

Chapter Three

Israel's Exile

Although the history of both Israel and Judah are very similar in that they both ended up being banished from the Promised Land because of their unfaithfulness, the fulfilment of the promised Birthright Blessings to Ephraim and the fulfilment of the Sceptre Promises to Judah meant that their histories would ultimately be different.

Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians about 745BC, however, it wasn't until about 573BC that Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians. The Jews returned from their captivity after 70 years and their final dispersion, at that point of time, was about 600 years in the future when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD. Because they mostly kept their identity and customs in the nations where they found themselves, we have little problem recognizing their presence and have ample historical records to trace the migrations of the Jews. For the most part they refrained from intermarrying with the Gentiles (some definitely did intermarry) and thus they are mostly relatively easy to identify. We will cover their story more fully later.

But the scattering of Israel is not so well known. Apart from a very small minority (perhaps representatives of every tribe), the ten tribes of Israel never returned to their homeland. In the final years of Israel's presence in the Promised Land, God sent His prophets to His people to warn of the consequences of their wickedness. Israel would be punished and suffer greatly as a nation for their apostasy. They would be scattered among the nations and would become for a considerable time just like the rest of the nations, worshipping false gods and committing all manner of evil. Because they went away from the Lord and forsook the laws and customs delivered to them by Moses and took on the worship of other gods and the customs of the Gentiles, God declared that for this period of time they were not His people (Hosea 1:9). Whatever happened to them has been shrouded in mystery and it has been theorised that they were completely assimilated amongst the Gentiles and are no longer to be accounted for as an entity. This theory however, would make God a liar and nullify His promises to the sons of Joseph. Let us follow the last traces of them in the Word of God and discover further prophecies regarding their future.

1 Chronicles 5:26

And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgathpilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and brought them unto Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river Gozan, unto this day.

This was the first of the Assyrian deportations.

2 Kings 17:5-6

Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. 6 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.

These areas are in the region north and west of Nineveh, in an area now referred to as Upper Mesopotamia in modern Turkey.

2 Kings 17:16-18

And they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. 17 And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger. 18 Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.

2 Kings 17:21-23

For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king: and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin. 22 For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; 23 Until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.

The Assyrians began a program of population replacement.

2 Kings 17:24

And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.

2 Kings 17:41

So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.

These people brought into the Land of Israel by the Assyrians served their own gods and made sacrifices to the God of Israel as well after an Israelite was sent to them because of their fear of lions attacking them (2 Kings 17:25-33). They became known as the Samaritans and were despised by the Jews. The feelings were mutual and the Samaritan's unfavourable attitude to the Jews is recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Records are scant with regards to the Ten Tribes from this point on and we have but a few definitive details with which to trace their history.

A few years after the removal of the Kingdom of Israel from the Land, the Assyrians began to attack the Kingdom of Judah during the reign of King Hezekiah. This is recorded in 2 Kings 19 and 2 Chronicles 32. In answer to King Hezekiah's prayers, God destroyed 185,000 of the Assyrian army overnight and thus the power of the Assyrians was seriously broken. Around this time the Babylonian Empire was on the rise and this is mentioned in 2 Kings 20:12-19. Hezekiah's great grandson Josiah, another godly king of the Jews, held a massive Passover feast where it is mentioned that some of Israel attended (2 Chronicles 35:18-19). These details enable us to see that the Israelites recovered at least a measure of freedom after their captivity and some took opportunity to return to the Promised Land and lived among the pagans that the Assyrians had placed there. The majority, however, remained in the area

north of the Euphrates, and as opportunity provided they migrated to the land between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea in proximity to the Caucasus Mountains. More on this later.

The Israelites who returned to Samaria were also referred to as Samaritans by the Jews. In Jesus' time, we have the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42), which tells of a resident from a village in Samaria who identified herself as a descendant of Jacob. So the term Samaritan refers to both Assyrian imports and returned Israelites and without the context of who is being referred to it is difficult to know who's who. Sometimes it is simply impossible to discern. In the New Testament, Jesus mentions the Twelve Tribes in Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:30. One member of the tribe of Asher is mentioned in Luke 2:36, so it seems possible that others may have also joined themselves with the Jews. Paul speaks of them in Acts 26:7 and James addresses his letter to them (James 1:1). More on this later.

Isaiah 14:24-25

The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: 25 That I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders.

