

# THE TWO HOUSES OF ISRAEL

There is a general error among most Christians and a lot of Jews regarding the identity of the children of Israel. Because of a general lack of historical understanding, most Christians believe that the Jews are ALL of the people chosen by God in the Old Testament. Additionally, many Christians believe that they belong to an unrelated group known biblically as "Gentiles." In this article, we are going to show from the Scriptures that both of these conclusions are founded on incorrect assumptions.

First, let's examine the Scriptures to see who God chose as His own special people:

EXODUS 19:3 And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to **the house of Jacob**, and tell **the children of Israel**: 4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then **you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people**; for all the earth is Mine. 6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the **children of Israel.**" (*NKJV*)

Who were (and who **are**) the children of Israel? Here are two passages about the exodus from Egypt: one from a Christian source, and one from a Jewish source. They share a common problem, as the following comments show:

From the Christian web site [EndTimes.org](http://EndTimes.org):

Moses - Great prophet of God called to lead the **Jews** out of Egypt to the land that God promised his forefather Abraham. . . . Moses led the **Jews** through the desert for 40 years while God purged out the unbelievers.

From the Jewish web site [PassoverCentral.com](http://PassoverCentral.com):

Passover is the Jewish holiday which commemorates the time in history that the **Jews** were slaves in Egypt and then were freed. There is a lot of symbolism which relates to our history, heritage, modern day events and world. Basically Moses leads the **Jews** out of Egypt via a split in the Red Sea . . .

Did you see a problem with those comments? They reflect a common misconception about WHO the children of Israel actually are. The Bible tells us very specifically who comprised the "children of Israel." They are listed in several places in the book of Genesis.

The children of Jacob, who was renamed Israel (Gen. 32:28), were:

- **(1) Reuben**
- **(2) Simeon**
- **(3) Levi**
- **(4) Judah**
- **(5) Zebulun**
- **(6) Issachar**
- **(7) Dan**
- **(8) Gad**
- **(9) Asher**
- **(10) Naphtali**
- **(11) Joseph**
- **(12) Benjamin**

Jacob, the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham, was recipient of the same promises made to them by God. The 49th chapter of Genesis shows Jacob prophesying about the future of his 12 sons, who were the forefathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. It was the descendants of these sons of Jacob that Moses led out of Egypt. The tribe of Judah (later called "Jews") was just **one** of the 12 tribes that came out of Egyptian slavery.

(As a side note, because of Jacob's deathbed adoption of Joseph's two sons Ephraim and Manasseh as his own recorded in Genesis 48, he effectively gave a double inheritance to his favorite son Joseph. Therefore, the Bible sometimes lists 13 tribes, with the duo of Ephraim and Manasseh replacing their father Joseph.)

Let's look at the history of the children of Israel, from the time of the Exodus until their captivity many centuries later. The 12 tribes, from the time of their wandering in the desert after leaving Egypt, were called the "children of Israel" or the "House of Israel" (Exo. 16:31; 40:38; Lev. 10:6; Num. 20:29; Jos. 21:45).

After coming into the Holy Land, a series of judges ruled over Israel for a period of about 450 years (Acts 13:20). Then Israel asked for a king to rule over them, just as all the surrounding nations had (I Sam. 8:5). God chose Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, to rule over Israel; he was anointed by Samuel. But Saul displeased God and was rejected from being king. He was replaced as king by David, who was from the tribe of Judah. David's

son Solomon followed him on the throne of Israel.

With the exception of 7½ years at the beginning of David's reign when he ruled only over the House of Judah (II Sam. 2:11), these three kings reigned over the united 12 tribes of Israel as one nation. However, because later in life King Solomon worshiped other gods and did not keep *YHWH's* covenant and statutes, God told him that He would split the kingdom into two nations after his death (I Kings 11:9-13). This occurred about 960 BCE at the beginning of the reign of Solomon's son, Rehoboam:

I KINGS 12:1 And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king. 2 So it happened, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard it (he was still in Egypt, for he had fled from the presence of King Solomon and had been dwelling in Egypt), 3 that they sent and called him. Then Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, 4 "Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." 5 So he said to them, "Depart for three days, then come back to me." And the people departed. 6 Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, and he said, "How do you advise me to answer these people?" 7 And they spoke to him, saying, "If you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever." 8 But he rejected the advice which the elders had given him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him. 9 And he said to them, "What advice do you give? How should we answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, 'Lighten the yoke which your father put on us'?" 10 Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, "Thus you should speak to this people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter on us' – thus you shall say to them: 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist! 11 And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!' " 12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had directed, saying, "Come back to me the third day." 13 Then the king answered the people roughly, and rejected the advice which the elders had given him; 14 and he spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!" 15 So the king did not listen to the people; for

the turn of events was from the LORD, that He might fulfill His word, which the LORD had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 16 Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying: "What share have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!" So Israel departed to their tents. (NKJV)

The 10 tribes, led by Jeroboam (who was from the tribe of Ephraim), seceded from Rehoboam's kingdom because of taxation. For those of you who know a little bit about American history, that might sound somewhat familiar. Let's follow the story a little further:

