

Lesson 4 – What Happened to the Lost Tribes of Israel?

Background

2 Kings 17:6 (ESV)

⁶ In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he **carried the Israelites away to Assyria** and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Why is this unsolved?

When people refer to the “lost tribes of Israel,” they usually have in mind the **ten** tribes of the Northern Kingdom that fell to Assyria about 722 BC. These tribes are Reuben, **Simeon**, Levi, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, and Joseph (whose tribe was divided into the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh). Most of the people of the Northern Kingdom were deported to ancient Assyria (2 Kings 17:6). After their fall, **the Bible is largely silent regarding the ultimate outcome of these tribes**. Thus, the story goes, the ten northern tribes of Israel were “lost” to history.

How Many Tribes Were Lost?

Prophecy Concerning Jeroboam, Whose Reign Began in Approximately 930 B.C.

1 Kings 11:30–31 (ESV)

³⁰ Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. ³¹ And he said to Jeroboam, “Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes

During Reign of Asa (3rd King of Judah) - Approximately 895 B.C.

2 Chronicles 15:9–10 (ESV)

⁹ And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from **Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were residing with them, for great numbers had deserted to him from Israel** when they saw that the LORD his God was with him. ¹⁰ They were gathered at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa.

Many believe that Simeon no longer existed at all in the northern kingdom as of this point.

What are the Theories?

Beta Israel - The contemporary Jewish community has accepted at least one group claiming to be descended from a lost tribe: the Beta Israel, or Jews from Ethiopia, who claim to trace their lineage to the tribe of Dan.

Japanese-Jewish - The Japanese-Jewish common ancestry theory is a fringe theory that appeared in the 17th century as a hypothesis which claimed the Japanese people were the main part of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

British Israelism – A movement from the 19th century which holds the view that the people of the British Isles are "genetically, racially, and linguistically the direct descendants" of the Ten Lost Tribes of ancient Israel

The Book of Mormon / Latter-Day Saints - The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel migrated to the Americas after their expulsion from ancient Israel. Native Americans are descendants of these lost tribes.

Tribes Reunited - Assyria was later conquered by Babylon, who went on to invade the Southern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 25:21). Remnants of the northern tribes would have thus been part of the Babylonian deportations. Seventy years later, when King Cyrus allowed the Israelites to return to Israel (Ezra 1), many (from all twelve tribes) returned to Israel to rebuild their homeland.

What Really Matters

Genesis 49:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ The *scepter shall not depart from Judah*, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, *until tribute comes to him*; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

1 Kings 11:36 (ESV)

³⁶ Yet to [Solomon's] son *I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem*, the city where I have chosen to put my name.

Isaiah 11:1 (ESV)

¹ There shall come forth a *shoot from the stump of Jesse*, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. (Also see II Sam 7:12-13, Psa 89:3-4, Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-10, Jer 23:5-6)

Matthew 1:1 (ESV)

¹ The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the *son of David*, the son of Abraham.

Revelation 5:5 (ESV)

⁵ And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the *Lion of the tribe of Judah*, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

Background

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⁶ In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he *carried the Israelites away to Assyria* and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Ten Tribes

1 Kings 11:26–40 (ESV)

²⁶ Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, a servant of Solomon, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, also lifted up his hand against the king. ²⁷ And this was the reason why he lifted up his hand against the king. Solomon built the Millo, and closed up the breach of the city of David his father. ²⁸ The man Jeroboam was very able, and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious he gave him charge over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph. ²⁹ And at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two of them were alone in the open country. ³⁰ Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. ³¹ And he said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes' ³² (but he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel), ³³ because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did. ³⁴ Nevertheless, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of David my servant whom I chose, who kept my commandments and my statutes. ³⁵ But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and will give it to you, ten tribes. ³⁶ Yet to his son I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. ³⁷ And I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. ³⁸ And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. ³⁹ And I will afflict the offspring of David because of this, but not forever.'" ⁴⁰ Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. But Jeroboam arose and fled into Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

2 Chronicles 15:8–10 (ESV)

⁸ As soon as Asa heard these words, the prophecy of Azariah the son of Oded, he took courage and put away the detestable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities that he had taken in the hill country of Ephraim, and he repaired the altar of the LORD

that was in front of the vestibule of the house of the LORD. ⁹ And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were residing with them, for great numbers had deserted to him from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him. ¹⁰ They were gathered at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa.

