

Cimmerians, Scythians and the “Lost” Tribes of Israel—Part One

Were the Cimmerians named for King Omri of ancient Israel? Did the Scythians get their name from Isaac? Are the Cimmerians and Scythians to be identified with the lost ten tribes of the house of Israel? Will the descendants of these ancient peoples play a role in future world events?

Typically some historians attempt to identify the ancient Israelites in later histories by claiming that the name “Omri” is the etymological beginning for the Indo-European Cimmerians and that the name “Isaac” is the etymological beginning for the ancient Scythians.

But can this be done?

Given that these etymological connections are questionable we find that some people attempt to shore up these claims with certain premises—using the concepts of proximity and timeliness—to propose that the seemingly sudden appearances of the ancient Cimmerians and Scythians in Asia Turkey and Central Asia are directly related to the deportations of the ancient northern ten tribes of Israel.

But this raises doubt.

So let’s examine this issue of identifying the Cimmerians and Scythians with the people of ancient Israel by first reviewing ancient Israel’s history in the time of Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria.

Now Tiglath-pileser III executed two known military campaigns into the northern kingdom of Israel during the reigns of King Menahem of Israel and his rival ruler in the area of Gilead,

King Pekah of Israel. And during these campaigns Tiglath-pileser III exacted a burdensome tribute on King Menahem (of Samaria) while annexing a large area of the northern kingdom of Israel into the Assyrian Empire. (Tiglath-pileser III was also known by the title of "Pul" in Scripture, which was a Babylonian throne name.)

Then within a relatively few years King Pekah was killed and replaced by King Hoshea at Samaria, while more Israelite captives continued to be taken from throughout the land of Israel.

And so we read in Scripture that "in the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abelbethmaachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria. And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and smote him, and slew him, and reigned in his stead, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah" (II Kgs. 15:29-30). (See also I Chron. 5:26 regarding the tribes of Manasseh, Reuben and Gad.)

This of course significantly reduced the northern ten-tribed house of Israel to a relatively small area surrounding the city of Samaria.

And we find this confirmed in part by what was recorded in the Assyrian inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, which show that the land of Naphtali became a province of the Assyrian Empire: "on the border of Bit-Humria (house of Omri, Israel)... the wide land of Naphtali, in its entirety, I brought within the border of Assyria. My official I set over them as governor..." (Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*). (Translations of ancient inscriptions are subject in part to the interpretive understanding of the translator.)

Interestingly, according to this translation, the land of Naphtali appears to be "on the border" of the land of Omri,

and the land of Naphtali was also considered to be “within the border of Assyria.”

Consequently only a central portion of the northern ten tribes remained as a vassal state of the Assyrians, which is noted in one of the few remaining inscriptions accorded to Tiglath-pileser III that states: “the country of the house of Omri [bit-humri]... and all its people [and their possessions], I carried away into Assyria. Pekah their king they had overthrown; Hoshea as king over them I placed...” (Bruce, *Israel and the Nations*).

We see from this inscription that Hoshea was made King of Israel, and it also mentions the land of “bit-humri,” which is a reference to the general area of Samaria ruled by Hoshea.

Now historically Shalmaneser V began a siege of Samaria near the end of Hoshea’s reign, which resulted in the end of the Israelite line of kings and the beginning of successive deportations of the Samaritan-Israelites. With the additional result being that many of these deportees were then placed under the jurisdiction of various cities within the Assyrian Empire during the reign of Shalmaneser’s immediate successor Sargon II.

And so we read that “in the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes” (II Kgs. 17:6).

Thus we find that the fall of Samaria is accorded to Sargon II, with an inscription regarding this siege being preserved in the Display Inscriptions of Khorsabad that states: “I besieged and conquered Samaria, led away as booty 27,290 inhabitants of it. I formed from among them a contingent of 50 chariots and made the remaining inhabitants assume their social positions. I installed over them an officer of mine and imposed upon them the tribute of the former king”

(Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History*).

Let's notice some important points regarding this inscription.

It is apparent that Sargon II conscripted some of the Israelite charioteers into his own army, in case we should wonder where some of the people of Israel went to after the fall of Samaria. And not only that, some Israelites remained in the region to pay tribute while many others were taken as captives from Samaria.

However the number of deportees noted in this inscription is strikingly small—only a relatively few thousand people respective to Israel's expected population at that time. Which becomes important to consider when we realize that after being deported to and divided among several different cities within the Assyrian Empire the Samarian-Israelites were greatly diminished and essentially powerless, remaining so for many years.

Also—importantly—these inscriptions confirm that Samaria was a city associated with the bit-humri in the land of Israel.

Who then were the bit-humri of Samaria?

We need to understand that the northern ten tribes of Israel were a loose confederation, whose kings could not build a cohesive nation among the tribal groupings. Consequently, this resulted in the continual development of conspiracies to overthrow those who were on the throne of Israel. And this was the situation when Omri established a ruling dynasty at Samaria (I Kgs. 16:16-22).

