

Your Roots Your Destiny

Introduction: Solving the Mystery of the Lost Ten Tribes

Does God keep His promises? Would He be willing to have and maintain a close relationship with a human like me?

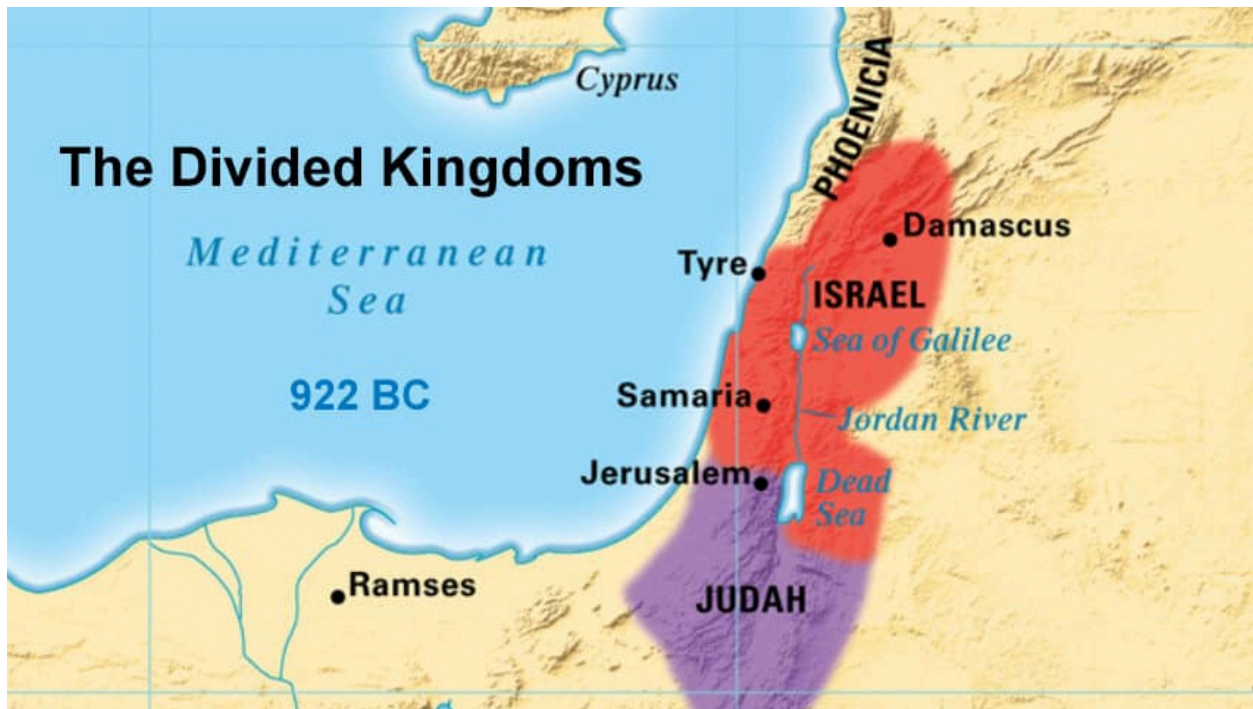
I don't kid myself about being holy or perfect. There are even those occasions when I feel rebellious or tempted. Sometimes I do my own thing and I don't want to listen to the Divine Authority Figure who tells me what is right or wrong. I admit it! There are moments when I think I know best and I behave like a spiritual teenager who won't pay attention to His heavenly Father's instructions. It seems as though I have to learn some things the hard way.

So why would an omnipotent God having all the power of the universe at His command want to keep up an on-going relationship with the likes of me? Wouldn't a righteous, *holy* God eventually lose patience with my repeated mistakes and character flaws? Can I really depend on the Almighty to be there for me in spite of myself? After all, how can the Perfect One put up with the seemingly imperfectable? Why would He even want to bother?

Many people want a relationship with God these days. They're interested in a spirituality that produces personal happiness and contentment. This is a search to know and to be known by God. They would agree with the statement that "happy is the nation whose God is the Lord. Happy are the people he chose for his very own" (Psalm 33:12, ICB). But the big problem with this generalized desire for spirituality is that many people know neither what this Supreme Being is really like nor what He requires from those who would like to build a relationship with Him. People today don't know their spiritual roots. They don't understand the nature of the covenant relationships that the Almighty and His Messiah offer to both individuals and whole communities.

The purpose of this writing is to help reveal answers to these questions about God. The example chosen to help impart this spiritual knowledge is that of the ancient Ten Tribes of Israel, who have become lost to the view of the secular world. Most biblical scholars think the Ten Tribes of Israelites simply ceased to exist when their political state called the Kingdom of Israel was conquered in the late 8th century B.C., and its inhabitants ethnically cleansed from their Promised Land.

