conquered Israel. By 650 BC, Assyria was in an advanced state of decline.<sup>1</sup>

The rapid decline of Assyria afforded some Israelites the opportunity to become aggressive. Early on, some Israelite groups actually became strong enough to mount a guerilla war against their captors. Although unable to turn the tables on Assyria, they did weaken her to the extent that a confederation of the Babylonians and the Medes found it relatively easy to capture Nineveh, Assyria's capital city, in 612 BC.<sup>2</sup> A few decades later, other Israelites banded together to become the Scythians, whom historians recognize as a fierce and warlike people. Centuries later, these peoples would merge with others to become the Parthians, the scourge of the Roman Empire. For the entirety of the Roman period, the Parthians effectively contained the Roman armies at the Euphrates River, keeping them from ever invading the rich Indus Valley on the Indian sub-continent (now Pakistan).

However, the majority of Israelites left the Middle East during the several decades just after Assyria's fall. They took a number of routes, of course, but in general they made their escape using several passes over the Caucasus Mountains, one of which, located in present-day Georgia, retained the name, Pass of Israel, until renamed by the godless communists of the last century.

The prophet Amos, as recorded in Amos 9:9, uses the metaphor of sifting grain to describe what God has done (and will do) to Israel. God, Amos says, "will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve; yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground."

God will separate His people and scatter them, while at the same time keeping track of every Israelite. The Scriptures provide plenty of evidence regarding where this sifting placed the Israelites over a period of time. For convenience, we will divide that evidence into two categories. First, God's Word tells us where to look for Israel. Second, His Word tells us *from* where He will gather Israel in the last days. Together, these two categories of evidence provide substantial detail regarding the whereabouts of modern-day Israel.

### Driven Where?

**Category One:** God's Word states *where* to look for Israel.

» Psalm 89:25: The psalmist Ethan prophesies that God "will set his hand over the sea, and his right hand over the rivers." So, Israel was to be scattered somewhere over oceans and rivers. That is, admittedly, a bit general. God's Word becomes much more specific.

» Hosea 12:1: In a passage condemning Israel (specifically Ephraim, the primary tribe, having received the greater portion of the birthright blessing), God says that Israel "pursues the east wind." To pursue the east wind is to travel west.

» Jeremiah 3:12-13: Jeremiah, pleading for Israel to repent, to "acknowledge your iniquity" (verse 13), asks that his words be proclaimed "toward the north." Jeremiah, remember, lived at the time of Judah's fall to the Babylonians, some 130 years *after* the Kingdom of Israel had been forcibly moved out of its homeland. So, he was not writing to Israelites domiciled within a hundred miles north of Jerusalem—residing in and around Samaria. No, he is addressing a people living somewhere else further north.

» Jeremiah 31:10: God says that He, "who scattered Israel," will also gather it "as a shepherd does his flock." He asks that His message be declared "in the isles afar off." This is not Crete or even Cyprus or Malta. The islands must be far away, and northwest of Jerusalem.

Therefore, Israel migrated north, west, into islands some distance away. People who look for the "Ten Lost Tribes" in Africa or South America need to study God's Word with a globe in one hand and a compass in the other!

### **Gathered from Where?**

**Category Two:** God's Word speaks of the areas *from where* He will gather Israel in the last days.

» Jeremiah 31:10: Here again, God says He will gather Israel from "the isles afar off." Note the plural, *isles*.

» Jeremiah 23:8: God prophesies that the time will come when people will look back and remember how He "led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country."

» Jeremiah 31:8: God says He will "bring [the remnant of Israel] from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth." This nails the matter down even tighter: God will not bring Israel back from the near north, from the area of the Caspian Sea, where it first migrated. God will gather Israel from a much greater distance, from around the globe.

» Jeremiah 3:18: God says He will gather Judah and the house of Israel "together out of the land of the north."

» Isaiah 11:12: God says He will gather "the outcasts of Israel, and . . . the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." This reference indicates that Israel will have migrated far and wide.

» Hosea 11:8-10: God asks rhetorically, "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?" He goes on to explain that He will roar like a lion, and "then His sons shall come trembling from the west."

» Isaiah 49:1, 12: In verse 1, God indicates His audience: the "coastlands" and the "peoples from afar." Then, in verse 12, He tells more about the areas from where He will gather His people: "Surely these shall come from afar; Look! Those from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim [Vulgate: Australi]." Israel, God says, will come to dwell at "the ends of the earth," even in Australia.

» Isaiah 41:1, 9: In verse 1, God encourages the peoples of the "coastlands," telling them in verse 9 that He has "taken [you] from the ends of the earth, and called [you] from its farthest regions, and said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away.'"

The Scriptural evidence is conclusive: Israel is today—and will be until God re-gathers it—scattered around the world, but principally to the north and west of Jerusalem and in isles afar off. Now we have some definite geographic search criteria. Next month, we will conclude our gathering of search criteria by looking at the venue of today's Davidic monarchy.