Now because Omri established a dynasty known as the "house of Omri" it eventually became an historical reference—bit-humri—in the Assyrian inscriptions. And importantly, the term "bit-humri" was generally a dynastic designation imposed upon the city of Samaria and associated to some degree with the Israelites who resided under that city's governance and

jurisdiction.

But why then were the Samarian-Israelites called the bit-humri (house of Omri) in the Assyrian inscriptions?

It was because Samaria was Omri's city.

A fact recorded in the biblical record.

"In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah. And he [Omri] bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria" (I Kgs. 16:23-24). [Author's emphasis throughout.]

So Omri's dynasty began with the land that he bought and owned, and the city that he built on the hill of Shemer.

In a sense then Samaria was Omri's city, and it was referred to as the "house of Omri" respective to his established dynasty, and it made it into the Assyrian inscriptions as "bit-humri" because it was the last leading Israelite bastion remaining in the land before and after the conquests of Tiglath-pileser III. (Consider that Jerusalem is also referred to as the "city of David" in regard to his dynasty, which will be reestablished in Jerusalem with the return of Jesus as the final heir of David's throne.)

Therefore the term "bit-humri" was a dynastic designation—not an ethnic or national designation—and it was a ruling dynasty generally limited to the city of Samaria in the area between Judah and Galilee. It was not a dynastic designation that was applied to all the people of Israel, and it certainly wasn't a mark of prestige or distinction because Omri's dynasty was eventually overthrown by Jehu.

And so with this in mind we can better understand Israel's

relevancy to the Assyrian deportations of the Samarian-Israelites that occurred during the reign of Sargon II, which also occurred at relatively the same time as the continuing Assyrian deportations of the coastal peoples, the peoples of the desert areas, and those in the area of Urartu and Asia Minor who had been weakened by the earlier incursions of the Cimmerians—a people who had already been migrating into Asia Turkey from the steppes beyond the Caucasus. (Some sources indicate they came through Thrace as well.)

Historically then the Cimmerians had affirmed their presence in this part of the world because the Cimmerians had been causing troubles for other peoples—Meshech (Phrygians), Tubal and Togarmah—before the Assyrian siege of Samaria. This then allows us to conclude that the bit-humri were generally the Samarian-Israelites, but not the Cimmerians.

But let's review some additional history regarding the people of Israel.

We know that significant deportations from Israel occurred during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III only a relatively few years before the fall of Samaria. And there is little doubt that there were those who fled by way of land and sea and escaped the Assyrian army in those days, while others remained in the land of the house of Omri. The same would have been true during the siege of Samaria under Shalmaneser V and Sargon II because a significant remnant of the northern kingdom of Israel remained in their land during the time of King Hezekiah of Judah, whose people also became subject to the Assyrians (II Kgs. 18:13). (There were more than 200,000 captives taken from the area of Judah by the Assyrians according to a translation of the Taylor Prism.)

Notably then the Assyrian deportations of various peoples continued for many years after the fall of Samaria as confirmed by what is recorded in Scripture about the “great and noble Assnapper [Assurbanipal]” who brought settlers from

Babylonia and Elam to Samaria (II Kgs. 17:20, 24; Ezra 4:9-10). Consequently many of the deported people of Israel and many of those who remained in the Assyrian provinces continued to be subject to the Assyrian rulers even to the time of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. (Consider also that probably thousands from Ephraim and Manasseh returned to Jerusalem in the days of Ezra (Ezra 2:1, 64-65, 70; I Chron. 9:1-3).)

It is reasonable to conclude then that the scattered Israelites, and those of the earlier deportations (Gad, Reuben, half-tribe of Manasseh), and the many captives from the area of Judah, and the Israelites who remained in the land, and the Israelites who returned to Jerusalem, were not referred to in later history as the Cimmerians. And it can be said with some confidence that there is no biblical support or definitive historical evidence for the bit-humri being the Indo-European Cimmerians.

Therefore we may also conclude that the term "bit-humri" was a dynastic designation derived from the house of Omri and the city that he built on the hill of Shemer. It is understandably then a term that generally applies to those called "Samaritans" in the "land of the house of Omri."

So what about the Scythians—are they then the lost ten tribes of Israel?

Some people assume so.

And this assumption comes largely from associating the historical Scythian presence in northern Mesopotamia and in eastern Asia Minor with the timeliness of the deportations and the locations of the Israelite deportees during the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II. And some people further assume that the Assyrian name for the Indo-European (also Indo-Iranian) Scythians—*Asgusai* or *Iskuzai* (the Persian Saka)—is etymologically linked to *Ishak*, believing the name

“Scyth” is derived from the name “Isaac.”

These are, however, weak assumptions.

Nonetheless, proponents of these historical and etymological views traditionally base their assertions on a particular biblical phrase found in Scripture.

So let’s take a look at the verse in question.

Now God said to Abraham: “let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad [Ishmael], and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Gen. 21:12).