Those northern Ten Tribes were historically distinct and politically separate for over 200 years from their brothers of the southern Two Tribes—eventually nicknamed "Jews"—who formed the Kingdom of Judah. Today everyone knows what happened to the Jews over the centuries because the Jews kept a knowledge of who they were and preserved written records of



their history. However, according to mainstream scholarly opinion, the national, ethnic identity of the northern Ten Tribes was completely destroyed by war, disease, and assimilation. As a consequence, 10 of the original 12 tribes of Hebrews who left Egypt under Moses, conquered Canaan with Joshua, and built the magnificent Temple with Solomon, ceased to exist. They seemingly vanished, disappeared. They became lost, at least to the eyes of those writing history books.

That is certainly true. The Israelites of the northern Ten Tribes dropped out of sight. Nevertheless, this does not mean they ceased to exist. Perhaps a better description of what really happened to the Ten Tribes of Israel was that they were gradually but purposely hidden! After all, what are we to make of the scores of biblical prophecies that portray the descendants of the northern Ten Tribes as continuing to play significant roles on the world stage through time? Should the historical story and prophesied future of a majority of the people called “chosen” by God be considered unknowable, or maybe fictitious?

Many modern biblical scholars no longer believe that there really is such a thing as prophecy—a divinely inspired foretelling of future events. Such critics usually look at a message written by one of the biblical prophets as merely a historic and perhaps moralistic recounting of what had already happened. The idea that prophecy is tomorrow’s news written in advance is given short shrift. Authoritative statements in the Bible made in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel are often dismissed as mere pious hyperbole, hellfire-and-brimstone preaching, or maybe obscure spiritual metaphor. But the Bible’s own explanation about the

nature of prophecy categorically states that it is an advance revelation of how God Almighty plans to intervene in the affairs of individuals, nations, and the entire world:

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. Do not fear, or be afraid: have I not told you from of old and declared it? You [“Israel whom I have chosen,”] are my witnesses (Isaiah 44:6-8, NRSV)!

People who assume that God is dead or never existed in the first place are making a mistake. But it is an understandable mistake. To see things spiritually is a gift given by grace. Human materialistic thought cannot comprehend divine spiritual understanding. The apostle Paul made this point clear:

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength (1 Corinthians 1:20-25, NRSV).

Relationships of Faith

God defines spirituality by covenant relationships, which are life-long relationships. In our age the best remaining example of a covenant relationship is that of marriage between a man and a woman.

As a practical form of social organization and behaviour, covenant-based relationships in the West have become almost obsolete, the fragile institution of marriage remaining the most noteworthy vestige of such relationships.... The extent to which modern and Western students of the Bible can conceive and imagine relationships built upon little more than promises reliably made and honourably kept is a problem to the modern person seeking to understand a covenant relationship.¹

Despite much confusion and misunderstanding, sometimes in our Western democracies’ modern legal systems we can still discover something of the true nature of an ancient covenant relationship. Did you know that a partner to a marriage may still have an *inextinguishable legal claim* to financial support *on the other partner to that covenant* even though many years previously that marriage “ended” with a divorce ruling that did not stipulate financial support? That was precisely the position of a recent Supreme Court of Canada ruling. Surprised? The judgment shocked a great many Canadian divorcees who thought their bank accounts were forever safe from their “ex” because they had some legal paper they thought absolved them from any future responsibility to take care of their old covenant partner!

In spiritual matters, a covenant defines a relationship based on faith. From the perspective of the Bible, God is a permanently faithful Father and we as His children are to imitate that faithfulness. Once established, a spiritual covenant between the perfect Divinity and some part of imperfect humanity creates an enduring relationship that features *inextinguishable*

¹ *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, p. 1179.

responsibilities and *abiding claims* according to the terms of that covenant. A distinguishing feature of all ancient Middle Eastern covenants was that they were based on promises.

For I [God] have chosen him [Abraham], that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has *promised* him (Genesis 18:19, NRSV).

As the Greek Scriptures point out, the ultimate promise that God made to Abraham and his descendants was that they would inherit the world and eternal life (cf. Romans 4:13; Luke 16:22-26). This promise made by God to Abraham and his descendants was accepted by Abraham in an attitude of such complete and total trust that our cynical age finds it extremely hard to even begin to understanding this, much less emulate it.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland (Hebrews 11:8-14).

Yes, Abraham, a mortal human, did not receive in his lifetime the fulfillment of God’s promises. But he had faith it would come to pass in the future at a time deemed appropriate by the ever-living Being who was his covenant partner. God gave Abraham fantastic almost *incredible* promises. But Abraham did not stagger in disbelief at God’s words. Rather he was strong in faith being fully persuaded that what God had promised, He would perform (cf. Romans 4:21). So between a fallible man and the infallible God a covenant relationship based on faith was created.