I KINGS 12:17 But Rehoboam reigned over the children of Israel who dwelt in the cities of Judah. 18 Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was in charge of the revenue; but all Israel stoned him with stones, and he died. Therefore King Rehoboam mounted his chariot in haste to flee to Jerusalem. 19 So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day. 20 Now it came to pass when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had come back, they sent for him and called him to the congregation, and made him king over all Israel. There was none who followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only. 21 And when Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled **all the House of Judah with the tribe of Benjamin**, one hundred and eighty thousand chosen men who were warriors, to fight against the **House of Israel**, that he might restore the kingdom to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. 22 But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, 23 "Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, to **all the House of Judah and Benjamin**, and to the rest of the people, saying, 24 'Thus says the LORD: "You shall not go up nor fight against your brethren the **children of Israel**. Let every man return to his house, for this thing is from Me." ' " Therefore they obeyed the word of the LORD, and turned back, according to the word of the LORD. (NKJV)

God told Rehoboam that the split was divinely ordained, and that he was not to fight the 10 tribes of Israel that had broken away from him. To his credit, Rehoboam heeded God's word and sent his troops home. The separation resulted in a northern kingdom in Samaria and a southern kingdom in Judea. The northern kingdom was known by several names, including: Israel, the House of Israel, Samaria, Joseph, the House of Joseph, and Ephraim. The southern kingdom was generally called Judah or the House of Judah. From the very beginning of the split, the northern kingdom perverted and outright broke God's Laws. King Jeroboam immediately began to change the Law. He removed the Levites from the priesthood, which caused most of them to return to the southern kingdom of Judah (I Kings 13:33; II Chr. 11:13-14). He also set up calf idols at Bethel and Dan, set up shrines on high places, and changed the time and place for observing the Feasts of God (I Kings 12:26-33). These sinful innovations plagued the House of Israel throughout their existence.

Several decades before the fall of the House of Israel, the prophet Hosea preached the message of God to the separated tribes of Israel. While he addressed both the House of Judah and the House of Israel in his prophecies, Hosea's primary message is directed at the House of Israel, or Ephraim:

HOSEA 1:1 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. 2 When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD." 3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. 4 Then the LORD said to him: "Call his name **Jezreel**, for in a little while I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, and **bring an end to the kingdom of the House of Israel**. 5 It shall come to pass in that day that I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel." 6 And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then God said to him: "Call her name **Lo-Ruhamah**, for **I will no longer have mercy on the House of Israel**, but I will utterly take them away. 7 Yet **I will have mercy on the House of Judah**, will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword or battle, by horses or horsemen." 8 Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. 9 Then God said: "Call his name **Lo-Ammi**, for **you are not My people, and I will not be your God**. 10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.' 11 Then the **children of Judah** and the

**children of Israel** shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel!" (*NKJV*)

To graphically illustrate the House of Israel's rebellion against Him, God commanded Hosea to take a prostitute for a wife (Hos. 1:2). The reason for this was because God's wife, the House of Israel, had prostituted herself spiritually with the surrounding nations. As we go through these prophecies, it's important to realize that the God (Hebrew '*elohim*') of Israel who was married to the House of Israel (and also the House of Judah) was the one who later came in the flesh as Yeshua of Nazareth.

The harlot Gomer bore Hosea three children. God had Hosea name them symbolically to show how He was going to deal with the House of Israel, which had committed harlotry by worshipping strange gods. These three children were named *Jezreel*, *Lo-Ruhamah*, and *Lo-Ammi*.

All three of these names described God's punishment on the House of Israel, as He explained to Hosea. *JEZREEL* (which literally means "God sows" in Hebrew) represented God's sowing of the House of Israel among the Gentile nations of the earth after they were carried away into captivity by the Assyrians (Hos. 8:8; Zec. 10:7-10). *LO-RUHAMA*H (which is Hebrew for "no mercy") indicated that God would no longer have mercy upon the House of Israel, allowing them to be taken captive because of their sins (Hos. 1:6). The name *LO-AMMI* (literally "no people" in Hebrew) pictured the gradual loss of national identity by the House of Israel. They were prophesied to lose the knowledge of who they were. Scattered throughout the nations of the world, the House of Israel forgot that they were part of the *YHVH*'s chosen people (Hos. 1:9) and eventually came to view themselves as part of those nations where they were living. Essentially, they came to believe that they were Gentiles.

The sins instituted by Jeroboam, based on his corruption of God's Law, caused the House of Israel grief throughout its history. Just as Hosea prophesied, God finally had enough of the sins of Ephraim. He allowed the nation of Assyria to capture and deport the House of Israel in 722 BCE:

II KINGS 17:16 So they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. 17 And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. 18 Therefore the LORD was very angry with **Israel**, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of **Judah** alone.

(NKJV)

Because of Israel's continual spiritual harlotry, the prophet Jeremiah tells us that God divorced the House of Israel and sent her away:

JEREMIAH 3:6 The LORD said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. 7 And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 Then I saw that **for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce**; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. 9 So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. 10 And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense," says the LORD. (NKJV)

Jeremiah wrote this passage over a hundred years after God had divorced Israel and sent her away into captivity by the hand of Assyria. About the same time, the prophet Ezekiel also wrote about the spiritual adultery of both Israel and Judah:

