

Is the Church Ephraim?

In investigation into the theory that Believers are descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel.

By Jack Carstens

Some of our brothers and sisters in the Lord have been following the teachings of Barbara Wooten, Eddie Chumney and others, mainly from the USA, that contend that the 10 northern tribes that were part of the Assyrian exile in 722BC, were scattered abroad and are lost. They further contend that the true church of Messiah is the descendants of these lost tribes. They are therefore urging the true church to rediscover their Hebrew roots and to return to Torah. They further contend that the church (Ephraim) will be reunited with the tribes of Judah (the Jews) and return to Israel in the end times.

There are several implications involved in accepting this theory, so we should first examine the foundational premises that lead the originators to their proposition and secondly discuss the impact it has on evangelism to the Jewish world.

As we review the evidence, let us remember that we are discussing the matter in love, as we are talking about people that seek the Lord and want to serve Him in Spirit and in truth.

- 1. Proposition number one. “The 10 tribes separated themselves from the two southern tribes. They were taken into exile by the Assyrians in 722 BC, from where they were scattered and “lost”.**

The Northern tribes broke away from the Judean tribes after King Solomon’s death around 900 BC. The Bible tells us that the division was more of a land separation than a pure tribal break up of the kingdom. Consequently, not all the northern tribesmen were taken into exile. Here are some Biblical references that substantiate the fact that the tribes were intermingled within Judah after the northern tribes formed their own kingdom:

- a) For a start, Priests from the tribe of Levy stayed to continue the Temple service and worship. Those that joined the northern kingdom were expelled by Rehoboam and returned to Jerusalem. (2 Chron. 11:13-14). The Levites were still doing temple service when the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.
- b) The Bible says that many “out of all the tribes of Israel” defected to the south to join king Jehoboam because they wanted to stay faithful to the Lord. (2 Chron. 11:16-17).
- c) During King Asa’s reign in Judah, people from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon “fell to him out of Israel in abundance” when they saw the Lord his God was with King Asa. (2 Chron. 15:9).
- d) When the Assyrian exile later occurred, the Assyrians took only the learned and most able people into exile. According to the Talmud, some 27 000 people in all from the northern tribes were taken to Assyria.
- e) After the Assyrians conquered Israel, King Hezekiah reigned in Judah and invited the remnant of the tribes of Israel to turn to the Lord: “You children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, and He will return to the remnant of you that escaped out of the hand of the king of Assyria”. (2 Chron. 30:1-13).

Clearly, there was not a clear cut distinction between the northern and southern tribes and many northerners mingled with the southern tribes. Those that mingled with Judah were not “lost”.

The Babylonian Exile.

When the southern kingdom was taken into exile by the Babylonians, those exiled from both kingdoms of Israel soon found themselves part of the new empire of the Persians and the Medes that included Assyria and Babylon.

a) According to the book of Nehemia, all 12 tribes were in contact with each other. When the Jews returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple, members of all 12 tribes were asked to join the more than 40 000 people that returned. Those that returned to Jerusalem built an altar and made a sacrifice on behalf of all 12 tribes in Jerusalem. (Ezra 6:17).

There is, therefore, ample evidence to show that the 10 tribes were not “lost” by the time the Temple was rebuild in 425BC.

2. Proposition number two. “Only the tribes of Judah returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and only they are called Jews (Jahudaim), as the rest of the 10 tribes had disappeared and became Gentiles”.

It should be clear from the above that all 12 tribes were dispersed throughout the empire of the Medes and Persians and a remnant of all 12 tribes returned to rebuild the Temple. The book of Esther is clear on that question since Haman gave orders for all the Jews that had migrated to all 120 provinces of the empire to be killed. Note that the people from both the exiles were now spread out over the entire empire, from Assyria to India and even into Africa. Esther calls all her countrymen “Jews”. They all still spoke Hebrew as the notice given by the king for the Jews to defend themselves was written in their “own language”. All 12 tribes in exile were collectively called “Jews”.

This makes nonsense of the idea that only people from the tribe of Judah and Benjamin are called Jews and the other tribes are now Gentile believers.

3. Proposition number three. “Jesus only came to save “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24).

a) If Jesus came to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and this is interpreted to mean He came to save the lost 10 tribes of Israel, then what was He doing in Israel? If the people He came to save were scattered and lost in the Diaspora, why was Jesus ministering to the Jews in Galilee and Jerusalem?

b) We note that Jesus very rarely spoke to anyone other than Jews according to the Gospels. There are only three incidents mentioned where Jesus speaks to non Jews - the Roman centurion whose servant was healed, the Samaritan woman at the well and the Philo-Phonessian woman begging for “the crumbs for the dogs”. There is no indication that this scripture should be interpreted in any other way than that He came to save first the Jew and then the Gentile.

c) The salvation message has its origins in the Abrahamic covenant when God promised Abraham that He will make a nation of Abraham and that through his seed “all the families of the earth will be blessed”. Israel was chosen to be the vehicle of

God's redemption, not to usurp the salvation message primarily for themselves, but to be the light to the world. (Isaiah 11.xx).

- d) It soon became clear to all Jesus' Disciples that God loves the whole world and gave His only Son so that "all may be saved". (John.3: 16). This becomes apparent in the New Millennium when the redeemed sing "Worthy are You to take the book and break the seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." (Rev.5:9).

4. Proposition number four. If the tribes were scattered and lost after 722 BC, then they must have been lost when Jesus ministered in Israel 700 odd years later.

