

Who is Israel?

The name, Israel, is mentioned more than 2,570 times in scripture. It is first used in *Genesis 32:28*, which is where we find Jacob wrestling with an Angelic Being.

After the two had wrestled all night, the angelic being spoke and said, "Let me go it is daybreak. But Jacob contended "I will not let you go, unless you bless me. So, the angel asked him, "What is your name? "Ya'acov", The angelic being said no longer will your name be Ya'acov, but Israel for you have striven with the Divine and with human and have overcome and He blessed him there. See *Genesis 32:26,27,29-30*

Yisrael is a name that is given as a blessing. But what does it mean to be Israel? How is it a blessing?

Jacob is derived from the root word a'kov, which is said to mean heel catcher. To catch by the heel or to seize the heel to circumvent to (by holding the heel) restrain, to stay to supplant which is the definition in Strong's # 3290.

Then the change came. Our forefather met the angel in the wilderness. He met Yahweh Elohim. Tsa'va'ot or you might recognize the name "The Lord of God of Hosts."

It is written that Jacob "wrestled with the angel and prevailed." and that Jacob "wept and sought His favor", He also confessed his own name to be Yaacov (one who acquires by supplanting) and

after making lamentation and prevailing, Yah called him Israel (Hosea 12:2-4).

Then, the Holy One again appeared to Jacob this time at Bethel and He said to him. "you shall no longer be called Jacob but Yisrael shall be your name. Genesis 35:10.

Of this most important encounter, Hosea wrote: "He found Him at Bethel, and there He spoke with us, even Yahweh Elohim, Yah of Hosts.

Hosea is says: that Abba gave Jacob the name Yisrael, and at the same time, there He spoke to us.-" Through this blessing Yah also spoke to Jacob's seed, the multitudes who were in Jacob's loins when Yah called him "Israel"

Let's look at the name Yisrael, Strong's defines Israel as "He will rule with Yah" In the Hebrew Lexicon says" contender, soldier of Yah and that means to fight. If you look at the root Word in Israel; you would see the etymology (which just means origin and development) As the Word Sarah, and El. Sarah is listed "to have power, contend, persist, exert oneself, persevere and to prevail to have power (as a prince). El is rendered to Mean strength, mighty; especially Almighty, and as "El" persisteth and persevereth (Strong's # H 410).

In this encounter where he wrestles with the angel of Yah Or Elohim, Jacob demonstrated his ability to stand as a limping prince. He depicts one who is flawed and yet has been granted a certain power in this earth.

Jacobs struggle was spiritual, in prayer as well as physical and he prevailed. So his name change: Yisrael Means "One who contends, A powerful prevailing Prince, A soldier of Yahweh, One who rules with the Almighty.

Jacob yielded, contended, and prevailed. What can we learn from his experience? One message is that through repentance and perseverance, in the power and strength of the Almighty, Jacob was given the Name Israel. So we, too, should seek our Father's favor, yield to His ways and always "hold on" which is the secret to prevailing.

After Jacob wrestled with the Angel, he walked with a limp. Genesis 32:25, 31-32. The message is here is : After we have a personal encounter with our Messiah, we too should have a decidedly "marked walk". So let's take a walk down memory lane.

Jacob had two wives, Leah and Rachel, and their handmaidens, Zilpah and Bilhah, who gave Jacob twelve sons and became known as the twelve tribes of Israel.

Leah was the mother of Jacob's firstborn son, Reuben, and the title of firstborn should have been his. However Chronicles reveals to us that Reuben was not Jacob's heir, but instead "the birthright belonged to Joseph. 1 Chronicles 5:2.

Reuben was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; We see that Rueben is not enrolled in the genealogy according to

the birthright. 1 Chronicles 5:1. Jacob gave the birthright to his beloved Rachel's firstborn. He gave it to Joseph and Joseph's sons.

What was the birthright that Jacob gave to Joseph? What did it include?

In ancient Israel the birthright included a double portion and gave the first born the right to act as the next family ruler. Yah commanded that the father must acknowledge the first born. by giving him a double portion of all that he has for he is beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of firstborn. Deuteronomy 21:17.

The firstborn was given a double portion so that he would be equipped to be the kinsman-redeemer for his brethren. The family ruler, to dispense justice. Genesis 43:33. The promise to the patriarchs were considered to attached to the firstborn, because the first born belonged to Yah and was the priest of the whole family. He would have had the respect of a leader among his brothers, preferential status, sanctity, authority, sovereignty, responsibility, and the right of succession accrued to himself and would become the next head of the family responsible for its continuance and welfare.