From the Bible we can deduce that approximately 120 years after the captivity of Israel (2 Kings Chapters 17-25), the Assyrians were defeated by the Babylonians. Initially a great multitude of Israelites became free at the onset of the Babylonian period as the above verse implies; the yoke of slavery was removed. Many migrated north (you'll read more on that later), some returned to the Holy Land, but most came under Babylonian oppression as the new regime established their control.

Let's now look at some other prophetic proclamations concerning this period of time with regard to the Kingdom of Israel.

Hosea 1:9-10

Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God. 10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.

Hosea 3:4

For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim:

Hosea 5:7

They have dealt treacherously against the Lord: for they have begotten strange children: now shall a month devour them with their portions.

Ezekiel 4:13

And the Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them.

Ezekiel 12:16

But I will leave a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the heathen whither they come; and they shall know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 20:23

I lifted up mine hand unto them also in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the heathen, and disperse them through the countries;

Hosea 8:8

Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure.

Ezekiel 11:16

Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come.

Amos 9:8-9

Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord. 9 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.

So then, we see that God promised to reduce them to a remnant, and then He would make them a multitude. To begin with they were destroyed as a nation and they were taken as slaves. But as time went on they found their freedom and went on to become as the sand of the sea, a number that none can count. And a time would come when they would be known as “sons of the Living God” (Hosea 1:10).

Before the Babylonians destroyed the Jewish Temple, they had taken many Jews captive and left the city as a puppet state. During this time, Ezekiel, who apparently had some liberty under the Babylonian captivity, prophesies against representatives of the House of Israel who had entered Jerusalem and joined with the remnant of Judah in their abominations, that they would be destroyed and scattered when Nebuchadnezzar finally destroyed the city during the time of King Zedekiah.

Ezekiel 12:1-10

The word of the Lord also came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house.

3 Therefore, thou son of man, prepare thee stuff for removing, and remove by day in their sight; and thou shalt remove from thy place to another place in their sight: it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house. 4 Then shalt thou bring forth thy stuff by day in their sight, as stuff for removing: and thou shalt go forth at even in their sight, as they that go forth into captivity. 5 Dig thou through the wall in their sight, and carry out thereby. 6 In their sight shalt thou bear it upon thy shoulders, and carry it

forth in the twilight: thou shalt cover thy face, that thou see not the ground: for I have set thee for a sign unto the house of Israel.

7 And I did so as I was commanded: I brought forth my stuff by day, as stuff for captivity, and in the even I digged through the wall with mine hand; I brought it forth in the twilight, and I bare it upon my shoulder in their sight. 8 And in the morning came the word of the Lord unto me, saying, 9 Son of man, hath not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said unto thee, What doest thou? 10 Say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; This burden concerneth the prince in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel that are among them.

The “prince in Jerusalem” mentioned here is the last king to reign over Judah: King Zedekiah. Being designated ‘prince’ and not ‘king’ reflects his position as an appointed king by the Babylonians. Jeconiah, the actual king, was in captivity in Babylon and Zedekiah was his uncle. Ezekiel never called Zedekiah ‘king’. That aside, we take note that among the Jews in Jerusalem were some members of the house of Israel (Ezekiel 12:10).

Ezekiel 12:11-28

Say, I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done unto them: they shall remove and go into captivity. 12 And the prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder in the twilight, and shall go forth: they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby: he shall cover his face, that he see not the ground with his eyes. 13 My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there. 14 And I will scatter toward every wind all that are about him to help him, and all his bands; and I will draw out the sword after them.

15 And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall scatter them among the nations, and disperse them in the countries. 16 But I will leave a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the heathen whither they come; and they shall know that I am the Lord.

17 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 18 Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, and drink thy water with trembling and with carefulness; 19 And say unto the people of the land, Thus saith the Lord God of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and of the land of Israel; They shall eat their bread with carefulness, and drink their water with astonishment, that her land may be desolate from all that is therein, because of the violence of all them that dwell therein. 20 And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.

21 And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 22 Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? 23 Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord God; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. 24 For there shall be no more any vain vision nor

flattering divination within the house of Israel. 25 For I am the Lord: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord

26 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying. 27 Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off. 28 Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God.

Around this time this proclamation by the inhabitants of Jerusalem was recorded.

Ezekiel 11:15

Son of man, thy brethren, even thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly, are they unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get you far from the Lord: unto us is this land given in possession.

And so it was that the majority of those of Israel who had returned then departed to return no more. It is interesting to note that this attitude of the Jews remains to this day. "The Land is ours" is what they say and the idea of Israelites who are not Jews having any claim to the Land is simply not entertained. (Except by a tiny minority)

Zechariah also prophesies against the nations that scattered them.