- a. This is not what the Bible says: The Gospels mention Anna the prophetess from the tribe of Asher, who saw Jesus and blessed Him in Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36).
- b. The Apostle James, the brother of Jesus, writes his letter to the "12 tribes of Israel". (James1:1). (About 60 AD).
- c. Joshephus, a Jewish historian in the time of Jesus, writes about the tribes and refers to the 12 tribes of Israel in the Diaspora. (About 30 AD).
- d. Speaking after Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter spoke to Jews from "every nation under the sun" (Acts2:3) and says "let all the house of Israel know" that God has made Jesus Lord. (Acts 2:36).
- e. If the 10 tribes were scattered, lost and assimilated into the Gentile populations of the world more than 2 700 years ago, there would be no trace of these descendants after the forth or fifth generation. If a generation is measured as 40 years, the 10 tribes were lost some 67 generations ago! How could Gentiles today possibly still have Ephraimite or Israelite blood in them?

As we know from History, the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD and most of the surviving Jews were taken into exile as slaves by the Romans. The Jewish people were scattered throughout the world. By the grace of God, many kept their Jewish identity and the remnant of all 12 tribes have come back to the land of Israel since its establishment in 1948. In the interim, the Word of God has been carried to the Gentiles who have accepted and believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and His Son, Yeshua HaMashiach.

5. Taking on the identity of the Lost Tribes instead of the identity of Christ. Setting oneself up for failure.

If one identifies with the idea that one is a long lost member of the ten tribes, one is obliged to assume the Hebrew identity that comes along with it. According to the proponents of the Ephraim movement, their followers are obliged to revert to living under Torah as part of their Hebrew roots. Conversely, by not keeping Torah lifestyle, one would not be living righteously before God.

The red herring in this scenario is not that there is something wrong with Torah, but that it is impossible to keep Torah! Torah has been codified into 613 laws. There are 613 tassles at the end of a prayer shawl. By viewing it, you are saying I adhere to all the Laws of Torah, and this is my righteousness before God. If living a Torah lifestyle brought about righteousness, then why was it necessary for Jesus to tell Nicodemus, a Torah observant Jew, that he could not enter into the kingdom of God without being born again? (John 3: 3).

Can any person, past or present keep all of Torah? Surely not! Even less so after the destruction of the Temple as all the Levitical laws pertaining to the Temple sacrifice have become impossible to perform.

As believers, our new identity is in Christ. We are New Covenant people. As New Covenant people, our lives are directed and guided by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit will write the law (Torah) on our hearts. We end up honouring God with a Torah lifestyle, not because we are of the ten lost tribes, but because of our new identity in Christ.

The Apostle Paul sums it up with these words: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom.8.1-4).

The Holy Spirit empowers us to keep the laws of God, whereas encouraging people to live under Torah for the sake of righteousness, is setting them up for failure in the kingdom of God.

6. How does the Ephraim theory impact negatively on Jewish Evangelism?

- a) The Jewish people see the Ephraimite movement as an attempt to replace the Jewish nation. There are roughly 14 million Jews in the world while Gentile believers could number several hundred million. The Jews think Ephraimite/Gentiles are “meshugena” and are certainly not provoked to jealousy by the Ephraim movement.
- b) The movement is elitist. According to the Ephraimites, it is mainly those Gentiles that are of the bloodline of the 10 lost tribes that are coming to faith in Jesus as Messiah and that constitute the “true” church. This begs the question: What happens to the other Gentiles? Is their faith suspect?
The elitism is further compounded by some Ephraimites that have added a racist element to their argument by stating that the lost 10 tribes are all of white, Anglo-Saxon heritage, thus excluding blacks from entry into the kingdom of God.(This is a throwback to the heresy of British Israelism). The Ephraimite message undermines the great power of the claims of the Apostolic Writings. It tries to change a message of hope and comfort for all peoples, regardless of their heritage and station in life, into a race-based plan of salvation for those with the “proper” bloodlines.
- c) The Ephraimite Gentile believers are making things difficult for the true Jewish Messianic believers who are trying to bring the Gospel to the rest of the Jewish people. The Jews are now being confused by Gentile believers who say they are from the “lost” tribes of Israel. They have no genealogical or DNA proof for their statements but insist that they are descendants from the “lost” tribes of Israel.
- d) The writings of the Apostle Paul concerning the Gentile’s requirement to adhere to aspects of Torah (like circumcision) have become problematic to the Ephraimites, so that new adherents to the faith are confused by Paul’s so called “contradictions” in

his epistles to the Gentile churches. How confusing can that be when talking to Jewish people about faith in Yeshua?

Brief Remarks on Conclusion.

If there are any present day Gentiles whose forefathers were from the lost tribes, that lineage has been broken because of intermarriage and the many generations that have transpired since then.

The Ephraimites encourage their converts to keep a Torah lifestyle. This may sound acceptable, except that the Torah has been codified into 613 laws, many of them are connected to the temple service and sacrifices and can not, therefore, be kept. The Bible also makes it clear that if a person wants to remain under Torah, then he or she will have to keep all of Torah and will be judged by Torah.(2 Thes.2:4) If the Temple is rebuilt some time in the future and the Ephraimites want to adhere to Torah, they will have to participate in animal sacrifices as an offering for their sins, in that way completely nullifying the work of Christ on the cross.

The message of the Bible is that we are to become disciples of Jesus by repenting and believing that Jesus died for our sins, being baptized and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. It then becomes the work of the Holy Spirit to enable us to keep that part of Torah that is still relevant for our walk with God. The Spirit will lead us in a life pleasing to Him and bearing much fruit for His kingdom.

You can read further detail in “Is the Church Ephraim?” A 90 page book on the subject with more biblical and historical evidence and the results of genealogical research showing the error of the Ephraim theorists. To order, contact Jack Carstens at 021 5592958 or email at jech@mweb.co.za.