EZEKIEL 23:1 The word of the LORD came again to me, saying: 2 "Son of man, there were **two women**, the daughters of one mother. 3 They committed harlotry in Egypt, they committed harlotry in their youth; their breasts were there embraced, their virgin bosom was there pressed. 4 Their names: Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister; they were Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, **Samaria is Oholah**, and **Jerusalem is Oholibah**. 5 Oholah played the harlot even though she was Mine; and she lusted for her lovers, the neighboring Assyrians, 6 who were clothed in purple,

captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. 7 Thus she committed her harlotry with them, all of them choice men of Assyria; and with all for whom she lusted, **with all their idols, she defiled herself.** 8 She has never given up her harlotry brought from Egypt, for in her youth they had lain with her, pressed her virgin bosom, and poured out their immorality upon her. 9 Therefore I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, for whom she lusted. 10 They uncovered her nakedness, took away her sons and daughters, and slew her with the sword; she became a byword among women, for they had executed judgment on her. (NKJV)

As the passage above symbolically details, the House of Israel played the harlot with the gods of the surrounding nations. God had told Hosea that He was going to cast the House of Israel away because of their sins (Hos. 1:6), and He was true to His word. The House of Israel was carried away captive by Assyria into the surrounding nations.

EZEKIEL 23:11 "Now although her sister Oholibah saw this, she became more corrupt in her lust than she, and in her harlotry more corrupt than her sister's harlotry. 12 She lusted for the neighboring Assyrians, captains and rulers, clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. 13 Then I saw that she was defiled; both took the same way. 14 But she increased her harlotry; she looked at men portrayed on the wall, images of Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion, 15 girded with belts around their waists, flowing turbans on their heads, all of them looking like captains, in the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, the land of their nativity. 16 As soon as her eyes saw them, she lusted for them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. 17 Then the Babylonians came to her, into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their immorality; so she was defiled by them, and alienated herself from them. 18 She revealed her harlotry and uncovered her nakedness. Then **I alienated Myself from her, as I had alienated Myself from her sister.** (NKJV)



Because the House of Judah followed in Israel's footsteps, God eventually gave Judah into captivity also. In 586 BCE, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, burned Solomon's Temple, and took the majority of Jews to Babylon. However, about 50 years later, when Medo-Persia defeated Babylon, many of the Jews were allowed to begin returning to Jerusalem (starting around 536 BCE). This return was in fulfillment of God's promise to not utterly cast away the House of Judah (Hos. 1:7), even though their sins became worse than those of the House of Israel (Eze. 23:11). Unlike Judah, the House of Israel never returned to their homeland.

Although God punished both houses, the Jews have always been recognized as His people for ONE reason. Unlike the assimilated House of Israel, they have strived to keep the sign that He said would forever identify the children of Israel:

EXODUS 31:16 "Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. 17 **It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever**; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed."  
(NKJV)

The reunion of the House of Israel and the House of Judah are frequently mentioned in the *Tanakh*. Some, including many messianic Jews, try to make the case that the northern tribes were reconciled to the House of Judah before the Babylonian captivity. Let's look at a few passages used by those who hold this opinion to see if they do, in fact, show that the two houses have already been reunited. The first passage we'll examine is from II Chronicles 11:

II CHRONICLES 11:16 And after the Levites left, those from **all the tribes of Israel**, such as set their heart to seek the LORD God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD God of their fathers.  
(NKJV)

From this verse, it does sound like those from all the northern tribes who wanted to obey God left the north and returned to Judah. However, if we read one more verse, we find

out that this reunion was short-lived:

II CHRONICLES 11:17 So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong for **three years**, because they walked in the way of David and Solomon for **three years**. (NKJV)

We see here that this reunion was short-lived, lasting only three years. Therefore, this cannot be the reunification of Israel and Judah prophesied in Scripture. Next, let's examine another supposed reunion during the reign of King Asa of Judah:

II CHRONICLES 15:8 And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim; and he restored the altar of the LORD that was before the vestibule of the LORD. 9 Then he gathered **all Judah and Benjamin**, and those who dwelt with them from **Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon**, for they came over to him in great numbers from Israel when they saw that the LORD his God was with him. 10 So they gathered together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. (NKJV)

No reunion of all 12 tribes described here; only the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon are mentioned as having joined Judah to worship God properly. It makes sense that some from these tribes would join with King Asa of Judah; their tribal territories bordered on the parcels of land belonging to Judah and Benjamin.

In reality, there is no evidence in the Scriptures or history that Judah and Israel were reunited during this time period.

Some use the book of Ezra, who wrote about the return to Judea from the Babylonian captivity, to make the case that all 12 tribes returned. They generally cite the following verse as proof:

EZRA 2:70 So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and **all Israel** in their cities. (*NKJV*)

This Scripture does say that "all Israel" dwelt in their cities. Is Ezra speaking about all 12 tribes of Israel? Those who seek to prove a reunion of Israel and Judah argue that to be the case. However, could Ezra just be speaking of "all Israel" that had been taken captive by the Babylonians (those from Judah, Benjamin and Levi)? Let's allow Ezra to answer this question at the beginning of chapter 4:

EZRA 4:1 Now when the adversaries of **Judah** and **Benjamin** heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, (*NKJV*)

Ezra clearly tells us that it was only Judah and Benjamin, along with the Levites and priests, that were present in Judea when the rebuilding of the Temple took place. Again, it is evident that the reuniting of Judah and Ephraim had not taken place by the time the Jews came back to Judea and Jerusalem after 70 years captivity in Babylon. When examined objectively, there is NO scriptural basis for assuming that the two houses were reunited before the Babylonian captivity.