It is this statement—“in Isaac shall thy seed be called”—that is proposed to mean that the Israelites would bear the name of “Isaac” nationally by using an apparently obscure etymological understanding to associate the Assyrian “*Iskuzai*,” or Greek, “*Skythai*” with the name *Ishak* (Hebrew, “Isaac,” *yishaq*). (Oddly enough this reasoning excludes the many from the area of Judah (also descendants of Isaac) who were also taken as captives by the Assyrians, and those who remained in the land of northern Israel, and those who were scattered, and those who returned to Jerusalem after the Exile, and those who were referred to as the bit-humri or Samaritans of the land of Omri.)

We should examine this further.

Biblically, the descendants of Jacob became known as the people of Israel, or Israelites, and only in an indirect sense were they referred to as the “house of Isaac.” (There were two branches of the house of Isaac.)

However, it should be pointed out that Scripture tells us that Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph and said, “the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;

and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (Gen. 48:16).

Notably then this reference to Jacob’s name was associated with the two sons of Joseph who were adopted by Jacob as his own, even though history does bear record that the name “Israel” has been—for the most part—imposed upon all the descendants of Jacob, with the possible exception of “Hebrew” (possibly from “Eber,” an ancestor of Abraham). And the reason for this name designation was to set them apart as a distinct people, which gave them a national identity in Jacob beginning with the Exodus from Egypt.

A similar concept is understood by how the people of Israel would be set apart and distinguished as followers of YHWH. In speaking to the people of Israel, Moses said, “The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee” (Deut. 28:9-10).

This doesn’t mean that the people as a nation would be called “YHWH,” but rather the people would be “called by the name of the Lord” as a means of identifying them as a people specifically set apart by God. In other words, by their obedience to God and his laws they would be recognized as God’s people, and would be referred to as such (I Chron. 7:14).

So what then is meant by the phrase “in Isaac shall thy seed be called”?

The promises given to Abraham would continue through his lineal descendants as Scripture states: “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen. 22:18).

However, given this, we know that Abraham had more than one

son.

Consequently we have to consider which “seed” or descendant we are talking about—Ishmael or Isaac—because a distinction had to be made between the two heirs regarding the birth-right promise. This of course was the issue at hand when Sarah demanded to have the bondservants—Hagar and her son Ishmael—cast out of the family (theme of Paul’s allegory).

Therefore, the context for the phrase “in Isaac shall thy seed be called” is in regard to the matter of inheritance, and it is a statement that designates which son is the legitimate heir of those promises of national inheritance given to Abraham. And so Abraham was told that “in Isaac shall thy seed be called” because—being the child of promise—Isaac’s pedigree would be chosen over the pedigree of Ishmael in regard to the birth-right promise, which was to be inherited by Abraham’s descendants through Isaac (one seed).

(We can see then why this issue furthers the dispute over Israel’s right to exist as a nation-state in the Middle East, being that the land of promise was centralized in Jerusalem in the land that was once referred to as Canaan.)

And indeed the birth-right promise continued with Isaac and with Jacob because “by faith he [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:... By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure” (Heb. 11:9; 17-19).

Therefore the pedigree of Isaac was chosen over the pedigree of Ishmael (and Abraham’s other sons), allowing for Isaac’s descendants to be identified with Abraham in regard to the

birth-right promise and also the promise that in his descendant the nations would be blessed.

Thus Paul stated that “to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16).

The promises then were to be fulfilled through Abraham’s offspring Isaac so that in Abraham’s son the birth-right promise was established, and also in his descendant “the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.”

This allowed Paul to say that if we are Christ’s, that is sons of God, then we also are Abraham’s children, which is to say that Jesus was indeed of the lineage of Abraham, and if we are accounted as Jesus’ brothers and sisters, then we also are accounted as Abraham’s descendants. This kinship means we are heirs to eternal life as children of God, and also heirs of the land of promise as children of Abraham, which makes Abraham the eventual “heir of the world” (Rom. 4:13). (The implication of such a bold statement may be understood in that the coming kingdom of God is inextricably linked to Abraham and the people of Israel.) (See Rev. 21:12, 14.)

It is incredible then to think that the promise of the kingdom of God and salvation are established in the context of the pedigree of Abraham and his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:18). And the Apostle Paul confirmed this about Abraham’s descendants: “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises” (Rom. 9:4).


Therefore the promise of the birth-right inheritance, and the promise of eternal life were both accounted to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and also through Jesus, making it necessary that the lineage of Isaac be chosen because the

promises were not established outside the pedigree of Abraham (Rom. 11; Gal. 3:27-29).

And so Scripture states that “for they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called... That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed” (Rom. 9:6-8).

Therefore the phrase “in Isaac shall thy seed by called” addresses the issue of inheritance, and it has nothing to do with the people of Israel being called by Isaac’s name in the national sense. Therefore we can’t use the phrase to connect the Israelites with the ancient Scythians.

But there is more.

Who then were the Cimmerians and the Scythians? Will their descendants play a role in future world geopolitics and in the political affairs of the people of Israel? 

(andrewburdettewrites.com) (Continued in part two of this series.)

See: [Resources & Notes](#)

Also see: [Cimmerians, Scythians and the “Lost” Tribes of Israel–Part Two](#)