

Lost Ten Tribes

It may be that those taken captive by the Assyrians numbered in the hundreds of thousands. In any case, these members of the Lord's Other Tribes were taken away as colonists to the area of northwestern Mesopotamia, toward the upper reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, there to await the time of their escape. Today those areas are associated with eastern Syria, northern Iraq, northwestern Iran, and the Armenian region of eastern Turkey.

Eventually, some of the displaced Israelites escaped from their captivity, to the fulfillment of the word of the Lord through his prophet Amos: "For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve." ([Amos 9:9](#).) How this portion escaped, and when, are not known.

Perhaps the fall of Assyria afforded the captives the opportunity to escape. In the period from 614 to 610 B.C. the army of the Medes under Cyaxeres overran all the territory of the Assyrians, including the areas of Halah and Gozan, where many of the captives had been settled. This was the end of the Assyrian empire. Subsequently, some of the peoples held captive by Assyria migrated. This migration seems to have been under way by the early part of the sixth century B.C., for at that time Nephi wrote: "Behold, there are many who are already lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem. Yea, the more part of *all* the tribes have been led away." ([1 Ne. 22:4](#); italics added.) The best account of the departure of the Other Tribes by Judah's record-keepers is found in the book of 2 Esdras (also called 4 Ezra). In verses 40 through 47 of chapter 13 we read:

"These are the ten tribes which were led away captive out of their own land in the days of Josiah [Hoshea] the king, which (tribes) Salmanassar the king of the Assyrians led away captive; he carried them across the River, and (thus) they were transported into another land. But they took this counsel among themselves, that they would leave the multitude of the heathen, and go forth into a land further distant, where the human race had never dwelt, there at least to keep their statutes which they had not kept in their own land. And they entered by the narrow passages of the river Euphrates. For the Most High then wrought wonders for them, and stayed the springs of the River

until they were passed over. And through that country there was a great way to go, (a journey) of a year and a half; and that region was called Arzareth. There they have dwelt until the last times.” (R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, 2:619.)

This report agrees with 2 Kings 17:6, 18:11 [[2 Kgs. 17:6](#); [2 Kgs. 18:11](#)], and 1 Chronicles 5:26 [[1 Chr. 5:26](#)] in that the tribes would have been taken “across the River” (the Euphrates) on the way to the places of captivity named in those verses. An escape “by the narrow passages of the river Euphrates” (that is, in its upper reaches—see map) into “a land further distant, where the human race had never dwelt” points to a northward direction for the subsequent migration of the tribes (the lands east, west, and south of Assyria were already inhabited at that time). This, too, agrees with a number of scriptural prophecies relative to the eventual return of those Other Tribes from the “land of the north,” or “north countries.” (See, Israel, Ten Lost Tribes of, in Topical Guide, LDS edition of the King James Bible.)



Beginning in 721–22 B.C., the Assyrians carried many Israelites captive, settling them “in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.” From these areas, according to one account, they later migrated northward “by the narrow passages of the river Euphrates.”

This was to be an event of such significance that the prophet Jeremiah spoke these powerful words:

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt;

“But, The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.” ([Jer. 23:7–8.](#))

Precisely where the tribes journeyed after the fall of Assyria is another unknown, even as it is unknown to Judah where Lehi and Mulek went; *Arzareth* itself simply means “another land.” But seeking an actual locale is perhaps an irrelevant question, since the scriptures clearly indicate that the Other Tribes were to be scattered among many nations, even though a distinct remnant of them clearly would remain in the “land of the north.”