In Genesis 35:11 we see that Yah made a promise to Jacob that "A nation and a company of nations shall come from you.

So Yah said to Jacob "Behold I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company (kahal) of peoples, and I

will give this land to your seed after you for an everlasting possession. Genesis 48:2-4.

Joseph was the son of Jacob's beloved Rachel, and Jacob loved Joseph more than all his sons. (Genesis 37:3), as his firstborn heir (Genesis 48:21-22) Jacob/ Israel said to him: Now you and your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are: and May my name live on in them, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac. (Genesis 48:5,16.) Though this action, Israel (Jacob) adopted Joseph's two sons. This was not an adoption in a normal sense, these two boys were in actuality Jacob's biological grandchildren as and such are "adopted" into a position of "sons" as Paul refers to in Romans 9:4.

Genesis 48 tells the intriguing story of how the firstborn blessing was passed onto Joseph and his sons. Let's explore it a little. So going back to Egypt inside the Patriarchal tent we have Israel (Jacob) He gathers up his strength, as he is on his death bed and when he sees Joseph and says to Joseph; "Yah said to me "Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples." Does this sound familiar? Father Abraham? So He tells Joseph to bring to him Ephraim and Manasseh so that he can bless them.

Joseph moves his sons towards his father Israel (Jacob) deftly moved his right hand to Ephraim's head and placing his left hand on Manasseh's hand, he blesses them: "May they grow into teeming multitudes upon the earth. Manasseh shall become a people. However, his younger brother, Ephraim shall be greater than he

and his descendants shall become a fullness of Gentiles. The definition of Gentiles is "Nations" "melo ha'goyim. (Genesis 48) We notice here that Israel crossed over his arms and switched hands when he blesses Joseph's boys.

Scripture clarifies that the position of each boy in relation to Israel's right hand because traditionally one blesses another by laying his hands on the person's head. The right hand is preferred one for the performance of mitzvos and accordingly has spiritual supremacy. When he crossed his hands Israel put Ephraim before Manasseh the firstborn. (Genesis 48:14.) Manasseh was first born, The greater blessing went to the younger Ephraim.

Israel (Jacob) declared Ephraim to Joseph's heir. Ephraim shall be mine as Reuben, meaning Ephraim shall be as my first born. (Genesis 48:22,5.) In essence Israel (Jacob) wrote Joseph's will for him, which Ezekiel confirms when he says, "The stick of Joseph is in the hand of Ephraim. Ezekiel 37:19.

Possession of the "stick" indicates Ephraim's headship over the tribe of Joseph, for Yah instructed Moses: Speak to the sons of Israel, and get from them a rod for each fathers household, (Numbers 17:2,3,) the stick or rod, serves as the symbol of family leadership and Ephraim holds Joseph's rod.

Abraham's heir was Isaac; Isaac's heir was Jacob whose name was changed to Israel; Israel's (Jacob) heir was Joseph; and Joseph's heir was Ephraim. Why was Joseph's inheritance given to Ephraim, rather than Manasseh, who was Joseph's actual firstborn son? Why was the one who was naturally in line for firstborn blessing

again passed over in favor of another? Is Abba teaching us a principle in the way the patriarchal firstborn were chosen?

Lets explore this theme:

Abraham's physical firstborn was named Ishmael, but Yah elected Issac (Abraham's second born) as heir. Next, Issaac's firstborn, Esau was passed over in favor of Jacob, Jacob overlooked firstborn Reuben and chose Joseph, the eleventh son (The firstborn of Rachel) Finally, Manasseh was passed over in favor of Ephraim.

Each of these elected heirs had one thing in common: Though all were "biological" heirs, they became "Firstborn heirs" though a type of "adoption" into that position.

Also, with the exception of "mysterious Ephraim" each of these firstborn heirs required divine intervention to bring them forth at birth.

We read of their mothers: "and Sarai was barren; she had no child". But Yah said " I will bless her and she shall become of the mother of many nations. (Genesis 25:21.) Rachel was barren then Yah remembered Rachel, and Yah gave heed to her and opened her womb.(Genesis 29:31, 30:22.) In the cases of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and Ephraim, each of them did not gain their position based on their biological birth order, instead became heirs by being "adopted" into firstborn position.

What picture do these examples paint for us? They portray the truth that, even if one is a physical heir, it is still our Father who brings forth the "elected firstborn" since they belong to him and They are determined by His selection. Which is why Paul writes that inheritance is not based "on man's desire or effort, but on Yah's mercy (Romans 9:16.)

