

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

*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?*

**D**uring Hezekiah’s first year of reign he “opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them” (II Chron. 29:3). And he commanded the Levites to clean up the house of God at Jerusalem, while reminding them of the state of affairs afflicting the Commonwealth of Israel: “for, lo, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this” (II Chron. 29:9).

King Hezekiah was understandably speaking about the captives from Israel in the north, as well as the captives from Judah who were taken by the Assyrians, when he decreed that the house of God should be restored. [Author’s emphasis throughout.]

Notably this attempted reformation by Hezekiah began about eight years after the fall of Samaria (722 BCE), which was more than a century before the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire under King Nabopolassar and crown prince Nebuchadnezzar in 609 BCE. This of course meant that the Assyrians continued to dominate the region of Mesopotamia and later the Middle East from the time of Samaria’s fall until the time they were overthrown by the Babylonians, making it improbable that the majority of Israelite captives would have escaped the iron grip of the Assyrians for many decades after the conquests of the northern tribes of Israel.

What then became of the Commonwealth of Israel?

During the reign of Sargon II some Israelites were placed in different regions and cities dominated by the Assyrians, while others escaped or died during the conquests of the northern tribes of Israel. The same was true for many of the people of Judah. Still others died while in captivity as a significant number of people remained in the lands of Israel and Judah to pay tribute to the Assyrians.

This latter situation prompted King Hezekiah to call for an observance of a Passover, perhaps in the hope of building some unity among the remnant tribes and hopefully to seek favor from God.

“So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria” (II Chron. 30:6).

Indeed then a remnant of the tribes of Israel remained in the land, which included those in the tribal areas of Zebulun, Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraim, Asher and Issachar. And from these areas people came to Jerusalem to observe a Passover, and afterwards “all the children of Israel returned, every man to his possession, into their own cities” (II Chron. 31:1).

Unfortunately, this bleak situation for the people of Israel and Judah only worsened over time because the Assyrian invasions, and later the conquests of the Babylonians, created a diaspora for the Commonwealth of Israel. And this dispersion of the twelve tribes of Israel was later broadened by the coming of the Medo-Persian Empire (Achaemenid Empire), even though King Cyrus allowed willing Jews and some of the people of Israel to return and rebuild the sanctuary at Jerusalem.

Consequently those of Israel and Judah who did not return from their captivity were most likely to be found pocketed throughout the Mesopotamian region from near the Persian Gulf to areas in central and eastern Asia Minor and also Central Asia.

The prophet Daniel describes this situation somewhat in his prayer after reviewing the writings of Jeremiah at the time of the fall of Babylon: “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them” (Dan. 9:7).

This statement by Daniel reveals to some degree the expected whereabouts of the twelve tribes in proximity to Babylon nearly two centuries after the fall of Samaria, which gives us some confidence in concluding that the twelve tribes were within the bounds of the Persian Empire for some time in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.

Then what became of the Commonwealth of Israel?

From Scripture we can determine that at some time the twelve tribes began moving westward, maintaining in some measure their tribal integrity and identity with their established homeland in Israel and Judah.

However, in attempting to describe this migration of the twelve tribes of Israel some people misapply a particular verse in Scripture, which they believe explains the nature of Israel's journeys westward through Asia Minor.

“For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth” (Amos 9:9).

This makes for an interesting analogy.

The sifting of corn is typically done by placing it in a box with a screened bottom, and it is then shaken until the chaff falls through the screen, leaving the corn in the sieve, with hopefully none falling through to the ground. And so this simple description of sifting corn doesn't really describe the nature of Israel's journeys, but what it does describe are the conquests and resulting deportations initiated by the Assyrians and the Babylonians who divided out the tribes of Israel and Judah. The analogy then aptly describes the overthrow and resulting diaspora of the twelve tribes into the diverse regions of these former empires.

Also, if we take a closer look at the prophecy of Amos we see that he was describing a future overthrow of the house of Israel not long before the return of Jesus and the restoration of the Davidic Dynasty, which allows us to draw a larger conclusion from Amos' prophecy and the messages of the other prophets that were sent to Israel and Judah. That is that the prophets never considered the twelve tribes to be "lost," even though they would be diminished as a commonwealth (Amos 9:11-15).

