

Sinim A Biblical Mystery Land



**Pastor Jory
Brooks**

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By Pastor Jory Brooks

IN AN IMPORTANT PASSAGE OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY, Isaiah 49:12 says, “Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.” Where is Sinim, and who are the objects of the prophecy?

The Bridgeway Bible Commentary designates the passage in Isaiah 49:8 to 50:3 as, “Israel rebuilt.” We are told, “Once more God promises the return of the captive Hebrews to their homeland.” Our specific key verse in this prophecy therefore relates to exiled Israel, leading some expositors to think that the mysterious name Sinim reveals the location of the lost ten tribes.

Famous 19th century evangelical commentator John Trapp agrees and thinks that lost Israel is to be found in China: “Botterus (cf. Arias Mont., Osorius, A. Lapede) saith that there are reckoned seventy millions of men, which are more than are to be found in all Europe; and who knows but many of those of the ten tribes of Israel are there?”

Others look to China for the missing Israelites as well. The Scofield Bible says, “Sinim: The word is supposed to refer to a people of the Far East, perhaps the Chinese.” The Preachers Commentary concurs: “Sinim (a name often given to China, which represented the end of the earth).”

Barnes Notes suggests we may find lost Israel in China on philosophic grounds: “It may be added, that this is the only place where that country is referred to in the Bible, and there may be some plausibility in the supposition that while so many other nations, far inferior in numbers and importance, are mentioned by name, one so vast as this would not wholly be omitted by the Spirit of Inspiration.” If this is an appropriate determinant to identify China, why not America? Barnes does not similarly feel it peculiar that evangelicals believe the USA is wholly omitted in Scripture!

Barnes further explains, “As there is remarkable permanency in the names as well as in the customs of the East, it is possible that they may have had it from the commencement of their history.” Why does he not apply this same reasoning to other peoples, such as the Celtic Cymry of Wales, a people of supposed unknown origin in the East, which people bear the marks of Israel, and whose name is pronounced identically to the Hebrew name of the House of Israel, “Khumri” or “House of Omri”? Yet the Pulpit Commentary refutes the permanency of names view when referring to China: “They shall also come from the land of Sinim, by which most recent interpreters understand China. But it is highly improbable that an ethnic name which was not known to the Greeks till the time of Ptolemy should have recoiled Palestine by B.C. 700.”

The late British-Israel Hebrew scholar and Bible translator, Rev. Marcus S. Bergmann, a Messianic Jew, gave this lucid explanation: “I have looked up the word Sinim in various authorities. The land of Sinim of Isaiah 49:12, is generally applied to China by Jewish authorities. Gesenius and Fust regarded it so. The word, Sin, in Hebrew signified ‘a bush,’ the plural is Sinim, ‘bushes, or woods.’ Jerome in the Vulgate translates ‘the land of Sinim’ by ‘terra Australia’ meaning the ‘south country.’”

Similarly, another Messianic-Jewish British-Israel scholar, the late Rev. S. J. Deutschberger added, “Sinim may be derived from Sinah, a bush. See Exodus 3:2-4 and Deut. 33:16, ‘the goodwill of Him who dwelt in the bush.’” The “land of Sinim” may therefore, on the testimony of two scholars of the Hebrew language, be translated, “The land of Bushes,” or “the Bush-lands.”

It is certainly ironic that the continent of Australia is uniquely and quite accurately known world-wide as “the bush lands,” although Jerome finished his Vulgate translation of the Bible in 404 A.D., and the European discovery and settlement of Australia did not begin until about 1542. Yet the prophet Isaiah was not speaking from his own personal knowledge, but as an amanuensis or transcriber for the Holy Spirit of God who knows all things. Was Isaiah in prophecy unsuspectingly revealing where the eastern portion of the lost ten tribes, the House of Israel, would be settled in the latter days?

Barnes Notes says, “There have been many different opinions in regard to the ‘land of Sinim.’ The name ‘Sinim’ (סִינִימִיִּם *siyniym*) occurs nowhere else in the Bible, and of course it is not easy to determine what country is meant. It is evident that it is some remote country, and it is remarkable that it is the only land specified here by name.”

It is indeed evident that some of Israel’s lost tribes migrated to “some remote country,” since Isaiah’s prophecy also says, “...these shall come from far.” Would this indicate a land or continent even farther away than Europe? In fact, it could plausibly be interpreted as Australia or even the North American continent. What lands could better claim the sobriquet of “remote?” One thing is certain: No reputable historian imagines that exiled Israel settled in China, and if so, Isaiah’s prophecy about the tribes cannot be referring to Sinim as China.

The Kelley Commentary states, “It is the return of Israel that is here predicted from all parts of the earth...” Adam Clarke’s Commentary, on the contrary, claims it relates to non-Israelites and is all spiritual: “In any case, the reference is, not to the dispersed Hebrews, but to the remote Gentiles, who would pass from all quarters to the kingdom of the Redeemer.”

While Isaiah’s prophecy speaks specifically of Israel throughout chapter 49, it is curious that some commentators implausibly turn them into non-Israelites, the exact opposite; but if non-Israelite Gentiles, why would they be described as returning to Zion? Instead, we are expressly told, “Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” (Isa. 49:3)

Isaiah’s prophecy is therefore speaking about the places where exiled Israel would be found in the end of the age. Four clues are apparently given: “from far,” “north,” “west,” and “Sinim.”

What is especially interesting about this verse is that popular thinking today assumes the locations of the exiled lost ten tribes of Israel were south in Africa or east in Afghanistan, neither of which are given at all in Isaiah’s prophecy. The Hebrew language had no term for “north-west,” instead expressing it as “north and west,” so there is no question it is the

European continent north-west of Palestine that is prominently given as a location of lost Israel exiled in the Assyrian conquest of the eighth century, B.C.

In fact, Barnes Notes intuitively finds lost Israel in Australia, Europe and the American continent. “The idea here in general is, that those regions would furnish many who would embrace the true religion. If it be understood as referring to the Messiah, and the accession to his kingdom among the Gentiles, it is needless to say that the prediction has been already strikingly fulfilled. Christianity soon spread to the west of Palestine, and the countries in Europe have been thus far the principal seat of its influence and power.

It has since spread still further to the west; and, from a western world unknown to Isaiah, millions have come and acknowledged the Messiah as their Redeemer.” Since Isaiah’s prophecy specifically concerned latter-day Israel, those millions in America, Europe, and Australia are the descendants of the lost ten tribes, or Isaiah’s prophecy has seen no fulfilment. Perhaps many of the commentators searching for lost Israel have been looking in the wrong places!



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