

A Study of the Book of Revelation

The Twelve Tribes of Israel

(Last updated 1/14/00)

The twelve tribes of Israel are mentioned in Revelation, chapters 7 and 21. Their mention is far more than a "curiosity" (as it is treated in most studies of Revelation.) Rather, God's prophetic plan through history and concluding in Revelation centers around Israel, as represented by the twelve sons of Jacob and their progeny. There are several important points to take note of in their history that help explain what God's plan for them (and the world) is all about.

BLESSINGS AND PROPHECIES

Although Israel and the Jewish people can trace themselves back to Abraham, they are commonly called the *children of Israel*, with "Israel" being another name for Jacob the grandson of Abraham. (A name given to him by God.) Before Jacob died, he met with his sons and two of his grandsons to talk to them about what would happen to them (their descendants) in the last days and convey certain blessings. (Genesis ch. 48 & 49.) One item of significance regarding this final episode, was that Jacob took the inheritance of the first born son, Reuben, and divided it up between the other sons. This was very much due to Reuben's sin (Genesis ch. 35:22) and his own lack of leadership ability.

To Judah, he gave the kingship, as well as the "leadership" role among the brothers. This was also a rebuke of Simeon and Levi, as they were #2 and #3 in line. This may have been due to the violent course of action they had taken following the rape of their sister Dinah (Genesis chapter 34). Judah was the fourth son of Leah. Regardless of his mistakes, it was he that showed the best leadership ability and commanded the respect of his brothers. It was from Judah that the kingship (scepter) would not pass until [Shiloh](#) (Messiah) would come (Genesis 49:10). As prophesied, Yeshua the Messiah came from the tribe of Judah.

To Joseph he gave a "double portion" of the land inheritance, passing it on to Manasseh and Ephraim, his sons. This was due to Joseph's righteousness as he displayed throughout his time in Egypt and to his family when they were reunited (Genesis chapters 39-47).

M'LOH HA GOYIM - THE FULLNESS OF THE GENTILES

Jacob's blessing over Joseph's children is especially important with regard to prophecy (Genesis ch. 48). At this event, Jacob deliberately switches what would be their normal order of blessing. He gives the younger son, Ephraim, the "higher" blessing of the older son. What is critical here is verse 19, where Jacob prophesies that Ephraim's descendants would be among the nations. The term he uses is *m'loh ha goyim*, or "*fullness of the gentiles*." If this phrase sounds familiar, it is because Paul uses it in Romans 11:25, when speaking of the final redemption of Israel. Paul is not speaking of "the gentiles" when he uses this term, rather he is referring to the return of the exiled ten tribes. (This will be covered in detail in our Romans study this summer.)

The name "Ephraim" itself alludes to the future dispersion among the gentiles, and subsequent redemption:

Genesis 41:52: *And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.*

Midrash Rabbah Exodus I:33: *It is the custom of the righteous to name their children from some event which has occurred. What does it say in the case of Joseph? And he called the name of the first-born Manasseh, for God hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house (Gen. XLI, 51). And the name of the second called he Ephraim; for God hath made me fruitful in the land of my affliction (ib. 52), so that he should always be mindful of the miracles God had done unto him.*

There is an interesting teaching in the Zohar concerning a vision of the future that Jacob had at the time he blesses the two boys. Jacob sees that through Ephraim, Israel would fall into terrible idolatry:

Soncino Zohar Volume I p. 228a - *When Jacob was about to bless Joseph's sons, he saw by the Holy Spirit that Jeroboam the son of Nebat would issue from Ephraim, and he exclaimed, "Who are these?", the word "these" (eleh) being an allusion to idols. The reason is that besides the evil serpent there is one that rides on it, and when they are joined together they are called "these", and they visit the world with all their hosts.*

It is also interesting to note in the above quotation from the Zohar, that there is an evil entity (spiritual idolatry) that rides upon the back of the serpent. This is similar

language to Revelation chapter 17, where the "whore" (spiritual idolatry) rides upon the beast.

ISRAEL IS DIVIDED

Towards the end of his reign, King Solomon fell into the sin of idolatry, worshipping [Ashtoreth](#), [Milcom \(Molech\)](#) and [Kemosh](#). For his idolatry God told Solomon,

I Kings 11:5 - *"Since this is your mind, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant."*

God sent the prophet Ahijah to Jeroboam, of the tribe of Ephraim, whom Solomon had made ruler over the laborers of the house of Joseph. Ahijah prophesied that God would take 10 tribes and give them to Jeroboam and if he would listen to all that God commanded him, and walk in the ways of the Lord, and do what is right in God's sight, keeping His statutes and commandments, that God would build for Jeroboam a sure house, as He had built for David, and would give Israel to him. Immediately upon hearing this, Solomon sought for the death of Jeroboam. (I Kings 11: 26-40)

Upon Solomon's death the people of Israel gathered at Shechem to make Rehoboam, Solomon's son king. Jeroboam who, until now, was in Egypt was sent for. He came together with the people to petition Rehoboam to ease the yoke that Solomon had placed upon the people of Israel. Rehoboam disregarded the counsel of his father's advisors, and instead listened to his friends whom he had grown up with. Rather than easing their burdens, he promised to be even harder than his father had been. The people rebelled and the ten northern tribes broke away from the Davidic kings of the tribe of Judah, and under the leadership of Jeroboam, the Ephraimite, set up a new kingdom. (I Kings 12:1-20)