And yet something was lost by the people of Israel.

What many of the tribes lost was their purpose as a priestly nation among nations and their identity as a people bound by a covenant to God, and this particular loss of identity was assured by their abandonment of the promises made to Abraham, and their continued rejection of the prophets and later the apostles. The result being that the dispersion in part blinded them to their obligations in observing the covenant they made with God at Mt. Sinai.

The Apostle Paul wrote about this situation by expressing the future hope of Israel, when a deliverer would come out of Zion: "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the

fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Rom. 11:25-27).

By his letter Paul certainly confirms that the twelve tribes existed more than seven centuries after the fall of Samaria, because Paul was able to describe their then current state of "blindness," which would have continuing consequences for their future tribal identities. But also the Apostle Paul spoke of a coming covenant that will be established after the removal of Israel's blindness, which will be after a time referred to as the "fulness of the Gentiles."

Therefore, Paul's message to us is that the twelve tribes still exist today.

Why is this important?

Paul's focus on the "twelve tribes" was in the context of the "promise made of God," which established a purpose for the Commonwealth of Israel in regard to salvation. We understand this from Paul's defense against the accusations of the Jews when he briefly explained the purpose for his apostolic mission: "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews" (Acts 26:6-7). (Paul's confirmation of the promises made to Abraham is a valid documentation of the then observable evidence that the twelve tribes existed in his day.)

Also this apostolic mission to the twelve tribes is implied in the opening salutation of the Apostle James' letter to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (Jam. 1:1). And the same could be said about Peter's letter to the "sojourners" in

Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (I Pt. 1:1).

Traditionally it is thought that Peter was writing to the twelve tribes, or to a number of the church congregations, which he placed by his letter in the northern tier of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), implying that at least some of the migrating tribes of Israel were then bordering to some extent the southern shores of the Black Sea. Understandably then we could reasonably conclude that at least some of the twelve tribes could be found traversing the lands of the ancient Cimmerians and Scythians (and others), with some likely settling for a time not far from the "isles of the gentiles" about 800 years after the fall of Samaria (Gen. 10:5). (The "isles of the gentiles" may be better understood in the context of the descendants of Javan, Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim, who settled in areas that formed part of the "highway" used by Paul during his travels across Asia Minor and Greece.)

Relatively then at least some of the twelve tribes could be found not far from where they were originally deported to by the Assyrians, and not far from Jerusalem either. This makes it unlikely the apostles or others would have considered any of the tribes to be lost, or to have mistaken them for the Cimmerians or the Scythians or other peoples (Josephus, *Antiquities*, Bk. XI, Chp. V, Sec. 2).

Possibly no other apostle knew this better than Paul, who being of the tribe of Benjamin came from Tarsus of Cilicia in Asia Minor (Acts 22:3).

But more importantly we know that Jesus was aware of Israel's existence during his ministry, because it was his mission to bring a message about a coming kingdom of God to the "lost sheep" of the house of Israel (Judah also). And so significant and relative was this message to the "house of Israel" that it prompted Jesus' disciples to ask: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts

1:6.) (Such a question would not have been asked in ignorance of the existence and general whereabouts of the twelve tribes of Israel.)

Now judging by the letters of the apostles and others we are assured that the apostles fulfilled their responsibilities as instructed by Jesus.

Paul's letters, for example, were written to the church of God congregations located in the cities of Ephesus and Colossae in Asia Minor, and to those located just west of Asia in Greece—Philippi, Corinth and Thessalonica. And the Apostle John, like Peter, wrote to the congregations in Asia Minor when he addressed pressing issues relevant to the "seven churches which are in Asia" (Rev. 1:4). (The relevancy of John's admonishment to the seven churches was not exclusive to those seven churches in Asia.)