When God divorced the House of Israel and cast them away in 722 BCE, all the children afterward born in the 10 tribes became spiritually illegitimate. The *Torah* states that illegitimate children are banned from being part of the assembly ("church") of *YHVH* for a period of TEN generations:

DEUTERONOMY 23:2 "No one of illegitimate birth shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of his descendants, even to the **tenth generation**, shall enter the assembly of the LORD." (*NASU*)

In the Bible, a generation is defined as being 70 years (Psalm 90:10). A small number from the northern kingdom were likely assimilated into the House of Judah before and during the conquest of Samaria. But according to the *Torah*, no descendant of the northern kingdom of Samaria afterward would have been eligible to be part of God's people for at least 700 years after God divorced their mother, the House of Israel (Jer. 3:8).

Yet the Scriptures show that God does plan on bringing these wayward offspring back into the fold. The prophet Ezekiel, one of the Jews taken captive to Babylon before the destruction of Jerusalem, wrote vividly about the eventual reconciliation of the northern and southern kingdoms:

EZEKIEL 37:15 The word of the LORD came to me: 16 "Son of man, take a stick and write on it, 'For **Judah, and the people of Israel associated with him**'; then take another stick and write on it, 'For **Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the House of Israel associated with him.**' 17 And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. 18 And when your people say to you, 'Will you not tell us what you mean by these?' 19 Say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to take the stick of **Joseph (that is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him.** And I will join with it the stick of **Judah,** and make them one stick, that they may be one in My hand. 20 When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes, 21 then say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land. 22 And **I will make them one nation in the land,** on the mountains of Israel. And **one king shall be king over them all,** and **they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms.** 23 They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. 24 My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in My rules and be careful to obey My statutes. 25 They shall dwell in the land that I gave to My servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and David My servant shall be their prince forever. 26 I will make a

covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. 27 My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 28 Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore." (*ESV*)

This prophecy, recorded by Ezekiel during the years of the Babylonian captivity, makes it pretty clear that the two houses had not YET been reunited at that time. We are told that the split will be repaired when the House of Judah (led by the tribe of Judah) is reunited with the House of Israel (led by the tribe of Ephraim) under the offspring of David, the Messiah. But we also know from the *Torah* that this reunion couldn't occur until at least 700 years had passed from the beginning of Ephraim's captivity.

If we count forward the prescribed amount of time from the captivity of Samaria by the Assyrians, we arrive at the general time that Yeshua the Nazarene was born. Since many Old Testament prophecies proclaim that it will be the Messiah who reconciles the two houses, it is no coincidence that Yeshua came just after the 700-year time span of Ephraim's illegitimacy was completed. However, most did not (and have not) realized that the prophesied reconciliation would be a process that would last some 2,000 years. Ezekiel's prophecy of the two sticks is one of the most important, and unfortunately, one of the most overlooked, prophecies in the Bible. Although it is probably the most graphic picture of the reunifying of the two houses, there are many other similar prophecies in the *Tanakh*. Let's look at some of these prophecies:

ISAIAH 11:11 It shall come to pass in that day that the LORD shall set His hand again **the second time** to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea. 12 He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble **the outcasts of Israel**, and gather together **the dispersed of Judah** from the four corners of the earth. 13 Also the envy of **Ephraim** shall depart, and the adversaries of **Judah** shall be cut off; **Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim.** 14 But **they** shall fly down upon the shoulder of the Philistines toward the west; together they shall plunder the people of the East; they shall lay their hand on Edom and Moab; and the people of Ammon shall obey them. 15 The LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt; with His mighty wind He will shake His fist over the River, and strike it in the seven streams, and make men cross over dry-shod. 16 There will be a

highway for the remnant of His people who will be left from Assyria, as it was for Israel in the day that he came up from the land of Egypt. (NKJV)

ZECHARIAH 10:3 "My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the goatherds. For the LORD of hosts will visit His flock, the **House of Judah**, and will make them as His royal horse in the battle. 4 From him comes the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler together. 5 They shall be like mighty men, who tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle. They shall fight because the LORD is with them, and the riders on horses shall be put to shame. 6 I will strengthen the **House of Judah**, and I will save the **House of Joseph**. I will bring them back, because I have mercy on them. They shall be as though I had not cast them aside; for I am the LORD their God, and I will hear them. 7 Those of **Ephraim** shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as if with wine. Yes, their children shall see it and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the LORD. 8 I will whistle for them and gather them, for I will redeem them; and they shall increase as they once increased. 9 I will sow them among the peoples, and they shall remember Me in far countries; they shall live, together with their children, and they shall return. 10 I will also bring them back from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon, until no more room is found for them. 11 He shall pass through the sea with affliction, and strike the waves of the sea: all the depths of the River shall dry up. Then the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart. 12 So I will strengthen them in the LORD, and they shall walk up and down in His name," says the LORD. (NKJV)

JEREMIAH 23:3 But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. 4 I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking," says the LORD. 5 "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. 6 In His days **Judah** will be saved, and **Israel** will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. 7 Therefore, behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that they shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' 8 but, 'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the descendants of the House of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.' And they shall dwell in their own land." (NKJV)

JEREMIAH 50:1 The word that the LORD spoke against Babylon and against the land of the Chaldeans by Jeremiah the prophet. 2 "Declare among the nations, proclaim, and set up a standard; proclaim — do not conceal it — say, 'Babylon is taken, Bel is shamed. Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are humiliated, her images are broken in pieces.' 3 For out of the north a nation comes up against her, which shall make her land desolate, and no one shall dwell therein. They shall move, they shall depart, both man and beast. 4 In those days and in that time," says the LORD, "the **children of Israel** shall come, they and the **children of Judah** together; with continual weeping they shall come, and seek the LORD their God. 5 They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces toward it, saying, 'Come and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant that will not be forgotten.' " (NKJV)

These prophecies are for the end of the age, the time when the Messiah returns from heaven and establishes the Kingdom of God here on earth. As the Scriptures clearly

show, the House of Israel and the House of Judah are not finally joined together into one stick until that time. While there are even more prophecies about the reunion of Judah and Ephraim in the Old Testament, these should suffice to show how central this teaching is to the theme of the Bible.