10 The “third month of” Asa’s “fifteenth year” was May/June 895 b.c. The people may have “assembled at Jerusalem” then so as to observe the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), one of Israel’s three annual pilgrimage celebrations (cf. on 1 Chronicles 23:31; cf. Lev 23:15–21). This assembly probably took place in the year following Zerah’s attack (cf. on v.19), since the pursuit, the gathering of plunder (v.11), and the occupying of the surrounding territories by Asa’s forces (14:13–15) must have consumed several months.¹

Tribe of Judah / Lineage of David

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2 Samuel 7:12–13 (ESV)

¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Psalms 89:3–4 (ESV)

³ You have said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one;

I have sworn to David my servant:

⁴ ‘I will establish your offspring forever,

and build your throne for all generations.’ ” *Selah*

¹ Payne, J. B. (1988). [1, 2 Chronicles](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job* (Vol. 4, p. 488). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Isaiah 9:6–7 (ESV)

⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 11:1–10 (ESV)

¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,
⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.
⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD

as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

Jeremiah 23:5–6 (ESV)

⁵ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

Theories and Legends

Ethiopia’s Beta Israel

(Accessed from <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ask-the-expert-lost-tribes/> on April 7, 2019)

...the contemporary Jewish community has accepted at least one group claiming to be descended from a lost tribe: the Beta Israel, or [Jews from Ethiopia](#), who claim to trace their lineage to the tribe of Dan. Their connection to Dan comes from a late ninth century Jew called Eldad HaDani, or Eldad the Danite. Eldad showed up in Tunisia speaking Hebrew and told the Jewish community there that he was a member of the tribe of Dan, who had settled in the land of Cush (modern day Ethiopia). The Jews of Tunisia weren’t sure whether to believe Eldad, so they consulted with the head of North African and Middle Eastern Jewry at the time, Rabbi Tzemach Gaon, who affirmed Eldad’s story. In the 16th century a North African scholar known as the Radbaz repeated this affirmation. Today many scholars believe that Eldad came from an Arabic-speaking land and was nothing more than a harmless freeloader, or employed by [Karaites](#).

In 1973, [Rabbi Ovadia Yosef](#), then the chief rabbi of Israel, declared the Beta Israel to be descendants of the tribe of Dan, relying on responsa from the Radbaz and Rabbi Tzemach Gaon. Shortly after Yosef made this ruling, the State of Israel began aiding the members of Beta Israel who were being persecuted and sought to escape Ethiopia. As Jews they were eligible for the [Law of Return](#), and subsequently more than 15,000 members of Beta Israel were airlifted out of their homeland, and into Israel. Though some scholars still doubt the veracity of their claims to lineage, the Beta Israel have been accepted as Jews by nearly all of the rabbinic authorities in Israel today.

Assuming the lost tribes assimilated fully into other groups around the seventh century BCE, as Parfitt and others argue, these tribes’ descendants are now spread all over the world, scattered in every region without any knowledge of their ancient Jewish lineage. It’s more than likely that these descendants are walking among us today, and some of them may even be part of the groups that associate themselves with the lost tribes.

For British Israelism

See > https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Israelism

For Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry

See > https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese-Jewish_common_ancestry_theory

Latter Day Saints Movement

The [Book of Mormon](#) is based on the premise that two families of Israelites escaped from Israel shortly before the sacking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and that they constructed a boat, crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and arrived in the New World as founders of Native American tribes and eventually the Polynesians.^[17] Adherents believe the two founding tribes were called [Nephites](#) and [Lamanites](#), that the Nephites were white and practiced Christianity, and that the Lamanites were rebellious and received dark skin from God as a mark to separate the two tribes. Eventually the Lamanites wiped out the [Nephites](#) around 400 AD, leaving only dark skinned Native Americans. The descent of Native Americans from Israel is a key part of Mormonism's foundational beliefs. For example, Native American followers are almost always declared to be of the house of Manasseh when receiving Patriarchal Blessings, which purport to reveal ethnic lineage.^[18]

[The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#) (LDS Church) believes in the [literal gathering of Israel](#), and the LDS Church actively preaches the gathering of people from the twelve tribes.^[19] "Today Israelites are found in all countries of the world. Many of these people do not know that they are descended from the ancient house of Israel," the church teaches in its basic [Gospel Principles](#) manual. "The Lord promised that His covenant people would someday be gathered God gathers His children through missionary work. As people come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ, receiving the ordinances of salvation and keeping the associated covenants, they become 'the children of the covenant' ([3 Nephi 20:26](#))."