And not only did the apostles fulfill their mission to the twelve tribes of Israel regarding the gospel of the kingdom of God, but they also testified to the resurrection of Jesus, whose sacrifice makes the New Covenant possible for the houses of Israel and Judah (Acts 1:8; 2:36, 39). This New Covenant is not yet established with Israel and Judah as foretold by the prophets and the apostles, which leads us to question the purpose of the church of God today, and its relevance to the currently existing twelve tribes of Israel.

Why then the need for the church?

The church of God fundamentally represents those called and assembled in some manner as a result of the proclamation of the coming kingdom of God. This assembling of people early on created congregational groupings that then became a repository of the teachings of the prophets and the apostles. Thus the church of God can be said to be established on the teachings and agreements of the prophets and the apostles in regard to the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Consequently such a responsibility would require the church's published statements to accurately reflect the messages of the prophets and the apostles and all that is written in Scripture.

Unfortunately the doctrines and relative teachings of the church of God—and the larger Christian community—have sometimes incorrectly expressed what is found in Scripture. Also we can find within the teachings of Christianity some awkward defenses of some unsound historical conclusions not supported by Scripture. A case in point for the latter is the identifying of the United States and British Commonwealth with the Israelite tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim respectively. Such a conclusion, although of historical interest, is outside the bounds of Scripture.

This of course makes it necessary for us to recognize and work within some historical and biblical limitations while responsibly upholding the messages of the prophets and the apostles, which messages may be summed in the good news of the coming kingdom of God that establishes an ambassadorial role for the church of God.

Why then the need for the prophets and the apostles?

The institutions of the prophets and the apostles were established to uphold the promises and relative covenants given to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to the twelve tribes of Israel. And by reason of the apostles' mission, the church of God would expectedly be required to uphold the teachings of the prophets and the apostles, who by their letters confirmed the promises made to Abraham and the relative covenants established with his descendants. (Scripture contains the written evidence of the prophets and apostles' teachings, which bear witness to the promises and relative covenants respective to ancient Israel.)

Therefore the church of God cannot responsibly validate and

identify the United States and Britain with any of the twelve tribes of Israel by what is recorded in Scripture. Nor is it possible to confirm the suspected biblical identity of these two particular modern-day nation-states, making them a “key,” that is a premise, to understanding biblical prophecy.

However, Scripture can be used to confirm the continuing existence of the descendants of the Commonwealth of Israel.

The writings of the Apostle Paul give us an example when he wrote: “that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:11-13). (One cannot be estranged “at that time” from the “covenants of promise” and the “commonwealth” unless the promises and the twelve tribes were existing at that time in history.)

Paul brought this issue before the congregations in Asia Minor and explained the relevance of the then existing twelve tribes to the hope of salvation in Christ. With Paul adding that we are to “put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:10-11).

Notably then in writing to the Colossians, Paul identifies the descendants of Abraham by referring to the “circumcision,” but he also mentions the “Scythians,” and by doing so he makes a distinction between the Scythians and the people of Israel. But those distinctions do not prohibit gentiles from obtaining to the promises made to Abraham in that they also can become adopted children of God by the earnest of the holy spirit,

which was made possible by and through Christ's sacrifice and resurrection.

But there is something else of interest about Paul's mention of the Scythians.

One of the issues that Paul was addressing in his letter to the Colossians was the problem of a Phrygian heresy that had gained some footing in the church of God (Col. 2:8, 18).

And this gives us something to consider.

The city of Colossae in Asia Minor was founded by the Phrygians who were once an influential regional empire in west central Asia Minor. And the Phrygian kingdom was once ruled by a legendary King Midas who in lore was said to be able to touch things and turn them to gold.

Also, history shows that in the 700s BCE a King Midas who ruled the Phrygian kingdom was called the king of the Mushki (biblical Meshech), a tribal name that some people associate with some of the Slavic peoples. It is these Phrygians who by some historical accounts were a Scythian tribe, and who were eventually overrun by the Cimmerians.

This of course gives us some additional interest in examining what happened to the Commonwealth of Israel, and why they are sometimes associated with the Cimmerians and the Scythians.



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

See: [Resources & Notes](#)

Also see: [Cimmerians, Scythians and the "Lost" Tribes of Israel-Part Three](#)