[to be continued]

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See Jaspers, Karl, *The Origin and Goal of History*, trans. Michael Bullock, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953. Jaspers argues that the period from (roughly) 900 to 200 BC is an "axial" time of history, a term he uses to designate a pivot point during which the powerhouses of the ancient world (e.g., the empires of the Hittites, Babylonians, and Assyrians) passed into the dustbin of history, while modern nations (e.g., Greece and Italy) had their birth. It is important to recognize that the double falls of the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah took place during this period.

God calls Israel His "battle-ax" in Jeremiah 51:20-23. He continues: "For with you I will break the nation in pieces; with you I will destroy kingdoms; . . . and with you I will break in pieces governors and rulers." It is only fitting, then, that after her fall, God would use the descendants of the Kingdom of Israel to break up more than a few kingdoms during this Axial Period. Israel played a key role in Assyria's fall, and under the name of the Scythians, became a scourge to all around them, including the Babylonians.

God had used Israel before in this capacity. Abraham, in defeating the kings named in Genesis 14:1-2, retarded the development of the Assyrian-Babylonian axis for hundreds of years, giving Egypt the opportunity to develop its massive civilization unchallenged, in relative peace and quiet. Again, under the hand of Moses, God "defeated many nations and slew mighty kings—Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan" (Psalm 135:10-11).

Finally, it is quite possible that Israel's wanderings in northern Europe after 250 BC provided the stimulus that resulted in the southward migration of the displaced indigenous folk—among them various Germanic tribes. These tribes eventually crossed the Danube River, invading the territories of the Roman Empire. In this sense, Israelite migrations in northern Europe may have played an indirect role in the fall of the Roman Imperium.

<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, it appears that certain of the Israelite tribes raided Babylon sometime after its fall to the Medes and Persians, around 539 BC, capturing those of the tribes of Benjamin, Levi, and Judah who had not returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and later, Nehemiah. It was at that time and in this way that those who stayed back in Babylon rejoined their brethren, the house of Israel. These peoples accompanied the Israelites on their subsequent migrations, finally to emerge as the Jews of Eastern Europe—Ashkenazi Jewry.

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***Inset: Deferred Promises are Not Forgotten Ones***

Critics assert that Israel's history demonstrates the weakness of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in that their God could not keep His promises. Is that so? We need to set the record straight.

The Old Testament is a chronicle of Israel's repeated failure to obey God, of its refusal to keep His commandments and statutes. In Psalm 78:10-11, 40-42, 56-57, the psalmist mentions that Ephraim (meaning Israel at large)

did not keep the covenant of God; they refused to walk in His law, and forgot His works and His wonders that He had shown them. . . . How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert! Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His power. . . . Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God, and did not keep His testimonies, but turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers.

II Kings 17:7-8 speaks of the sins of the Kingdom of Israel, up north:

For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, . . . and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel.

The prophet Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 32:30, quotes God's scathing indictment of the people of both Kingdoms: "[T]he children of Israel and the children of Judah have done only evil before Me from their youth."

Because of their sins, as II Kings 17:18-20 indicates, God

was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight. . . . Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. And the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunders, until He had cast them from His sight.

In Psalm 78:59-62, the psalmist Asaph relates that God, when He became aware of the idols of Israel,

was furious, and greatly abhorred Israel, so that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, . . . and delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand. He also gave His people over to the sword, and was furious with His inheritance.

As early as the days of the founder of the Kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam I, God understood the direction Israel was taking. In I Kings 14:15, God warns that He will ultimately

strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the [Euphrates] River, because they have made their wooden images, provoking the Lord to anger.

Much later, Amos warned Israel, "Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth" (Amos 9:8).

The patriarchs were, as God attests again and again, faithful. However, the people of Israel failed to observe the terms of God's conditional promises to them. Israel exhibited again and again its refusal to obey God. As a result, it has yet to enter into the peace, prosperity, and eternal possession of the land He promised the patriarchs. Hebrews 3:8-11 summarizes the matter: "In the day of trial in the wilderness, [the children of Israel] . . . tested Me, proved Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation. . . . So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'"

Because of the peoples' recalcitrance, God *withheld* His blessings, ultimately separating Himself from them by casting them out of the land He had promised the patriarchs. *God punished Israel for its disobedience by deferring the fulfillment of His promises to the patriarchs.* This deferment did not make Him unfaithful to the people, because His promises to them were conditional, based on their obedience to His revelation.

In fact, it is not perverse to assert that God was *completely* faithful to the children of Israel, doing to them exactly what He promised He would do *if* they persistently sinned against Him. At the right time and for the right people, God will honor His unconditional promises to the patriarchs. Israel's sad history is the consequence of *peoples'* faithlessness, not of their God's weakness.