A couple of passages from the *Tanakh* speak of God once again being married to Israel at the time of their national salvation:

JEREMIAH 3:11 Then the LORD said to me, "Backsliding **Israel** has shown herself more righteous than treacherous **Judah**. 12 Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: 'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the LORD; 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,' says the LORD; 'I will not remain angry forever. 13 Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,' says the LORD. 14 Return, O backsliding children," says the LORD; "for **I am married to you**. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. 15 And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. 16 Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days," says the LORD, "that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore. 17 At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts. 18 In those days the **House of Judah** shall walk with the **House of Israel**, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers." (*NKJV*)

HOSEA 2:13 I will punish her for the days of the Baals to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers; but Me she forgot," says the LORD. 14



"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. 15 I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. 16 And **it shall be, in that day," says the LORD, "that you will call Me 'My Husband,'** and no longer call Me 'My Master,' 17 for I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more. 18 In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground. Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, to make them lie down safely. 19 **I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me** in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; 20 **I will betroth you to Me** in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD. 21 It shall come to pass in that day that I will answer," says the LORD; "I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth. 22 The earth shall answer with grain, with new wine, and with oil; they shall answer Jezreel. 23 Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' and they shall say, 'You are my God!' " (*NKJV*)

Remember, I stated previously that it would be important to remember that the God (*'elohim*) of Israel who was married to the House of Israel and the House of Judah was the one who became Yeshua the Messiah. As we read earlier (Jer. 3:8), God divorced the House of Israel. However, in Jeremiah 3:14 and Hosea 2:16, we see that it is prophesied that both houses of Israel would once again be married to *'elohim* and would call him "my husband."

These prophecies present a serious problem, for the *Torah* specifically outlaws such a remarriage:

DEUTERONOMY 24:1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, 2 when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter

husband dies who took her as his wife, 4 then **her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled**; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance." (*NKJV*)

God is true and just; He does not change, and He does not break His own Law. Therefore, how can these prophecies be fulfilled? There is a legal way for this to occur, as Paul tells us in the book of Romans:

ROMANS 7:1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the Law), that the Law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? 2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the Law to her husband as long as he lives. But **if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband**. 3 So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. (*NKJV*)

As Paul clearly states, this Law ceases to apply if the husband dies. Therefore, Yeshua's death on the cross caused this law against remarriage to no longer be applicable. Now, after his resurrection, Yeshua the Messiah is legally able to marry the House of Israel once again.

The New Testament carries forward the theme of the reconciliation of Judah and Ephraim. It is surprising how frequently this topic appears in the writings of the apostles and how integral it is to the gospel message.

After the seeming "disappearance" of the House of Israel into the nations, the House of Judah (the Jews) once again became known biblically as "Israel." They were the only visible portion of God's people left. The House of Judah was and is God's lawgiver (Gen. 49:10; Psa. 60:7; 108:8); they had, and continue to have, a major part in the plan the Almighty is accomplishing.

As a whole, only the House of Judah has continued to keep God's Sabbaths, which we saw in Exodus 31 is the sign He gave to distinguish His people from the rest of the nations (or "Gentiles"). Because of this sign, the Jews alone have been recognized as God's covenant people down to this day. However, Ephraim and the tribes associated with him lost their identity. They were absorbed into the nations to which they were

scattered. But these so-called "lost tribes" were not lost to God. He knew then, and knows now, EXACTLY where they are, as the prophet Amos tells us:

AMOS 9:8 "Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; yet I will not utterly destroy the **House of Jacob**," says the LORD. 9 For surely I will command, and will sift the **House of Israel** among **all nations** [*b'kal hagoyim*], as grain is sifted in a sieve; yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground." (NKJV)

Most people don't realize that the Bible is only written TO and ABOUT Israel. Other nations are discussed only as they come into contact with or effect God's chosen people. According to Yeshua himself, he was only sent to Israel when he came the first time:

MATTHEW 10:5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do **not** go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 **Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.** (NKJV)

MATTHEW 15:24 He answered, "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.**" (NKJV)

In the 10th chapter of John's Gospel, Yeshua states that part of his duties included gathering another "flock" besides the Jews:

JOHN 10:16 "And **other sheep I have which are not of this fold**; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and **there will be one flock** and one shepherd." (*NKJV*)

Here Yeshua tells his disciples that he had other sheep that he was responsible for, in addition to the targeted Jews. Because most Christians aren't familiar with the large number of Old Testament prophecies which speak of the Messiah's responsibility in reuniting the two houses (Israel and Judah), they assume that he was referring to those unrelated people from the nations ("Gentiles") who would thereafter come into the "church."

