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Are the “Lost 10 Tribes” of Israel Really —Lost?

By David Dunlap

In the year 2000, NOVA/PBS produced and aired a special entitled the “The Lost Tribes of Israel.” This television special concluded that tribal peoples in Africa are the lost tribes of Israel! For many years the late Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the World Wide Church of God, taught that the so-called lost ten tribes were no longer Jewish people but the Anglo-Saxon people of Great Britain and the United States. The “Christian Identity Movement”, a growing white-supremacy hate group, teaches that the white people are the lost ten tribes of Israel. Down through history various ethnic groups in Japan, China, Afghanistan, and Persia have been identified as the lost ten tribes of Israel. What does the Bible teach? Who are the alleged lost ten tribes of Israel today? Allow us to first examine the meaning of the phrase the “Lost Ten Tribes of Israel.”

The Meaning of the Phrase “Lost Ten Tribes of Israel”

In 930 B.C., soon after the death of Solomon, the united kingdom of Israel ruptured into two separate kingdoms, commonly referred to as the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Within three hundred and fifty years, both of these kingdoms would fail in their stand against idolatry and would be conquered by foreign nations. The northern kingdom, consisting of ten tribes, was conquered by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.

Their kinsmen, in the southern kingdom of Judah, (consisting of the tribes Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin) were conquered by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Some of these exiles returned under Zerubbabel and reestablished their presence in the land of Israel in 536 B.C. However, since there never was a formal return of the northern tribes to reestablish their kingdom, they have been popularly referred to as the *lost ten tribes of Israel*. Until modern times, Jewish tradition held that all the population of the northern kingdom was deported by Assyria, never to be heard of again; they are considered the *ten lost tribes*.

The Theory of British-Israelism

The theory called “British-Israelism” has gained a loyal and persistent following among many in Great Britain and the United States over the last one hundred years. This view, when it was first propounded in nineteenth-century England, drew a great deal of interest. The basic idea is that the lost ten tribes of Israel captured by the Assyrians are, in reality, the Saxon people, or Scythians, who surged westward through Scandinavia into Europe. These people were the ancestors of the Saxons who invaded and settled England. This theory maintains

“ It can be said, on the basis of Scripture, history, and archeology, that there is no such thing as the ten lost tribes of Israel.”

Dr. William Varner
Professor of Old Testament, The Master’s Seminary, CA

that the Anglo-Saxons are thus the lost ten tribes of the nation of Israel.

This viewpoint is based upon some misunderstood Scriptures relating to the birthright of Joseph (Genesis 49:26) and the promises to his sons Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:20). British-Israelism maintains that the lost tribes of Israel left landmarks on their trek across Europe. Thus, the Dan and Danube Rivers, as well as the city of Danzig and the country of Denmark, are clear indications to them of the tribe of Dan! The term "Saxon" is supposedly a contraction of "Isaac's sons" while the term "British" is actually derived from the Hebrew words for "covenant"(berith) and "man" (ish)!¹ These linguistic arguments have been rejected by every reputable Hebrew and biblical scholar as absolutely without basis.

The original proponents of British-Israelism were evangelical and orthodox in the rest of their theology. Some still exist, not as a separate denomination, but as a small movement which is found in a variety of churches. What should cause real concern, however, is the way this teaching has been adopted into the teaching of two groups which are out of line with the main tenets of biblical Christianity. The first of these groups is known as the World Wide Church of God, founded by the late Herbert W. Armstrong. Armstrong made British-Israelism an important part of his teaching; he also denied the deity of the Holy Spirit and the reality of eternal punishment. Armstrong's teaching also imposed Old Testament laws on the believer as a means of salvation. Herbert W. Armstrong died in 1986, at 93 years old; however, much of this teaching lives on in the printed page and recorded messages.

Another group that has adopted British-Israelism is the "Identity Movement" of white-supremacy. They teach the Satanic character of Zionism, a world-wide Jewish conspiracy, and the superiority of the white race over Jews, Asians, and those of African descent. These groups have often led demonstrations against so-called Jewish control of money and the media, and committed acts of violence against Jews and Jewish symbols.² In the United States there are an estimated 50,000 followers of the reputed "Christian Identity Movement."

What Does the Bible Teach About the Lost Ten Tribes?

Over the last one hundred years, a number of very respected Bible scholars have researched this crucial subject. Respected Hebrew scholar Dr. David Baron (1857-1926) wrote a leading book on the subject entitled *The History of the Ten Lost Tribes* in 1915. Dr. Baron's brilliant and thorough refutation cannot be improved and, up to the present day, has never been rebutted. Dr. David Baron and other researchers concluded that the so-called ten "lost" tribes of Israel were never lost, but continued as a part of the main body of the Jewish people. These researchers drew their conclusions from a number of important biblical facts.

1. In 930 B.C., Many From the Northern Kingdom of Israel Joined the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

At the time of the disruption of the united kingdom in 930 B.C., faithful Israelites from all of the ten northern tribes joined their kinsmen in the south and continued their identity as part of the kingdom of Judah. Two books of Scripture that detail this historical event are 1 and 2 Chronicles. These books make it clear that the ten northern tribes along with the two southern tribes continued as a nation in the tribal allotment of Judah.