The church also teaches that "The power and authority to direct the work of gathering the house of Israel was given to [Joseph Smith](#) by the prophet Moses, who appeared in 1836 in the Kirtland Temple.... The Israelites are to be gathered spiritually first and then physically. They are gathered spiritually as they join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and make and keep sacred covenants.... The physical gathering of Israel means that the covenant people will be "gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise" (2 Nephi 9:2). The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh will be gathered in the Americas. The tribe of Judah will return to the city of Jerusalem and the area surrounding it. The ten lost tribes will receive from the tribe of Ephraim their promised blessings (see D&C 133:26–34). . . The physical gathering of Israel will not be complete until the Second Coming of the Savior and on into the Millennium (see Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:37)."^[20]

One of their main [Articles of Faith](#), written by Joseph Smith, is as follows: "We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory." (LDS Articles of Faith #10) Regarding the Ezekiel 37 prophecy, the church teaches that the [Book of Mormon](#) is the stick of Ephraim (or Joseph) mentioned and that the [Bible](#) is the stick of Judah, thus comprising two witnesses for Jesus Christ. The church believes the *Book of Mormon* to be a collection of records by prophets of the ancient Americas, written on plates of gold and translated by Joseph Smith c. 1830. The church considers the *Book of Mormon* one of the main tools for the spiritual gathering of Israel.²

Mormon Scripture and the Lost Tribes of Israel

by [Zvi Ben-Dor Benite](#)

When the Mormons first emerged in 1830s America, Constantine Samuel Rafinesque, a Christian polymath of French-German heritage, attacked them for their "singular but absurd opinion that American tribes are descended from the Hebrews or the [ten lost tribes](#)." ([Atlantic Journal and Friend of Knowledge, vol. 1, 1833](#)). Strange as it sounds today, such notions of ancestry were widespread among British and American Christians of the time.

According to the Bible, the [Assyrians](#) of the eighth century B.C.E. exiled 10 of the original "twelve tribes" from their land in the [northern kingdom](#) of Israel. Many prominent Americans, such as William Penn and Elias Boudinot, believed that they ended up in America. This belief is known today among historians as the Jewish Indian theory. The theory persisted for centuries because it addressed a religious desire and [theological](#) anxiety to link the New World (America) to the Old (biblical) World. The fact that America was not part of the biblical [cosmography](#) posed major theological problems for many American Christians. Simply put, if America was not mentioned in the Bible, how could it properly be "under God"? This anxiety about the biblical status of the American continent plagued many generations of US citizens. And they sought comfort in the idea that the lost tribes had come to these shores centuries ago. The idea both linked America to the Bible and accounted for the origins of America's native peoples.

The theory that the 10 lost tribes of Israel had migrated to the Americas after their expulsion from ancient Israel was of course difficult to substantiate. Many went to great lengths trying to prove it scientifically. Numerous attempts to find linguistic or archeological evidence in support of it failed. Eventually the theory faded away. It would have most likely been long forgotten had it not been for the work of an important figure in American religious history—Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism.

² Wikipedia contributors. (2019, March 23). Ten Lost Tribes. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 02:21, April 10, 2019, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ten_Lost_Tribes&oldid=889164923

Whereas others turned to science to prove the Jewish Indian theory, Joseph Smith appealed to supernatural revelation: a [prophecy](#) declaring that the 10 lost tribes had indeed found their way to the Americas. Orson Pratt, one of Smith's 12 apostles (and a direct ancestor of former US presidential candidate Mitt Romney), explained: "From many intimations of ancient prophecy [the 10 lost tribes] evidently had a highway made for them in the midst of the Arctic Ocean and were led to a land in the neighborhood of the North Pole." Likewise, the 10th Mormon article of faith states: "We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent..." In this way Mormon Scripture and prophecy situate America within the framework of the traditional biblical story. The belief in the restoration of the 10 tribes provided the basis for an America-centered [theology](#) and made America the home of a wholly new Scripture—the Book of Mormon.

While this new Scripture remedied the omission of America from the Bible, it has been one of the main reasons why so many non-Mormon Americans have been suspicious of Mormonism. Mainstream Christians hold that new revelation is not possible after the end of prophecy in late [antiquity](#), when the Bible was [canonized](#). Even as Mormonism becomes more and more accepted, the question of new revelation that is at the heart of this religion remains thorny. In this regard, Mormonism challenges the boundaries of the "Judeo-Christian" discussion about religion in America in the most fundamental way: can we not only accept new interpretations of scripture, but also ones based on an entirely new revelation?³

³ Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, "Mormon Scripture and the Lost Tribes of Israel", n.p. [cited 9 Apr 2019].
Online: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/places/related-articles/mormon-scripture-and-the-lost-tribes-of-israel>