Zechariah 1:18-21

Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold four horns. 19 And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. 20 And the Lord shewed me four carpenters. 21 Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.

History shows us who the "four horns" are: the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medes and the Persians. The Greek Empire, which was divided into four, are the "four carpenters" that effectively crushed all the remnants of these nations when they conquered the Medes and the Persians.

As mentioned above, a significant number of the House of Israel found their freedom when Babylon defeated the Assyrians, thus fulfilling the above mentioned prophecy in Isaiah 14:24-25. Of those who had migrated north, some were called Cimmerians (thought to be a transliteration of Samaritans or Samaritans) and later became known as the Scythians. (Perhaps two different groups who migrated at different times. Again, more on this later) However, there were still Israelites dwelling under the dominion of Alexander and his successors during the time of the Greek Empire. These would not gain their independence until the following century with the rise of the Parthian Empire around 203-202BC. Approximately forty years after the Parthians gained their ascendancy and had weakened the Greeks, the Jews led by the Maccabees also broke the yoke of the Greeks and attained their independence for about a hundred years until becoming a vassal state again under Roman dominion and the rise of King Herod the Great. King Herod was not so great in my opinion . . . he was a real bad dude.

The Jewish historian Josephus, writing in the first century AD, recorded that there were “*but two tribes under the dominion of the Romans*”, and that “*the Ten Tribes were beyond the Euphrates and had become a multitude that none could count*” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.5.2). Even though there were a scattering of Israelites of the Northern Kingdom living among the pagans in Samaria, the Jews, who simply lumped them all under the term ‘Samaritans’ with whom they had no dealings, were clearly aware of where the bulk of their estranged brethren were situated. This historical testimony reveals that the freedom that Israel had gained during the latter time of the Greek Empire was not taken away from them by the Romans who had subjugated the Jews in the land then known as Judea. The phrase, “beyond the Euphrates” mentioned by Josephus, refers to the area between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, north of the head-waters of the Euphrates River, a place where we find the Caucasus Mountains which formed a natural barrier easy to defend against the Roman Empire. This mountain range is approximately 1200 kilometres long, averaging around 100 kilometres wide, 180 kilometres at its widest point, has over 2200 glaciers and has very few mountain passes, all of which are at least 3000 metres above sea level (approximately) and can only be traversed at certain times of the year. From the annals of history we find that the Roman Empire never made any significant advances north of this massive range of mountains.

It is interesting how the names of the patriarchs Manasseh and Ephraim also have a prophetic message. Manasseh means forgetfulness and Ephraim means fruitfulness.

Genesis 41:51-52

And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house. 52 And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.

So it is that Israel, led by the sons of Joseph, were made to forget their Father’s house and yet at the same time they were to become fruitful in the land of their affliction. And just as Joseph arose to prominence in Egypt whilst separated from his brethren, the descendants of Joseph were prophesied to become like a “lion among the sheep” (Micah 5:8), and would “push the peoples to the ends of the earth” (Deuteronomy 33:17), and would “possess the gates of their enemies” (Genesis 22:17, 24:60); and receive multiple blessings and abounding riches and be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. At the same time they were lost, they had forgotten their God, and they had forgotten their heritage.

Micah 5:7-9

And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. 8 And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. 9 Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off.

Take note of the details of this particular prophetic statement in Micah just mentioned. Jacob is compared with the Gentile nations and is likened as a lion among the sheep, victorious over them all. Despite the use of the image of a lion, this certainly does not describe Judah down through the ages.

Isaiah 41:8-16

But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. 9 Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the

chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away. 10 Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. 11 Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. 12 Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. 13 For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. 14 Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

15 Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. 16 Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.

Deuteronomy 33:17

His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.

As you can see, these proclamations of Isaiah and Moses concerning Ephraim and Manasseh have nothing to do with Judah.

Genesis 22:17

That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

These passages all speak of Israel, also known as Jacob, as a dominating force among the nations, something that Judah has never fulfilled in all of history, for the promise was not theirs. Remember, the promise to Ephraim was that his descendants would become a multitude, or company, or commonwealth of nations, depending on your translation. Therefore we should expect to find a people group who have made themselves a multitude of nation states and are a world power and have been, despite their failings, a blessing to all the other nations during their history. There can only be one people group that fits the biblical description. However, the record of their destiny is not complete, the prophets have yet more to say, and we shall have to follow the destiny of the House of Judah before we hear more of the House of Israel.