

Last of Ten Tribes

SIMEON

‘Scattered in Israel’



**By
W. E. Filmer**

Simeon Last of the Ten Tribes 'Scattered in Israel'



WHEN THE AGED JACOB FORETOLD THE FATE OF HIS TWELVE SONS, he declared, 'Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. O my soul, come not into their council; O my spirit, be not joined to their company; for in their anger they slay men, and in their wantonness they hamstring oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath for it is cruel!

I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel[1]. Probably Simeon and Levi were thus cursed on account of their cruel treatment of the men of Shechem who had defiled their young sister Dinah: 'Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly,

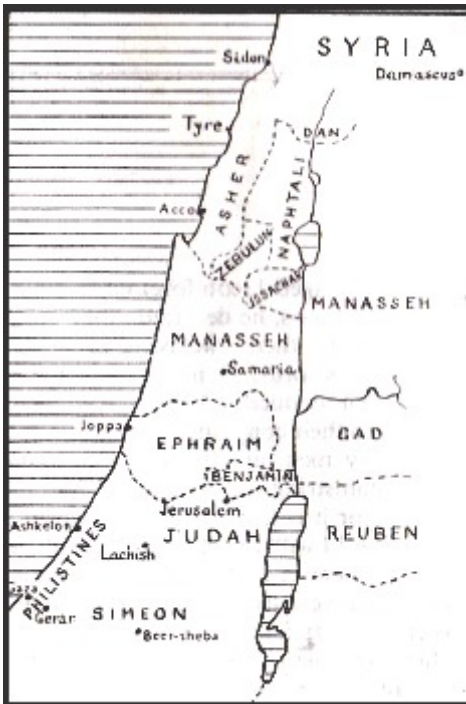
and slew all the males[2].

Many years later the tribe of Levi redeemed itself on the occasion when Moses, returning from Mount Sinai with the tables of the law, found the Israelites worshipping the golden calf. 'Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves unto him[3].

The Levites were then honoured by being made the priestly tribe, and the Lord said, 'Command the children of Israel that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in[4].

Simeon—Scattered in Judah

Consequently, when Joshua divided the promised land among the various tribes, he gave the Levites no territory of their own, but they were allocated cities in each of the other tribes, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Jacob that they would be scattered in Israel[5]. Simeon likewise received no territory, for 'their inheritance was within the inheritance of the children of Judah'[6].



Israel showing Tribal Territories

Among the towns allocated to them were Beer-sheba, proverbially the most southerly limit of the promised land[7], and Ziklag on the frontier with the Philistines. Reference to a Bible atlas will show that the other Simeonite cities were the most southerly of all the cities of Judah.

Now, following the death of Solomon, only two tribes remained loyal to the house of David, namely Judah and Benjamin in whose tribal territory lay the capita! city, Jerusalem. Of the remaining ten tribes, six and a half were situated to the north, while two and a half had their territory east of Jordan, namely Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh. The Simeonites in the extreme south were thus cut off from the northern tribes by the intervening territory of Judah in the west, and by the Dead Sea from the trans-Jordan tribes.

Since they had repudiated the sovereignty of the house of David, they must have been largely independent. Ultimately, the house of Israel, as distinct from the house of Judah, was carried away into exile by the

Assyrians. This took place in three stages. First we learn that in the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maacah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Razor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria[8]'. This captivity included not only the most northerly tribes around Galilee, but also 'the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh' who dwelt east of the Jordan[9].

The Second Stage

The second stage of captivity came about ten years later, when Shalmaneser king of Assyria 'came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years[10]'. He carried away the rest of the northern tribes, but, according to the Annals of Sargon, his successor on the throne of Assyria, the latter made the final assault on Samaria, taking 27,290 prisoners from the city. Afterwards he imported men from Babylon and other eastern provinces into the cities of Samaria. Nevertheless, the region remained so sparsely populated that wild animals soon increased to such an extent, that they became a public menace[11].

Meanwhile the Simeonites in the far south had not been affected by these Assyrian invasions. In fact, we learn from 1 Chronicles 4: 39-41 that, in the time of Hezekiah king of Judah, all the chief princes of Simeon migrated to the region of Gedor, or Gerar, even unto the east side of the valley, to seek pasture for their flocks'. The Hebrew says Gedor, but the Greek text reads Gerar, the place where Isaac once dwelt[12].

Most commentators agree that Ged or, situated in the hill country southwest of Bethlehem, is a scribal error for Gerar, which is on the coastal plain near Gaza. The latter agrees better with the description that 'the land was wide and quiet, and peaceable; for they of Ham had dwelt there of old[13]'. The valley mentioned in verse 39 (also in Gen. 26: 17) is evidently the wadi that runs northwards to the sea south-west of Gaza.

The Main Deportation

Hardly had the Simeonites settled near Gerar, however, than the Assyrians launched another attack. 'In the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacharib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of

Judah and took them[14]. The 'fenced cities' were those in the south and west that had been fortified against attack by the Philistines.



