



# Lost Israel's 'Further Country'

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The apocryphal book of 2 Esdras reads as follows.

'These are the Ten Tribes, which were carried away prisoners out of their own land in the time of Osea the king, whom Salmanesar, the king of Assyria, led away captive, and he led them over the waters, and so came they into another land. But they took this counsel among themselves, that they would leave the multitude of the heathen, and go forth into a **further country**, where never mankind dwelt... And they entered into Euphrates by the narrow passages of the river... For through that country there was a great way to go, namely of a year and a half; and the same region is called Arsareth.'

2 Esdras ch.13 vv 40-45

This fascinating passage cannot be classified as a mere prophecy, subject perhaps to later Divine modification, but an actual historical account, after the fact, of the location of the tribes of the House of Israel many years after their forced exile by Assyria. Where is this 'further country' that is defined as being an open, unsettled territory? This description automatically discounts the lands to the south and east of the Israel tribes' last known locations in the upper reaches of the Assyrian Empire. Could they have instead migrated north and west?

We know for certain at least three locations where the ten tribes of the House of Israel were first settled by the Assyrians.

'In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.'

2 Kings ch.17 v.6

The first two locations are in the far northern region of Mesopotamia, at various times controlled by Assyria: Halah was twelve miles north of Nineveh on the Khosr River, a tributary of

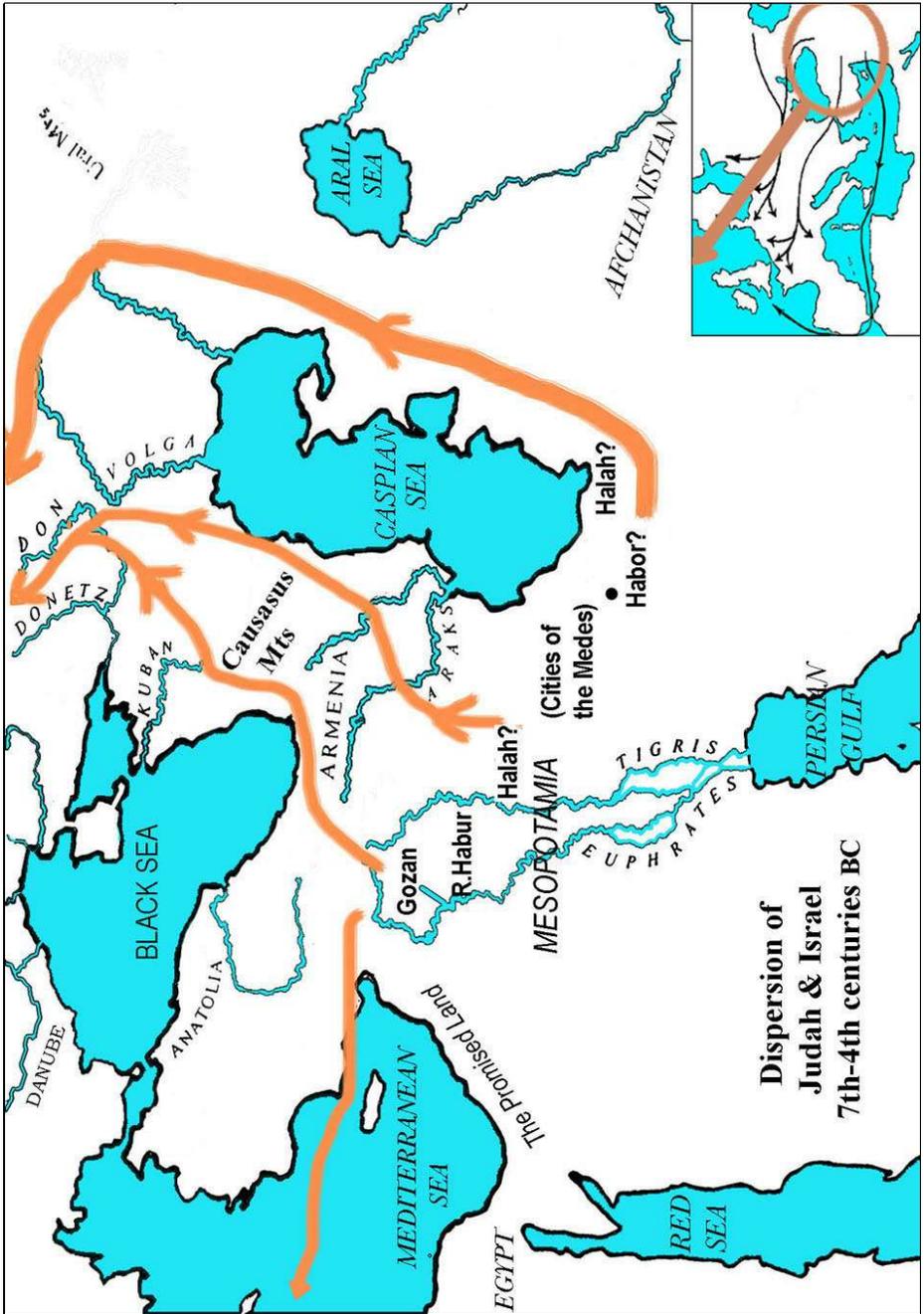
the Tigris River; Habor/Gozan is modern Tell Halaf on the upper course of the Euphrates, in a broad geographical area known as Aram-Anatolia. In contrast, the term, 'cities of the Medes' refers to places such as Rages in today's north western Iran, far to the east, which is cited in the apocryphal book of Tobit.