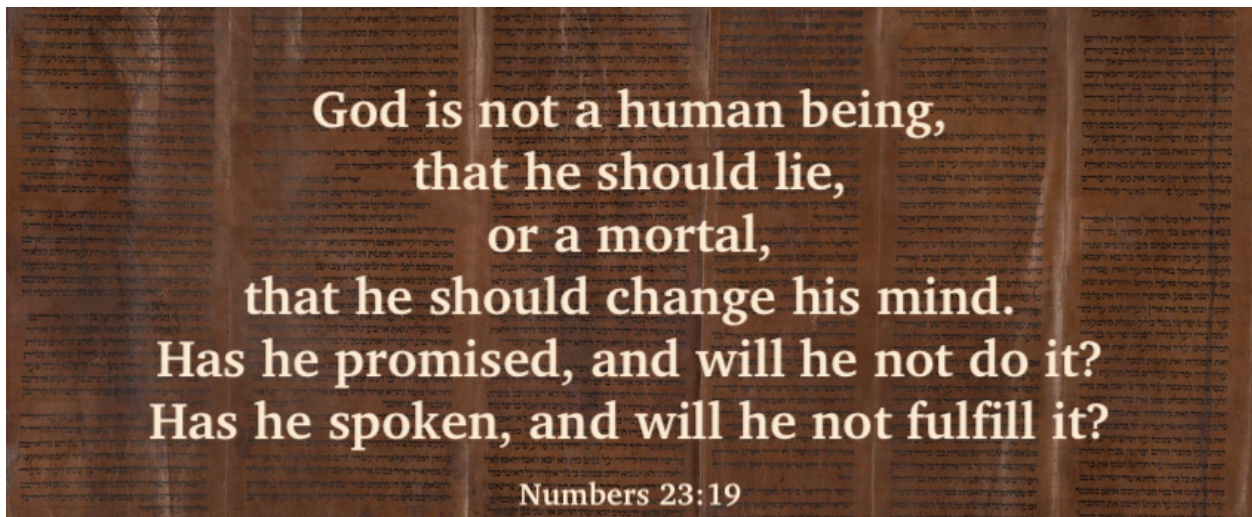
To both the spiritual and the physical seed of Abraham were given amazing, inextinguishable covenantal promises and divine prophecies (“And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise,” Galatians 3:29, NRSV). But in our day it is surprising how many scholars, commentators, and others believe that those promises shouldn’t be given much weight when it comes to their literal fulfillment, their real expression and concrete realization.

A majority of biblical commentators are too polite to say outright that God lied to Abraham. However, the practical implication of many of their interpretations of prophetic Scriptures implies God was either exaggerating at best, or maybe prevaricating at worst. Often such critical commentators use allegorical reasoning or intellectual circumlocutions to resolve what they consider to be an apparent *failure* of the *literal* meaning of the word of God. At least this is typically the clear implication when it comes to the historic, prophetic fate of the Ten Tribes of Israel, who seem to have been lost forever!

Did God really get so angry with those imperfect ancient Israelites’ repeated mistakes, character flaws, and rebelliousness that He decided not to honour His covenantal responsibilities and promises? Did He decide to void the many prophecies that He inspired His prophets to write down in Scripture? Did God change His mind so that the Scriptures don’t really mean what they explicitly say?

If that is true, then the implications for you and me are indeed sobering. After all, if we are really going to have any confidence in a future beyond this present short existence, our faith can only be based on the reliability of the Word of God. Is He faithful to His promises written in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures? Or have we believed some divine promises that are no longer valid because God changed His mind?

Is God really the forgiving, merciful and faithful Being as portrayed by Scripture? Perhaps you are a holy Joe who has never made mistakes or given in to temptation or anger. But



I know that I must at least occasionally try the Father and Son's patience! There is a lot at stake here! Frankly I depend on the inspired truthfulness of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures:

As for Scripture, it is all divinely inspired, being serviceable for teaching, for convicting men of their errors, for showing them the right way, for training them for a righteous life, the aim of it all being that the man in the service of God should become a master of his craft, being fully equipped to do good works of every kind (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Cassirer).

The Scriptures claim to be the authoritative, revealed Word of the Living God. Anyone with a bona fide claim to the label Christian must acknowledge being "built upon the foundation of the apostles *and prophets*, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20, NRSV). All the writings of those apostle and prophets concur that God keeps His promises and is worthy of trust!

God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? (Numbers 23:19, NRSV).

Sure, faith like Abraham's is out of fashion today. Our secular world believes in Darwinian relativism rather than Divine inspiration. Such unbelief is the wellspring of much of what is acceptable, politically correct mainstream thought. But what is the fruit of such a relativistic bias? What is produced in the lives of those seduced by it? The answer should be clear: selfishness, materialism, and meaninglessness. The only real antidote is faith; assurance that what God has promised he will perform.

The story of *what* happened to ancient Israel and *why* is one of the great mysteries of the world. But a good detective can unveil the essential clues and determine the correct conclusions to answer this spiritual "who-dunnit." The truth about the fate of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel is indeed stranger than fiction. But most importantly there is a great spiritual lesson to be learned from this story: God is *always* faithful to His promises!

For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished (Malachi 3:6, NRSV).

Now isn't that good news for you and me! Truly divine faithfulness is the key to understanding the actual historic fate of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. So, let's play the detective and examine those clues relevant to this mystery, beginning at our story's genesis.