The firstborn belongs to Yah (Exodus 13:2, 15.) As the family priest, the firstborn was embodiment of the soul and character of the social group. As head of the family, he was given authority and respect as the leader among the brothers. As the firstborn, he received preeminent sovereignty and a double portion.

Despite this rule, "It was possible for the Father to deprive the firstborn of the right, primogeniture was always considered, but not always decisive as the cases of transfer of birthright appear as exceptions which exemplify divine selection." (Moody)

In Israel the firstborn is preeminent, he is a priest, a sovereign or king, a redeemer, and he has a double portion.

So let's take a look at Ephraim. Ephraim's name as an "individual" is mentioned only 14 times in Scripture. We are told he was the second son of Joseph and Asenath (the daughter of the Potiphara the priest of On) and that he was named Ephraim because, his father Joseph said " Yah has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction. Which is what the name Ephraim means. (Genesis 41:52.)

Ultimately, Ephraim was brought before his grandfather, Israel (Jacob) and was declared to be Israel's /Jacob's primary heir. Later we are told the names of his sons, and the last mention of him in Scripture is found in Genesis 50:23 "and Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons. After that, elusive Ephraim disappears. He who's name meant "doubly fruitful" simply fades away with no record of him ever passing his rich blessing on to another. The patriarchal firstborn blessing was passed to Ephraim and its passing ended with Ephraim.

After Israel blessed Ephraim, Ephraim's descendants were regarded as a single tribe. Years later, ten of Israel's twelve tribes collectively became known as "Ephraim or Ephraimites and or "Israel". This is why the genealogy is so important and recorded in scripture though they seem long and arduous to read. It explains where we came from and what birthright we can expect. So had we not had this accounting we would not understand where we came from and our history which is why many to this day do not understand who were are. Yah is so faithful to chronicle every line so we can discover our identity.

Lets Examine some History:

So for some time after the children of Israel entered into the land of Canaan, they divided into two houses. Judah and Ephraim (or Israel). While all 12 tribes were Jacob/Israel descendants they could rightly be called "Israel" however, those of the northern kingdom of Ephriam were primarily called "Israel" and the southern kingdoms were called "Judah". (2 Kings 17:34; and 1 Kings 12:21.)

Moreover, Abba says "Israel is my son, My firstborn" (Exodus 4:22.) "Israel" is a birthright name. And even as the birthright went with Joseph then to his son Ephraim so did the birthright name.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel consisted of ten tribes. (1 Kings 11:35) and it lasted for a little more than two hundred years 975-721 B.C. However, because the Ephraimites often followed after the pagan customs of their Gentile neighbors, for a season some of them joined the more Godly people of Judah. During their sojourn with Judah, these Israelites were considered to be subjects to Judea. (1 Kings 12:17). But sad to say Judah ultimately fell into the same sins. (Ezekiel 23: 1-49 Kings 16:2-4, 2 Chronicles 31:1) and both houses continued their distinct identities.

Although Scripture does speak of some the intermingling and intermarriage between the two kingdoms, and while men could move from their tribal land to that of another, they could not take their land inheritance with them. Land could be "sold" on a "lease" basis but not permanently. This would go into the teaching of the Shemita years and the Jubilee years found in Leviticus 24:13, 29-31; Judges 21:24.)This restriction would have tended to limit intermingling. But most important, if one did move to a different tribal territory that move would not and could not change one's tribal lineage.

We see it is possible that each house, Israel and Judah, included in a representation of each tribe, however small, still each

remained a distinct entity until the very end. In fact there was continual warfare between them which warring ceased only when Ephraim's northern foe, Assyria, carried the people of Ephraim away into captivity. Ephraim-Israel became known as the "Ten lost Tribes"

Israel experienced its first deportations under Tiglath Pileser III (745-727 B.C.) a cruelty repeated by Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) at the time of the fall of Samaria. The latter king's inscriptions boast of carrying away 27, 290 inhabitants of the city as booty. They were sent to Assyria, to Halah, (modern day Syria) to Gozan (a river in North Afghanistan and Central Asia) on the Habor River,(Syria) and apparently to the eastern frontiers of the empire to the towns of the Medes, probably in the vicinity of Ecbatana and ancient city on the site of modern Hamadan or Iran.

During this time, The Assyrians practiced a unique method of controlling newly conquered lands. They scattered the leading citizens among other nations and then moved other conquered leaders into the newly subjugated land. So all were destabilized and so would be less likely to unite and revolt.

Assyrian records indicate noble families were taken captive, while agricultural workers were left behind to care for the crops. The Farmers and fishermen were forced to stay and feed their conquerors and were ultimately assimilated into the Assyrian Empire.