But to properly understand the Bible, one must base their understanding of the New Testament on the foundation of the Old Testament. When this is done, it is clear that Yeshua was speaking of those who were at that time still scattered among the nations, the lost sheep of Ephraim. These sheep had forgotten their identity and thought they were Gentiles. But Yeshua knew who (and where) they were, and as the Old Testament prophecies show over and over again, it was his divinely sanctioned job to retrieve them for the Father.

A prophetic passage in the next chapter of John confirms this:

JOHN 11:47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this man works many signs. 48 If we let him alone like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." 49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." 51 Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the **nation** [Judah], 52 and **not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad** [i.e., the northern kingdom of Israel]. 53 Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death. 54 Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called **Ephraim**, and there remained with His disciples. (*NKJV*)

Yeshua didn't just die for the Jews, but also for those "children of God who were scattered abroad." Anyone who knows the history of Israel as revealed in the Old Testament knows that those children who were scattered abroad (by God Himself) were the lost House of Israel. It's interesting (and prophetic) that right after this prophecy was given, Yeshua went into a city called Ephraim, which is also the symbolic name for the children of God who had been scattered into all nations.

Earlier, we read in the *Tanakh* from the prophetic book of Hosea about how God would punish the House of Israel (Samaria) for their sins. We saw that Hosea's three children born to him by Gomer were symbolically named to describe the fate of Ephraim: *Jezreel* ("God sows") described God's future sowing of the House of Israel throughout all the nations; *Lo-Ruhamah* ("no mercy") showed that God was not going to have mercy on Israel for a period of time; and *Lo-Ammi* ("not my people") revealed that those from the House of Israel would not be known as God's people for a time.

But the prophecies from Hosea also show that a time would come when God would regather His children and have mercy on them once again. Just to set the stage, let's recap a few of the pertinent passages from Hosea that speak of this time of forgiveness:

HOSEA 1:10 "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to THEM, '**You are not My people,**' there it shall be said to THEM, '**You are sons of the living God.**' " (NKJV)

HOSEA 2:19 "I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; 20 I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD. 21 It shall come to pass in that day that I will answer," says the LORD; "I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth. 22 The earth shall answer with grain, with new wine, and with oil; they shall answer **Jezreel**. 23 Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and **I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy;** then I will say to **those who were not My people, 'You are My people!'** and

they shall say, 'You are my God!' " (*NKJV*)

Now that we've reacquainted ourselves with the principle prophecy about the restoration of the House of Israel (Ephraim), let's look at a few passages from the New Testament that speak of this event. We'll start in the introduction to Peter's first general epistle. It is addressed to an interesting group:

**I PETER 1:1** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to **the exiles of the Dispersion** in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, (*RSV*)

Who was Peter writing to? Most scholars interpret his introduction to mean that he was writing to messianic Jews who remained outside the Holy Land. However, these Jews could not rightfully be considered "exiles" at the time Peter wrote. The legal decrees of Persian kings Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes (recorded in the book of Ezra), issued some five centuries earlier, meant that these Jews were no longer officially exiled from Judea. However, the Israelites who were conquered and taken into captivity by Assyria were never formally released from their exile. Therefore, we see that Peter was not speaking here to Diaspora Jews, as the common interpretation of this verse assumes, but rather to Israelite exiles dispersed throughout Asia Minor who had accepted Yeshua as the Messiah!

Now let's look at a very revealing passage in I Peter 2:

**I PETER 2:1** Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. 4 Coming to him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on him will by no means be put to shame." 7 Therefore, to you who believe, he is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone

which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," 8 and "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. 9 But **you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people**, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 **who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.** (NKJV)

In verse 9, Peter paraphrases God's words to Israel (Exo. 19:6) and applies them to those Gentiles in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia who were accepting Yeshua. In the original passage, God told Moses that the House of Jacob, the children of Israel, would be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" if they obeyed Him. In verse 10, Peter again uses a scriptural reference from the book of Hosea originally meant for the House of Israel that had become "not a people" and to whom God showed "no mercy."

There are really only two ways to understand what Peter says here. He was either implying that the Gentiles who were coming into the 1st-century church were "replacing" the lost Israelites and inheriting the promises of God in their stead (a form of replacement theology), OR he was showing that those who were coming into the church in these areas were actually members of the "lost tribes" who were then being regathered into Israel through Messiah Yeshua.

The writings of Paul show that the second option is the most likely. Let's look at Paul's comments to the Romans to support this understanding:

ROMANS 9:22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, **not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?** 25 As He says also in Hosea: "**I will call them My people, who were not My people**, and her beloved, who was not beloved. 26 And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God." (NKJV)

In this passage, Paul quotes from the prophecy of Hosea that we read earlier about the eventual recovery of the Israelites (Ephraim and the tribes associated with him) who were cast away by God for their sins (Hos. 1:10). Unless Paul too was using this prophetic Scripture to show that God was replacing the lost Israelites spoken of by Hosea, the Gentiles he referred to must have been descendants of those 10 lost tribes.

