

TAKING THE MYSTERY OUT OF THE WORD LOST

When people refer to the “lost tribes of Israel,” they usually have in mind the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom that fell to Assyria about 722 BC. These tribes are Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, and Joseph (whose tribe was divided into the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh). Most of the people of the Northern Kingdom were deported to ancient Assyria (2 Kings 17:6). Many of the Jews who remained in the land intermarried with the Assyrians.

But the story goes that, the ten northern tribes of Israel were “lost” to history and either wiped out or assimilated into other people groups. This narrative, however, is based on inference and assumption rather than on direct biblical teaching.

There are many mysteries, legends, and traditions as to what happened to the ten “lost” tribes of Israel. But, the truth is, the “lost tribes of Israel” were never really lost. Many of the Jews who remained in the land after the Assyrian conquest re-united with Judah in the south (2 Chronicles 34:6–9). Assyria was later conquered by Babylon, who went on to invade the Southern Kingdom of Israel, deporting the two remaining tribes: Judah and Benjamin (2 Kings 25:21). Remnants of the northern tribes would have thus been part of the Babylonian deportations. Seventy years later, when King Cyrus allowed the Israelites to return to Israel (Ezra 1), many (from all twelve tribes) returned to Israel to rebuild their homeland.

The idea that ten tribes of Israel were “lost” is false. God knows where all twelve tribes are, and, as the Bible itself proves, they are all accounted for. In the end times, God will call out witnesses from each of the twelve tribes (Revelation 7:4–8). So, obviously, God has been keeping track of who belongs to what tribe.

In the Gospels, the prophetess Anna (Luke 2:36) was from the tribe of Asher (one of the ten supposedly lost tribes). Anna wasn’t lost at all. Both Zechariah and Elisabeth—and therefore John the Baptist—are from the tribe of Levi (Luke 1:5). Jesus promises the disciples that they will “sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:30). Paul, who knows he is from the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1), speaks of “the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night” (Acts 26:7) – note the present tense. James addresses his epistle “to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations” (James 1:1). In short, there is ample evidence in Scripture that all twelve tribes of Israel are still in existence and will be in the Messianic kingdom. None of them are lost.

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