Wall sculpture from the palace of Sennacharib showing people taken captive before the siege of Lachish {Photo by courtesy of the British Museum}

A detailed account of Sennacharib's campaign has been preserved in his Assyrian Annals. These record that in 701 BC., he marched first against the Phoenician coast in the north, and list a number of cities from Sidon to Acco that submitted to him. He next captured certain cities, including Joppa, that belonged to the Philistine king of Ashkelon.

Meanwhile the people of Ekron had obtained help from Egypt, but Sennacharib defeated the combined forces of Egypt and the Philistines at Eltekeh. It is evident from the fact that the Egyptian forces included a contingent from Ethiopia, that Sennacharib's campaign along the Mediterranean coast had occupied a considerable time. This delay allowed Hezekiah to strengthen the walls of Jerusalem, and secure his water supply by diverting the spring Gihon through a tunnel to the west side of the city[15]. In consequence he was able to take a defiant attitude when Sennacharib finally turned his attention to Judah.

Sennacharib tells us, 'As to Hezekiah the Hebrew, who did not bow in submission to my yoke, forty-six of his strong walled towns and innumerable smaller villages in their neighbourhood I besieged and conquered by stamping down earth-ramps, and then by bringing up battering rams, by the assault of foot soldiers, by breaches, tunnelling and sapper operations. I made to come out from them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female'. He then says that the towns which he had captured he gave to the Philistine kings of Ashdod, Ekron and Gaza.

This makes it clear that the attack on Judah came from the south-west. So, although many of the 200,150 captives may have been of the tribe of Judah, there can be little doubt that the Simeonites were included, for they would have been reckoned as belonging to Hezekiah. Furthermore, the king of Gaza, close to Gerar, was one of those who received an addition to his territory.

British Museum Testimony

In the Bible account we are told that it was while Sennacharib was attacking Lachish that he sent his ambassadors to Hezekiah in Jerusalem to demand his surrender,¹⁶ and when they returned he had moved forward against Libnah. Although Sennacharib makes no mention in his Annals of the capture of Lachish, he evidently regarded this as the climax of his campaign, for he decorated the walls of one room in his palace with pictures of the event.

These may now be seen in the British Museum. At the far end of the room the king is shown sitting on his throne outside the conquered city, while above him a caption reads: 'Sennacharib, king of the world, king of Assyria, sat upon his throne while all the booty of Lachish passed before him.'

Along the left-hand wall are depicted the events, in chronological order, leading up to the surrender of the city, first an onslaught by archers and spear men leading up to the final assault with ramps and battering rams. But before all this, and therefore before the attack on Lachish, there is a scene in which a large number of people have been taken captive. This confirms the conclusion reached above, that the two hundred thousand

captives carried away to Assyria at this time were taken from places to the south of Lachish before that city was attacked. In all probability these included the tribe of Simeon who thus joined the other nine tribes in exile.

Now in Isaiah 6: 13, there appears to be an allusion to this last of the ten tribes. In this chapter Isaiah received his divine call to prophecy, but he was told that no one would listen to him: 'Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed but perceive not' (v. 9). When the prophet enquired how long this was to go on, he was told, 'Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away' (v. 11-12).

This clearly alludes to the deportation of the northern house of Israel, but in the next verse, which is difficult to understand, the prophet is warned that a-tenth would remain, but only for a short time: 'And though a tenth remain in it (i.e. in the land) it will be burned again' (v. 13 R.S.V.).

It appears, then, that Isaiah was not listened to until Hezekiah was attacked by Sennacherib, as recorded in chapters 36 and 37 of his book. It was at that time that the remaining tenth, the tribe of Simeon, was carried away.

NOTES

1 Gen. 49: 5-7, r.s.v.

2 Gen. 34: 25.

3 Exod. 32: 26.

4 Num. 35:2.

5 Joshua 21.

6 Joshua 19:1 and 9.

7 I Sam. 3: 20.

8 2 Kings 15: 29

9 I Chron. 5: 26.

10 2 Kings 17:5.

11 2 Kings 17: 24, 25.

12 Gen. 26: 6.

13 1 Chron. 4: 40.

14 2 Kings 18:13.

15 2 Chron. 32: 2-8 and (v. 30).

16 2 Kings 18: 17.



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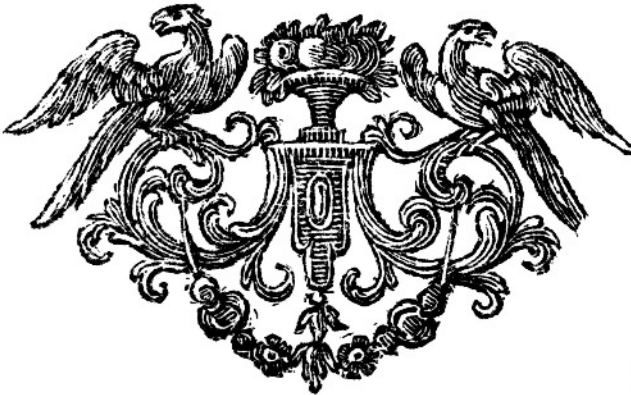
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