There are other Scriptures which indicate Paul understood that most of the Gentiles he was preaching to were, in fact, descendants of the House of Israel who had been scattered 800 years earlier and had intermingled with all the nations round about Judea. To prove this assertion, let's first look at a telling statement by Paul found in the 10th chapter of I Corinthians:

I CORINTHIANS 10:1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that **all our fathers** were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. (*NKJV*)

Here Paul is writing to a Gentile group primarily composed of former pagans (I Cor. 12:2) in Corinth, Greece. Yet in using the example of the Israelites that had been delivered from Egypt by God during the Exodus, he calls them "**all OUR fathers**" (I Cor. 10:1). He certainly wasn't referring to them as "fathers" in a spiritual sense, because these people had been wholly carnal; as a group they rebelled against God and died while wandering in the desert for 40 years. So logic dictates that Paul must have been speaking of them as the Corinthians' **PHYSICAL fathers!**

Let's return to Romans and continue with Paul's comments about Israel (Judah):

ROMANS 10:11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." [*Isa. 28:16*] 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." [*Joel 2:32*] 14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How



beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" [Isa. 52:7] 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" [Isa. 53:1] 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. 18 But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: "Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." [Psa. 19:4] 19 But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: "**I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.**" [Deu. 32:21] 20 But Isaiah is very bold and says: "I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me." [Isa. 65:1] 21 But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people." [Isa. 65:2] (NKJV)

First, we have to understand that Paul uses "Israel" in Romans 10:19 (and throughout his letter to the Romans) as a reference to JUDAH, since the House of Israel had been dissolved and was no longer identifiable as a specific people. Simply put, the Jews were the only recognizable remnant of Israel at that time. Quoting Deuteronomy 32:21, Paul tells us that God would provoke Israel (i.e., Judah) to jealousy by those who are "not a people" (Heb. *lo-am*), a clear allusion to the *Lo-Ammi* mentioned by Hosea. But the quote goes on to say that God would provoke the Jews with a "foolish nation" (Heb. *goy nabal*). Not foolish NATIONS (plural), but a single nation. Samaria was indeed a foolish nation; they did not appreciate the honor of being God's people and lost those benefits through disobedience.

Paul next quotes a very pertinent passage from the prophet Isaiah. Notice at the end of verse 1 who it was who found Him, although they did not seek Him:

ISAIAH 65:1 "I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a **nation [goy] that was not called by My name.** 2 I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts;" (NKJV)

Isaiah's prophecy is similar to that of Hosea which we read earlier. Again, the "nation"

(*goy*) not called by God's name that He would speak to is singular. It is almost certainly a reference to Samaria (the House of Israel), the nation that God cast away. Now let's examine the conclusion of Paul's commentary on the fate of God's chosen people, the 11th chapter of Romans:

ROMANS 11:1 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 3 "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? 4 But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 6 And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. (*NKJV*)

Here Paul tells the Romans that God has not cast away the Jews. He uses the story of Elijah to make the point that there were Jews who, through God's grace, had accepted Yeshua as the prophesied Messiah. Even though most Jews had not accepted Yeshua, God had selected a remnant of Judah to believe. They were not called due to their works, but because of *YHVH's* divine mercy and grace.

ROMANS 11:7 What then? **Israel** [i.e., Judah] has not obtained what it seeks; but **the elect** [Jews] have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. 8 Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day." [*Deu. 29:4*] 9 And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. 10 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always." [*Psa. 69:22-23*] 11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the **Gentiles**. 12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the

**Gentiles**, how much more their fullness! 13 For I speak to you **Gentiles**; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the **Gentiles**, I magnify my ministry, 14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. (*NKJV*)

The "Gentiles" in Romans 11:11 have traditionally been defined as unrelated peoples from various surrounding nations who were added to the early Jewish church. But the "jealousy" that the apostle Paul says these "Gentiles" will provoke within Judah is a clear reference to the "foolish nation" he mentioned earlier in Romans 10:19-21. Therefore, these "Gentiles" were part of the foolish nation that Moses was told was "not a nation" (Deu. 32:21). These "Gentiles" were members of the lost House of Israel who had been sown in all nations, but had not been forgotten by God.

ROMANS 11:15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a **wild olive tree**, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the **olive tree**, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. 22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut out of the **olive tree which is wild by nature**, and were grafted contrary to nature into a **cultivated olive tree**, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? (*NKJV*)

In this passage of Scripture from Paul, we see two olive trees mentioned: one that is

cultivated, and one that is wild. Who or what do these two olive trees represent? We find the answer to that question in Jeremiah 11:

**JEREMIAH 11:16 The LORD called your name, Green Olive Tree,** lovely and of good fruit. With the noise of a great tumult He has kindled fire on it, and its branches are broken. 17 For the LORD of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced doom against you for the evil of the **House of Israel** and of the **House of Judah**, which they have done against themselves to provoke Me to anger in offering incense to Baal." (*NKJV*)

Here we see that both houses (Israel and Judah) are called a "green olive tree." They were planted and named by the God Himself. So we can be certain from Scripture that both the House of Judah and the House of Israel are symbolically labeled as olive trees. But is there any further evidence? Yes, there is! Hosea, the prophet who spoke of the eventual regathering of the House of Israel from exile, also symbolizes Israel as an olive tree:

**HOSEA 14:5 I will be like the dew to Israel;** he shall grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots like Lebanon. 6 His branches shall spread; his beauty shall be like an **olive tree**, and his fragrance like Lebanon. (*NKJV*)

The cultivated olive tree depicts the House of Judah, which provided the foundation for the early church (Acts 2:41; 21:20). This is the olive tree of salvation, for Yeshua said that "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). Paul, harkening back to what Jeremiah said earlier (Jer. 11:16), portrays those Jews who rejected Yeshua as branches which were broken off from this cultivated olive tree. They were removed because they did not believe in the Messiah God sent to His people.