Esdras informs us that the ten tribes did not remain in these locations. The areas to the north of Assyria proper were very rugged, mountainous territory where travel was often difficult. Yet there were definite pathways out of the area. An interesting look at these natural migratory routes appeared in *The Bulletin of the Middle Eastern Culture Centre in Japan*, volume 10 (1998). The geography of northern Assyria can be described as a series of mountain ranges and 'intermontane plains;' that is, characterised as long narrow valleys surrounded by nearly impassable mountains.

With such imposing mountains blocking travel, there were two main river valleys that the migrating lost tribes had to choose from: 'The Aras and the Upper Euphrates valleys together formed the main east-west corridor between ... eastern Anatolia and the annexed Transcaucasia' (ibid. pp.138-139). Both of these 'escape routes' led to the Caucasus Mountain region, the gateway to Europe. In fact, the same scholarly source informs us, 'archaeological records suggest that natural route was used by nomadic tribes ...' (ibid).

Historical records enlighten us, for example, that tribes fleeing the Assyrians had taken that exact route as far back as 1112 B.C. Assyrian records state that during the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (Assyrian: Tukultiapal-Esarra, 1115-1077 BC) a military campaign in Anatolia resulted in the defeat of local tribes, whereupon the defeated 'warriors retreated to the safety of the Black Sea region' (ibid p.142). The Assyrians referred to the Black Sea area bordering the Caucasus Mountains as 'the Upper Sea', and as the 'Upper Sea of the West' (ibid). The Black Sea is part of south-eastern Europe; is this Assyrian record implying that some or all of these tribes escaped from Anatolia into Europe?

Of additional interest is the phrase used by Esdras, quoted above, describing a geographic detail of their direction of travel: '...they entered into Euphrates by the narrow passages of the river'. This indicates the upper northern course of the Euphrates just south of the Caucasus Mountains, and designates a north west direction of travel, following the direction of that river. Similarly, we find that in the aforementioned Assyrian inscription, Tiglath-pileser's troops pursuing defeated tribes toward the Black Sea were said to have crossed the



**Dispersion of  
Judah & Israel  
7th-4th centuries BC**

Euphrates' upper course, using possibly the same route travelled by Israel's 'lost tribes' centuries later.

If the 'lost tribes' had migrated eastward, then Esdras would have mentioned them crossing the Tigris River rather than the Euphrates. It seems apparent that the prophet was specifically speaking of those Israel tribes settled in Halah and Habor/Gozan in the northern reaches of Assyria. Given the geological restrictions of their mountainous region of exile, they would have been most likely to have followed the open geographical pathways toward the Caucasus and Europe. In contrast, those Israelites settled far to the east in 'the cities of the Medes' may in fact have found an easier escape route by migrating eastward beyond the far side of the Caspian Sea towards Afghanistan and then northward into western Asia. So it is likely that there was more than one escape route of the lost tribes of Israel into the 'further country' mentioned by Esdras in his historical account.