A few could have "held out". Some Ephraimites could have lived for generations under the rule of the Assyrian conquerors without

forgetting that they were " Israel". Yet after "Israel" ceased to be an identifiable people (Isaiah 7:8, Hosea 1:10, 2:23 and after some of Judah returned from Babylon, the sons of Jacob/ Israel who had stood together would be called "Jews" We would have had some Ephraimite fishermen who were called "Jews" such as Peter the apostle.

As to where the Ephraimites went, the Word reveals that Ephraim was scattered "In Halah, at the River Habor(which is the largest tributary within modern day Syria that feed the Euphrates River), at the River Gozan, and the towns of Media(middle Persian is best known for having been the political and cultural base of the Medes. It is comprised of present day Azarbaijam, Iranian Kurdistan and western Tabaristan) ".

And that afterwards "The king of Assyria brought men from Hamath(Syria which was the the northern most city in the mountainous region of the Levant, in the border territory between that and ancient Syria, it was the fortress that protected the rest of the Levant from northern invaders) and Sephar-vaim, and settled them in the cities of Samaria in the place of the sons of Israel. So they possessed Samaria "Israel's" capital and lived in their cities. (2 Kings 17:6-24. 1 Chronicles 5:26.)

Among this mix of assimilated and transplanted people were those who ultimately became known as "Samaritans". These people were generally despised by those of Judah whose hatred carried over into the New Testament times. This hatred also appears to have been readily returned by the Samaritans. Luke 9:52-53; John 4:9, 8:48.

To understand what happened to Ephraim, we need to see that at the time they were taken captive they had their own king and functioned as a separate kingdom. (2 Kings 17:1-3.) Also they were taken to cities that varied in distance from 250 to 350 miles north of Babylon, which is where Judah was taken. It was 135 years later or several generations before Judah was taken captive. Judah was settled "by the river of Chebar"(we would know it today by the name as Tel Abib which is an unidentified tell on the Canal, near Nippur in what is now modern day Iraq) Ezekiel 3:15 mentions this place. You could also take a look at Ezekiel 1:1. while Ephraim was scattered "beyond the Euphrates River" (1 Kings 14:15.)

This means there were many miles (especially considering the limited methods of transportation) and several generations assuming they had children by age forty, between the deportation of Ephraim to Assyria, and the later deportation of Judah to Babylon. We also have to remember these two peoples were openly hostile toward one another when they occupied the Promised Land.

Yet, many are blind to the differences between these two kingdoms. They do not see the different decorations and times, nor the different prophecies and promises that apply to each group.

It is as though they are blinded to the truth.

After Assyria conquered them, what happened to the Ephriamites as a people?

Encyclopedia Judaica says: It is evident that as a rule they did not possess the status of slaves or of an oppressed population. The exiles were first settled in Mesopotamia as land tenants of the king, the craftsmen among them were employed in state enterprises. Eventually, some of the exiles achieved economic and social status and even occupied high ranking positions in the Assyrian administration. The striking of roots of Mesopotamian society by large part of the descendants of the Israelites exiles resulted in their eventual absorption into the foreign milieu.

All Jews were Israelites but not all Israelites were Jews.

To Understand "Israel" we must realize that these deported Ephraimites were Israelites and not Jews. While they lived in the Land prior to their deportation, these Israelites were not called Jews. They were Israelites.

Once dispersed from their native land, once scattered they lived and worked in Assyria. As stated, they struck roots in the Mesopotamian Society, meaning, they were absorbed. For all outward appearances, these Ephraimites became "foreigners" and as foretold they became "Gentiles" or (the nations) Genesis 48:19.

The Judahites were taken captive more than a century and a quarter later. No matter where they were scattered, the Jewish people have always sought to maintain a separate identity from the nations in which they lived. In contrast Ephraimites wanted to be like Gentiles or the nations.. For that reason Yah allowed

them to become lost among the nations. He allowed them to outwardly become "Gentiles".

So from history we learn that the hallmark of the people of Ephraim is that they are lost, in particular, to their own Israelite identity.

So where are Ephraimites today? The first century Historian, Josephus stated in the Antiquities: The ten tribes are beyond the Euphrates tallow, and are an immense multitude not to be estimated in numbers.

Also, the 19th century Jewish Believer, Theologian Alfred Edersheim, wrote: in his respected work, The Life and Times of Yeshua the Messiah "The great mass of the ten tribes was in the days of Messiah, as inner own, lost to the Hebrew nation. Edersheim also calls them: Those who wandered of the ten tribes whose trackless footsteps seem as mysterious as their fate.