ROMANS 11:25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the **fullness of the Gentiles** has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; 27 for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." 28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, 31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. 32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. 33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" 35 "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. (*NKJV*)

Here Paul tells us that Israel (specifically the House of Judah, the only part of Israel that remained identifiable at that time) has been blinded to the truth for a period of time. However, he says that wild olive branches will continue to be grafted in to the cultivated olive tree to replace those branches broken off until "the fullness of the Gentiles" has been added.

What is meant by the phrase "the fullness of the Gentiles"? Does the Bible tell us who this group is? Yes, it most certainly does! Let's go back to the beginning and look at some history of Israel for perspective:

GENESIS 48:1 Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, "Indeed your father is sick"; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2 And Jacob was told, "Look, your son Joseph is coming to you"; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed. 3 Then Jacob said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, 4 and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you

as an everlasting possession.' 5 And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. 6 Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. 7 But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)." 8 Then Israel saw Joseph's sons, and said, "Who are these?" 9 And Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me in this place." And he said, "Please bring them to me, and I will bless them." 10 Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. 11 And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!" 12 So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. 13 And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. 14 Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. 15 And he blessed Joseph, and said: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, 16 the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." 17 Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." 19 But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a **multitude of nations** [*melo hagoyim*]." (NKJV)

Here we see the deathbed blessing of Israel upon Ephraim when he adopted him and his brother Manasseh. Israel prophesied that Ephraim would become "a multitude of nations." In Hebrew, this phrase is *melo hagoyim*, which literally means "fullness of the

Gentiles." The tribe of Ephraim was the leader of the northern House of Israel, and Ephraim came to be representative of all 10 lost tribes. It seems clear when the Old Testament references are understood properly that Paul had the descendants of these tribes in mind when he spoke of the "fullness of the Gentiles" and the "wild olive tree" in Romans 11!

In Romans 11:25, Paul told us that partial blindness has happened to the Jews until the "fullness of the Gentiles" comes in. He goes on to say in verse 26, "**And so** all Israel will be saved." The Greek phrase *kai houtos*, translated "and so" here, is very important for us to understand. Literally, these words mean "and in this manner." A better translation of this passage would be "blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles (i.e., Ephraim) has come in. And in this manner all Israel will be saved."

Paul tells us that it is through this very process of grafting lost Israelites back into the cultivated olive tree that all of Israel (all 12 tribes) would be saved. This is a clear indication that many (if not most) of those so-called Gentiles who are being grafted into the olive tree are actually lost Israelites being brought back into the fold. The "fullness of the Gentiles" (Ephraim) coming back to reunite with those from Judah who are not blinded to the identity of their Messiah is the foundation for the eventual salvation of ALL of Israel!

Lest my point here be misunderstood, please take note. I am not saying that ONLY physical Israelites are being called by God into the "church." The *Tanakh* shows clearly that Gentiles NOT of Israelite stock have been included in God's congregation (Exo. 12:38; Isa. 56:3-8). The Eternal has always made a way for godly foreigners to become part of His chosen people. But Scripture seems to indicate that, for the most part, those who have been called by God to His son Yeshua (John 6:44, 65) are physical Israelites, both from the House of Judah (the cultivated olive tree) and the House of Israel (the wild olive tree).

One of the pivotal prophecies of the Bible, the prophecy of the New Covenant, clearly shows that this understanding is correct. The original prophecy is given in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah:

JEREMIAH 31:31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a **new covenant** with the **House of Israel** and with the **House of Judah** — 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My Law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and

their sin I will remember no more." (*NKJV*)

This prophecy plainly states that God will make the New Covenant with two specific entities: (1) The House of Israel, and (2) the House of Judah. In his letter to the messianic Jews of the early church, the author of Hebrews cites this passage:

HEBREWS 8:7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. 8 Because finding fault with **them**, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when **I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah** — 9 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. 10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. 12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."  
(*NKJV*)

The author of Hebrews reiterates God's promise to make a new covenant with the two houses of Israel in the New Testament. His citation is a second witness to this fundamental aspect of God's plan. Yet how many myriads of believers have read this prophecy and missed the plain statement that the New Covenant would be made with the House of Israel and the House of Judah? Obviously, just as many Jews have been blinded to the identity of their Messiah, so too have many Christians been blinded to their own identity.

People don't understand the biblical teaching on the reunification of the two houses for a variety of reasons. The traditional teaching of the church for centuries has been that Gentiles, who have no ties to Israel, have replaced God's chosen people (whether it be simply for a time, or permanently). In fact, the "Gentile" nature of the church has been cited as one of the reasons that the Law no longer applies to believers. What a tremendous change of attitude it would require if believers came to understand that they



were probably descendants of those who stood before Mount Sinai and heard the voice of *YHVH!*

But there are also those who reject this understanding for the same reason that the Pharisees and Sadducees rejected Yeshua: they are afraid it will "take away" their perceived position. Many Messianic Jewish groups and organizations reject this understanding of the reunification of the two houses because they see it as an attack on the position that God gave the Jews. They see this doctrine as simply Gentile envy of the Jewish status.

In the introduction to James' epistle, we see a reference to the group James was addressing:

JAMES 1:1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to **the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad**: Greetings. (NKJV)