Esdras also remarked that the lost tribes 'would leave the multitude of the heathen' behind them as they migrated. The word, 'heathen' (Hebrew, goyim), literally means 'nations' and often has a secondary disparaging meaning in reference to the religious practices of non-Hebrews (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). In the first sense, northern Europe was the only extensive geographical area of the known world at that time which was nearly uninhabited. Secondarily, in a pejorative sense, the heathen nations and false religions that Israel was warned against by the prophets were all in the Middle East, Arabia, and Egypt, not in northern Europe.

Is there evidence in Europe of Semitic-speaking peoples arriving in early times? Famed Indo-European scholar V. Gordon Childe commented that 'The Indo-European word for axe [peleku] seems to be of Sumero-Akkadian origin ... This implies that the metal reached the steppe from the Mesopotamian region ...' (*The Aryans: A Study of Indo-European Origins*, pp.87, 185-6). Similarly, the Latin securia or 'battle-ax' originated in the Akkadian, sukurru. The early country of Akkad, also known as Chaldea, was the birthplace of Abraham.

More recent scholarship has built upon this finding. In the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies #25 (May, 1993), Professor Stuart C. Brown of the Memorial University of Newfoundland postulated the theory that the original Indo-European homeland 'lay in West Asia' in the region of Aram-Anatolia. He writes, '... the earliest recorded Indo-European languages are those from the second millennium [BC] of Anatolia' (p.12). He quotes two noted Russian linguists, T.V. Gamkrelidze and V.V. Ivanov, who 'argued for an Anatolian homeland by pointing to numerous correspondences

between the subgroup and Semitic and Caucasian languages, a phenomenon which also suggests long geographical proximity' (p.14).

These Russian scholars pinpoint the location of the Indo-European homeland '... somewhere in the crescent that curves around the southern shores of the Black Sea, south from the Balkan peninsula, east across ancient Anatolia and north to the Caucasus mountains. This location is also suggested by the frequency in Indo-European of loan-words from the Sumerian, Semitic, and Kartvelian (Caucasian) languages ...' (ibid p.16).

Although the original Indo-European homeland is still a matter of scholarly debate, it is significant that a number of important words used in Europe had their origin in Semitic languages found in Anatolia and Chaldea. The Biblical Israelites had many connections with both places, as Abraham and his relatives had called both places home, and exiled Israelites were also resettled there before migrating away to the 'further country' recorded by Esdras. It also may not be coincidence that the famed *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* states that the early Britons originated in Armenia, whose name is derived from the word, 'Aram'. (Read about this interesting connection in *The Story of Celto-Saxon Israel*, appendix 12, available from CBIA at [www.migrations.info](http://www.migrations.info)).

Most Christians, of course, assume that all of the ten tribes returned to Canaan after Assyria fell. But leading modern Mid-east scholars disagree. Professor Lester Grabbe, in *Leading Captivity Captive: The Exile As History And Ideology*, observed that according to the prophet Isaiah, 'Only members of the Southern Kingdom [two-tribe Judah] return, not those from the Northern Kingdom [ten tribe House of Israel]. It is also clear that only a small portion of those in captivity return.' (p.96) Dr J. Garrow Duncan, in *New Light On Hebrew Origins*, commented on the era after Israel's exile from Canaan, 'As for central Palestine, the ancient realm of Ephraim, it was inhabited by an extremely mixed population of Assyrian settlers who associated themselves with the ancient Israelites... But the centre of gravity and the vital forces ... were elsewhere — they were among the colonies of the Diaspora, established among the nations' (p.97).

The Bible gives no indication that the exile from Canaan of the ten tribes of the House of Israel ever ended. In fact, neither biblical nor secular history records any significant return of the lost tribes of Israel from their Assyrian exile. Where did they go? Language and geographic factors help us to identify Europe as the 'further country' in the historical record of Esdras.

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