" In their migration across Europe to the British Isles the 'lost' tribes supposedly left landmarks, bearing the names of the tribes. Thus, the Danube River and Danzig are clear indications to them of the tribe of Dan. The term 'Saxon' is obviously derived from the Hebrew and means Isaac-son or 'The sons of Isaac!' "

Dr. Walter Martin
(1928-1989)

Author of the *The Kingdom of the Cults.*

2 Chronicles 11:14, 16 states, “For the Levites left their suburban lands and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem; for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest’s office unto the LORD;...and after them, out of all the tribes of Israel, such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of their fathers.” These verses provide irrefutable proof that many godly individuals out of “all the tribes of Israel” rejected Jeroboam’s idolatry and joined the southern kingdom. During the reign of King Asa, others followed from Ephraim and Manasseh (2 Chronicles 15:9). It is clear from Scripture that many from the so-called lost ten tribes of Israel traveled south to Judah and Jerusalem, forming one region that consisted of Israelites from all the twelve tribes of Israel.

2. The Truth About the Assyrian Captivity 721 B.C.

It is often assumed that all (every person) of the ten tribes of northern Israel were taken to Assyria in 721 B.C. Again, this is not true. Many from the ten northern tribes continued to live there after the Assyrian invasion. The book of 2 Chronicles helps us in this regard. At Hezekiah’s invitation, many from the north traveled to Judah after the destruction of the northern kingdom (2 Chronicles 30). Even later, in 622 B.C., more godly Israelites came to Jerusalem to help repair the temple (2 Chronicles 34:9), and later to celebrate the Passover (2 Chronicles 35:17-18) under King Josiah. If the northern ten tribes of Israel had become “lost” in the Assyrian invasion, how could these representatives have joined in worship in Jerusalem? Surely, we must conclude that not all in the ten tribes were taken to Assyria and were “lost”.

Archeology has confirmed what the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles have recorded. Archeologists have uncovered the annals of the Assyrian Sargon, in which is recorded that only 27,290 people and 50 chariots were carried away in the invasion. Since the population of the northern 10 tribes numbered between 400,000-500,000 people, clearly less than 1/20th of the total population was deported.³ Therefore, the ten tribes were never “lost” because the majority of the people were never deported. Although their kingdom was destroyed, the people as a community did not cease to exist, but remained in their ten tribal allotments in the northern kingdom.

3. The New Testament and Ten “Lost” Tribes

The New Testament clearly indicates that there were individuals in the first century who still maintained their Jewish tribal identities, some of whom were members of those supposedly “lost” tribes. Consider, for example, the aged Anna who beheld Jesus in the temple. Luke 2:36 states that she was of the “tribe of Asher.” When the apostle Paul spoke of his Jewish brethren, he spoke of a common hope and promise: “Unto which promise the twelve tribes, earnestly serving God day and night, hope to come” (Acts 26:7). James addressed his epistle “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1). Both James and the apostle Paul made no distinction between Judah and the ten tribes of Israel. All Jews were of a common body, the only difference being that some were in the land and others were in the Diaspora. Concerning the question of the lost ten tribes Hebrew scholar David Baron writes, “Let us glance at the question of the so-called ‘lost’ ten tribes in the light of Scripture, history and prophecy...There is little historical reason to suppose that the ten tribes are lost.”⁴

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Dr. David Baron
(1857-1926)



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Evidently, members of all the twelve tribes of Jacob dwelt either in the land or outside of the Promised Land. Although Jews today do not know from which tribe they are descended (with the possible exception of the Levites), Scripture affirms that God knows. Such passages as Revelation 7:4-8 and Ezekiel 48 declare that representatives of every tribe of restored Israel will be present in the Tribulation and the Millennial kingdom.

Conclusion

To summarize, it can be said, on the basis of Scripture, history, and archeology, that there is no such thing as the ten lost tribes of Israel. What was lost was the existence of the kingdom of Israel in the northern region of Israel. The ten tribes, however, continued to exist in the body of the southern kingdom with the terms "Jews" and "Israelite" applied to all of the Jewish nation. Any claim that some ethnic group descended from the ten tribes rests on shaky ground at best. The suggestion that the Caucasian people are the true lost ten tribes must be thoroughly rejected. This ideology has help to fuel white supremacist hatred and, in many cases, violence against the Jewish people. This theory robs the Jewish people of God's promises and promotes the lie that the Jewish people are not truly the people of God.

Endnotes

1. Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, Anglo-Israelism, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1982). p. 299
2. Viola Larson, "Identity: 'Christian' Religion for White Racists", *Christian Research Journal*, (Fall, 1992), pp. 20-28
3. Biblical Archeologist Magazine, vol. VI, 1943, p. 58
4. David Baron, *The History of the "Lost" Tribes*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1915),

Further Reading

David Baron, *The History of the Ten "Lost" Tribes*, (University of Michigan Press), 95 pages.