

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

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The Israelite Diaspora

August 30, 2010

What happened to ancient Israel? Where is Israel today?

I trust you understand that it would require volumes to adequately and unequivocally answer these two simple questions. As I have stated previously, there is so much history, as well as etymological (study of the history of words) and anthropological (study of cultures) evidence, that could be cited to answer these questions that it is overwhelming. All I can do is skim the surface and trust that if you have an interest in this topic, you will do your own research.

The word *diaspora* is from the Greek, meaning “scattered or dispersed.” To some, the Diaspora refers to the scattering of the Jews (Judahites) that occurred in 70-74 AD when the Roman army laid siege to the cities and towns of Judea, leading to the total destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, thus driving the Old Covenant and Judaism into obsolescence (Hebrews 8:13), at least as far as God is concerned.

About 25 years earlier, James had written to **the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad** (James 1:1), and about 6 years earlier, Peter had written to the aliens scattered throughout the region of Asia-Minor (1 Peter 1:1). Obviously, James and Peter could not have been writing to the ones scattered in the so-called Jewish Diaspora of 70-74 AD.

So, to whom were they writing? Some have spiritualized the answer by concluding that it was to the church in general, but this cannot be, for it is clear they were writing to their brethren of the flesh. Consequently, the dispersion they had in mind had to refer to the Israelite dispersion that occurred about seven centuries earlier. Further proof of this is discovered in John’s gospel when the Jews questioned one another over Jesus’ word that He was leaving them and they could not go with Him: **“Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He?”** (John 7:35 NASB). The word *dispersion* is the Greek word *diaspora*. I find it interesting that the Israelite Dispersion is mentioned in a passage that points to the prophetic eighth day of Tabernacles. Think about it!

After the twelve tribes had split into two separate kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel was invaded by the Assyrians and taken captive in 745-721 BC. The ten tribes were deported northeast from their land to the area of Media in northern Mesopotamia along the shores of the Caspian Sea. As a united group they never returned to Palestine, and the national identity of the name *Israel* was lost. To round out this dispersion, we should also keep in mind that some of the kingdom of Judah probably dispersed as well when the Babylonians conquered Assyria and then Jerusalem in 607-604 BC. The name *Judah* was not lost, for it returned to Jerusalem in 534 BC; nevertheless, not all Judahites returned but instead became part of the dispersion to other lands, as evidenced by James’ reference to the twelve tribes. But there is more, for, undoubtedly, there were some from the tribes who sought to avoid captivity by migrating out of Palestine, trekking westward.

This is the real diaspora and the very reason why Jesus was sent to **the lost sheep of the house of Israel** (Matthew 15:24). The Judahites in Jerusalem and Judea heard Him as He stood in their midst, but the good news of His arrival and identity as Messiah and Son of God had to go to the lost tribes of Israel that were no longer united with Judah and were dispersed among the nations.

It is estimated that upwards of 6 million Israelites went into captivity and about 50,000 Judahites returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:1, 64, 65). This has led some to conclude that over 99% of God’s people were lost to history, but only in name. It is pretty hard to hide such a large number of people, considering the world population at that time was probably between 50-150 million people.

But how are the lost tribes to be found in the world? Actually there are many ways to identify them, for as they migrated away from the land of their captivity, they left artifacts along the way in the form of Biblical symbols and stories and heroes, language, culture, customs; you name it. It was like leaving crumbs along a path or breaking twigs of trees so that one can find his way home. Instead, they left telltale signs to let others know the path they had trod. However, an indication of their path is discovered in the names by which they became known, which were many.

One such name is that of the **Saka** or **Scythians** (Greek form). *Saka* or *Sacae* referred to the **House of Isaac**. In Behistun, 500 miles northwest of Susa where Queen Esther lived, stands a giant rock carving depicting a battle with the Saka. The accompanying text describing the battle is repeated in three languages—Persian, Susian, and Babylonian. From these texts, it was discovered that the Persians called these people Saka and the Babylonians called them **Gimirri**. The Scythian became known as a wanderer or tent-dweller, which aptly described the Israelites in dispersion.

Another name by which they were known was **Khumri**, which is how the Assyrians referred to the Israelites. The **Black Obelisk** of Assyrian king Salmanasar III (859-824 BC) is covered with script and reliefs that picture Jehu, the son of Khumri, paying tribute to the king. The name *Khumri* translates as the **House of Omri**, which refers to an Israelite king (1 Kings 16:16; Micah 6:16). It is thought that the Assyrians first became acquainted with the northern kingdom during the time of Ahab the son of Omri, which led them to henceforth refer to the kingdom as *Beth-Omri* or House of Omri.

Scholars seem to be in agreement that the Saka, Gimirri, and Khumri all refer to the lost tribes of Israel. Even *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (Vol. 12, p. 250) is in agreement: “The Sacae, or Scythians ... were the Lost Ten Tribes.” The Gimirri also became known as the **Cimmerian**.

But there is more, for it is believed that the **Saxons** are descendants of the Saka, the House of Isaac people. For those of us who remember our history, the English are considered descendants of the Anglo-Saxons, and many of us, whose forefathers migrated to America, have long thought of ourselves as Anglo-Saxons.

But there is even more, for the tribes migrated through the Caucas Mountains on their trek to Eastern Europe and became known as the **Caucasians**. True to form, historians debate some of this, but it seems that the Caucasians originated in Mesopotamia and migrated north through the Caucas Mountains to Europe. It has been noted that tribes located in the Scandinavian area spoke a language similar to ancient Iranian (Persian), an early Mesopotamian dialect. Further, on historical maps, **Iberia** or **Hebrew Land** is shown to be located in the Caucas region between the Caspian and Black Seas, north of the Euphrates. Add to this the fact that **Spain** is known as the **Iberian Peninsula**, and **Ireland** is known as **Ibernion**, and our vision of the Hebrew connection enlarges even more. The ancient name of the Israelites was *Ibri* or *Iberi*, which is derived from the name *Eber* or *Heber*.

Finally, the Omri, Khumri, Cimmerian, Kymry became associated with the **Celts**, a people group associated with Britain. Add to these names others like the **Welsh (Cymry)**, the **Goths**, and the **Germans**, and the history of the hand of God in migrating the Hebrews grows even more interesting.

Again, there is so much evidence of the migration of the Hebrew-Israelites that these mere fragments do not do the subject justice.

On a personal note, I recall when I was growing up that we white people were classified as Caucasians. Interesting? I find all of this fascinating since my ancestry consists of Scottish-Irish (mostly), German, French, and Native American, to name a few.

This leads to the conclusion made by many historians, including some Orthodox Jews. The millions of dispersed Hebrew-Israelites were called by many names as they migrated from Asia Minor through the Caucas Mountain region into southeastern Europe in the many centuries before the Christian era. They formed the beginning of **the company of nations** promised to Jacob-Israel (Genesis 35:11) that became many of the modern nations of the Western World.

This leads to two questions: Who are the Hebrew-Israelites today? Where are they?