

The Myth of the 'Ten Lost Tribes'

A Thesis of Chuck Missler

- No real Biblical basis
 - Epistles of James and 1 Peter are written 'to 12 tribes'
- Prophecies of 12 tribes
 - Jacob Genesis 49
 - Moses Deuteronomy 33
- The myth is based on a misconception derived from the misreading of passages such as 2 Kings 17: 7-23 and 2 Chron. 6: 6-11
- Division of the land:
 - The tribes were allocated their land by lot, as the Lord commanded Moses Numbers 34; Joshua chapters 13-19
 - The Levites were given no land inheritance – the sacrifices of the Lord were their inheritance (Joshua 13: 14)
 - They were given cities and surrounding land from within the tribal territories Numbers 35; Joshua 21
 - Six of the Levite's cities were designated as cities of refuge



Note: Dan migrated north when driven out by Philistines

- The Kingdom Divided
 - In 930BC the land was divided by civil war – 10 tribes in the Northern kingdom (ruled by Jeroboam from Samaria) and two in the Southern kingdom (ruled by Rehoboam from Jerusalem). 1 Kings 11: 43 – 12: 33
 - When Jeroboam turned the Northern kingdom to idolatry the Levites, and others who desired to remain faithful, migrated south. 2 Chronicles 11: 14-17

- Even before the Assyrian captivity (of the northern kingdom) substantial numbers from the northern tribes had identified themselves with the house of David.
See 1 Kings 12: 16-20 and 2 Chronicles 11: 16-17
- Many repudiated the northern kingdom and united with the southern kingdom in a common alliance to the house of David and to worship the Lord.
See 2 Chronicles 19: 4; 30: 1, 10-11, 25-26; 34: 5-7, 22; 35: 17-18
- Horrified that Jeroboam set up a rival religion with golden calf worship at Bethel and Dan, many northerners moved south, knowing that the only place acceptable to God was the temple on Mt. Moriah. Deuteronomy 12: 5-7; 16: 2-6; Isaiah 18: 7
- Those who favoured idolatry migrated north to Jeroboam – this is not specifically stated in scripture but is inferred by CM
- Later, when Asa reigned as king in the south, another great company came from the north. 2 Chronicles 15: 9
- Years after the deportation by Assyria, King Hezekiah of Judah issued a call to all Israel to come and worship in Jerusalem and celebrate Passover.
2 Chronicles 30: 5-21
- 80 years later, King Josiah also issued a call, and an offering for the temple was received from Manasseh and Ephraim and all the remnant of Israel.
2 Chronicles 34: 9
- The reality is that the tribes intermingled and did not remain static in their own original allocated lands – though those geographical areas retained their names.
 - In both the northern and southern kingdoms there are people from all twelve tribes by the time of the exiles (Northern kingdom to Assyria in 740-722BC and Southern kingdom to Babylonia in 589-586BC)
 - Eventually all 12 tribes were represented in the south
 - God addresses the 12 tribes in the south...’to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin’.
2 Chronicles 11: 3
 - The tribe of Judah is sometimes used idiomatically for the southern kingdom.
2 Kings 17: 18 et al; c.f. 1 Kings 11: 13, 32 etc
- When encountering tribal designations it is important to distinguish between
 - The territories allocated to the tribes, and
 - The people themselves
- In the captivity of the Northern kingdom, CM says that less than 5% of the population was deported – the Assyrian policy was to intermingle captives from elsewhere to stifle possible revolt. However, both the biblical and Assyrian sources speak of a massive deportation of the people of Israel and their replacement with an equally large number of forced settlers from other parts of the empire – such population exchanges were an established part of Assyrian imperial policy, a means of breaking the old power structure.
 - There is no promise of return from exile of the northern kingdom
 - Thus the political entity of the Northern kingdom disappears forever
 - Samaritans are the result of the mixture of Jews and intermingled captives of other races
- In the captivity of the Southern kingdom most of the population are deported to Babylonia
 - There are specific promises of return from exile for the southern kingdom – because of David
 - This would have involved representatives from all of the 12 tribes
 - Isaiah, prophesying to Judah, refers to them as the ‘House of Jacob, which are called by the name Israel’. Isaiah 48: 1; c.f. vs. 12-14