In his study of the rabbinical thought regarding the lost tribes. Edersheim concludes: As regards the ten tribes there is this truth underlying that as their persistent apostasy from the El of Israel and His worship had cut them off from His people, so the fulfillment of the Divine promises in the latter days would imply as it were a second birth to make them once more Israel.

Before the division of the two houses of Israel were united under three successive kings: First there was Saul, a Benjamite. Then from the tribe of Judah came King David, whom "all of Israel and Judah loved" (1 Samuel 18:16.) Afterward, David's son Solomon

became King. But Solomon entered into sin by building places of idol worship for his foreign wives. Which this idolatry sounded a death knell for the unified kingdom of Israel.

So the Holy One said to Solomon: "Because you have done this I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Nevertheless, I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son" (1 Kings 11:11-12.)

The united kingdom of Israel was torn from Solomon's son, Rehoboam, because of idolatry. However, the Father said" I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of Servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen. (1 Kings 11:13.)

Judah remained a kingdom because they were beloved for the sake of their father David, and because of Yah's love for Jerusalem, His chosen city.

This will forever remain unchanged. Romans 11:28 says of the Jew: "From the standpoint of Yah's choice, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. The Yah of Israel loves the Jewish people and is always calling them to Himself.

Nonetheless, The Father took the greater portion of the kingdom away from Judah's sovereignty. As HE swore He would, He gave ten parts to Solomons's servant who was an Ephriamite by the name of Jeroboam. At that time, Abba told Jeroboam, I will tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hands and give you ten tribes. (1

Kings 11:11-12, 25, 31-35.) Ten tribes were given to Ephraim. Israel was torn in two most importantly it was divided by Yah. For He declared "This thing has come from Me " (1 Kings 12:24.)

The Israelites separated into two houses after King Solomon's rule. Their division can be compared to that of the United States during the Civil War. Union and Confederacy, Yankees and Rebels, North and South. Even so during the American Civil War, all continued to be "Americans" even though a blood battle raged with brother fighting brother. So it was in Ancient Israel.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim repeatedly went to war against each other, cousin countering cousin, Yet, both were part of the greater family of "Israel". Those who lived in Judea were called primarily Judah, Judeans or Jews.

Considering our Yanks and Rebs comparison, it's ironic that one reason for ancient Israel's separation was a type of "Slave labor" For many, the house of Joseph had become conscripted laborers for the ruling house of Judah.

It was King Solomon's need to have an overseer to control his forced laborers and when he saw that Jeroboam was a valiant warrior and that Jeroboam was industrious he appointed him over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph. (1 Kings 11:28.)

However, After Yah told Solomon that Jeroboam would receive ten tribes, Solomon, filled with jealousy, sought to kill Jeroboam.

So Jeroboam fled to Egypt and remained there until after Solomon's death.

Then Solomon died, and his son, "Rehoboam, went to Shecum, for all the Israelites had gone there to make him king. When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this he returned from Egypt.

So they sent for Jeroboam and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him "Your father put a heavy yoke on us and if you will lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke on us we will serve you. But foolish Rehoboam ignored the wise counsel of his elders to "relent" Instead he listened to his peers, who errantly advised him to make the service even more harsh (1Kings 12:1-14) so then began Israel's division.

In examining this division we need to see what Scripture says of Rehoboams' refusal to listen to his elders: It was a turn of events from Yah that He might establish His word to Jeroboam the son of Nebat (1 Kings 12:15). This division was from Yahweh. Which means there is a reason it happened.

Nevertheless, Jeroboam's reappearance incited Rehoboam to make a move to retake all of Israel. So "King Rehoboam send Adoram, who was over the forced labor, apparently he had taken Jeraboam's place and all Israel Ephriam stoned him to death.

King Rehoboam made haste to mount his chariot and flee to (his) Capital Jerusalem. (1 Kings 12:18) When all of Israel (Ephriam) heard that Jeroboam had returned they sent and called him to the

assembly and made him king over all of Israel the Northern Kingdom. (1 Kings 12:20).

The kingdom of Israel was divided. Rehoboam was the King of Judah, and Jeroboam was the King of Israel. David's once united house, his once glorious tent, had fallen for it is written that "a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. So David's house fell (Matthew 12:25).

It is essential that we see that this kingdom was divided by Yah Himself (1 Kings 12:15,24; 2 Chronicles 11:4,) It came from His hand because He had a plan. In spite of their innate differences, inspite of their many sins, Abba would use His two houses of Israel.