Just as God had prophesied to Jeroboam through the prophet Ahijah, Jeroboam was king of ten tribes, and was well established, for Rehoboam's attack was stopped by God Himself. Instead of doing as God had instructed, Jeroboam sought to secure his position through establishing a system of idolatry that would ensure no contact between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

The ten northern tribes quickly fell into the same idolatry for which Solomon had been judged. Jeroboam made two golden calves and set one in Beth-El, a city of Ephraim, and the other in Dan, the principle city of the tribe of Dan. Jeroboam had reason to create his own system of worship. As all the men of Israel were required to appear in Jerusalem for the feasts of Pesakh (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost) and Succot (Tabernacles) each year, this would likely lead to a reunification of the

northern and southern kingdoms, because Jerusalem lay in the southern kingdom of Judah. Jeroboam halted this pilgrimage and filled the void of the true Temple worship by creating his own temple, priesthood and system of worship. (I Kings 12: 22-33)

The northern kingdom of Israel was never able to repent of their idolatry and for this they were judged by God. Taken captive, Ephraim and its kingdom were eventually scattered throughout the nations never returning to Israel, just as Jacob has prophesied. Hosea, who was a prophet to the ten northern tribes, speaks of their sin and future reunification, especially in chapters 11-13.

EPHRAIM AND DAN IN REVELATION

Ephraim and Dan both sinned with regard to Jeroboam's actions. Ephraim's sin was the institution of a false system of worship. (Jeroboam was an Ephraimite.) Dan's sin was one of "accommodation," as the tribe of Dan allowed the golden calf to reside within its territory.

This sin committed by Ephraim and Dan is significant, as these two tribes are not among those listed in Revelation chapter 7. Although there are [different groupings of the tribes throughout Scripture](#), this is the only time where Ephraim and Dan are missing (replaced by Joseph and Manasseh). Searching Scripture, it would seem that the sin of *idolatry within the land of Israel*, has its "payback" in the last days, when these two tribes are deprived of the opportunity to testify of the Messiah. It should be noted however, that according to Ezekiel, both tribes receive their land grant in the Millennium.

There is an interesting verse in the Zohar that links Ephraim to the "church" at Laodicea found in chapter three of Revelation:

Soncino Zohar Volume II p. 67b - *“And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out power”, namely, the celestial unholy power which presided over the act of idolatry committed by Jeroboam (I Kings XII, 28), without which he would not have been able to succeed. Now, when this king and this priest of the “other side” are subdued, and their power broken, all the “other sides” follow suit, and are also subdued and broken, and acknowledge the sovereignty of the Holy One, and in this way He alone rules above and below, as it is written: “And the Lord alone will be exalted in that day” (Isa. II, 11).*

The phrase "... *I am become rich*" is quite similar to Revelation 3:17, and is related to the last days when the Lord's name will be made one (*echad* - see below. See also the book of Hosea, especially chapters 11-13.)

THE REUNIFICATION OF EPHRAIM AND JUDAH

One of the important results of the end-time events that lead to the return of the Messiah is the reunification of the "lost tribes" of Israel/Ephraim with their brethren. "All of Israel" (the entire twelve tribes) cannot be saved unless they are all brought back into a unity (*echad*). It is necessary for those of Israel who are "lost" among the nations (Ephraim, the "*fullness of the gentiles*") to come back in, and only then can this happen. This is the point of the "mystery" of Romans 11:25.

The concept of "*echad*" (unity) is key to understanding not only Revelation but all of Scripture. (This will be covered in great detail later in this study.) Although Scripture says that God is *echad* (Deuteronomy 6:4), we also know that at the present time, things are not as they should be between Him, Israel and the rest of His creation. That is why the prophet Zechariah says that, "*In that day, the Lord's name will be one.*"

So, although Deuteronomy 6:4 is a statement of fact, it is also a prophecy that will be fulfilled at the return of Yeshua and beginning of the Messianic kingdom.

Shiloh: Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b - *The world was created only on David's account .24 Samuel said: On Moses account;25 R. Johanan said: For the sake of the Messiah. What is his [the Messiah's] name? — The School of R. Shila said: His name is **Shiloh**, for it is written, until Shiloh come.* [◀ Back](#)

Ashtoreth: Principal female divinity of the Phoenicians, called Ishtar by the Assyrians and Astarte by the Greeks and Romans. Closely related to Asherah and Venus.

Talmud, Shabbath 56b - *Rather it is as was taught: R. Jose said, and the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for **Ashtoreth** the abomination of Moab. Now, is it possible that Assa came and did not destroy them, then Jehoshaphat, and he did not destroy them, until Josiah came and destroyed them! But surely Assa and Jehoshaphat destroyed all the idolatrous cults in Palestine? Hence [the explanation is that] the earlier are assimilated to the later: just as the later did not do, yet it was ascribed to them, to their glory, so the earlier ones too did not do, yet it was ascribed to them, to their shame. But it is written, And Solomon did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord? — But because he should have restrained his wives, but did not, the Writ regards him as though he sinned.*

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Kemosh, Milcom (Molech): The fire god of Ammonites. Essentially identical with the Moabite god Kemosh. The worship of Molech included child sacrifice. Molech was fashioned with the face of calf, with outstretched hands upon which infants were burned. The country of the Ammonites was his possession according to Jeremiah 49:1.

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