- Comingled Terminology
 - Even before the death of Rehoboam, God looked upon all as a unity, seeing ‘all Israel in Judah and Benjamin’. 2 Chronicles 11: 3
 - After the Babylonian captivity, the terms Jew and Israelite are used interchangeably:
 - Ezra calls the returning remnant ‘Jews’ 8 times and ‘Israel’ 40 times
 - Ezra speaks of ‘all Israel’ Ezra 2: 70; 3: 11; 8: 35; 10: 25 et al
 - Nehemiah calls them ‘Jews’ 11 times and ‘Israel’ 22 times
 - Nehemiah speaks of ‘all Israel’ being back in the land Nehemiah 12: 47
 - The remnant that returned from Babylon is represented as ‘the nation’ (note: many stayed in Babylon) Malachi 1: 1

- New Testament Nomenclature
 - The Lord is said to have offered Himself to the nation... ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ Matthew 10: 5-6; 15: 24
 - The New Testament speaks of ‘Israel’ 75 times and ‘Jew’ 174 times
Acts 21: 39; 22: 3; Romans 11: 1-2; 2 Corinthian 11: 22; Philippians 3: 5, etc
 - The twelve tribes Acts 26:7; James 1: 1
 - Anna knew her tribal identity – Asher (a northern tribe) Luke 2: 30
 - Paul knew he was of the tribe of Benjamin – called himself
 - A Jew Romans 11: 1
 - An Israelite Acts 2: 14
 - Peter, in his Pentecost sermon, cries
 - ‘Ye men of Judea’ Acts 2: 14
 - ‘Ye men of Israel’ Acts 2: 22
 - ‘All the house of Israel’ Acts 2: 36
 - ❖ These are obviously synonyms

- Regathered As One
 - The Dry Bones Vision (Ezekiel 37) speaks of
 - Judah (‘Jews’), and
 - Israel (‘10 tribes’)
 - Shall be regathered as one Ezekiel 37: 16-17, 21-22
 - This is happening today
 - Note: The total physical descendants were not the people to whom the promises were made Romans 9: 4-7
 - Verse 6 ‘for they are not all Israel who are of Israel’
 - Verse 7 ‘nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham’
 - ❖ The promise was through Isaac not Ishmael

Chuck Missler’s concern is that a theology of ‘10 lost tribes’ is not biblically based and also that it will lead to conclusions that are contrary to the bible, and that it ends up in conclusions that are anti-Semitic.

My Comments

Chuck Missler’s biblical points are well made...and it is clear that at the time of exile of the southern kingdom, and in its return, and in the time of Christ, and in AD70 at the dispersion; that there were a mixture of all 12 tribes in the territory of Judah.

What Chuck Missler has not explained in this is where obviously Jewish peoples such as the Falash Mura in Ethiopia and the Bnei Menashe in N.E. India fit in. Peoples from these groups have already made aliyah and are accepted by the Jewish Immigration ministry as Jewish. It would seem these are examples of Jewish peoples who clearly in their histories and culture relate them to the exile of the northern kingdom in 722AD.

There are a number of groups claiming descent from specific 'lost tribes'

- Bene Ephraim (from southern India) - claim descent from the Tribe of Ephraim
- Bnei Menashe (from northeast India) - claim descent from the lost Tribe of Manasseh
- Persian Jews (especially the Bukharan Jews) claim descent from the Tribe of Ephraim
- Beta Israel (from Ethiopia) known as Falashas, Falash Mura or Ethiopian Jews - claim descent from the lost Tribe of Dan
- Igbo Jews of Nigeria claim descent variously from the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, Levi, Zebulun and Gad
- Samaritans numbering about 600 people - claim to be authentic descendants of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

There are however some more fanciful stories and theories of 'lost tribes' which do not seem to have and real biblical or cultural basis. One of these is 'British Israelism', sometimes called Anglo-Israelism, which claims that Anglo-Saxons are descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel.

It is these more fanciful 'lost tribe' stories that can imply that the 'lost tribe' is the real Israel and hence it can become often anti-Semitic.

For more information on 'lost tribes' – from a source that is clearly not anti-Semitic – see Shavei Israel's website. It is a Jewish organisation, whose founder and chairman, Michael Freund, is a strong advocate for the lost tribes and for Israel and the Jewish people generally. He is a well know columnist and writer and he previously served as Deputy Director of Communications & Policy Planning in the Prime Minister's Office under Benjamin Netanyahu.

See the Shavei Israel website at: <http://www.shavei.org/?lang=en>