

'Men of Issachar': The Astounding Story of Finland and Estonia

The Baltic Republics of Finland and Estonia are among the most northerly inhabited countries in the world. They share much with their Nordic neighbors: Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. Like other Nordics, Finns and Estonians are egalitarian and democratic. They are also winners in the new global economy. Finland in the early 2000's was rated the most competitive economy on earth. Estonia, having endured a half-century of Communism has now become the free-market showplace of the Soviet Union.

Finland and Estonia are curiosities. Ethnically, many Finns and Estonians resemble Swedes and Danes, but most of them do not speak a Germanic or Indo-European language. Finnish and Estonian belong to the Finno-Ugric or Ural-Altai language family, related distantly to Turkish and Hungarian. In spite of their Nordic democratic traditions and high levels of wealth and literacy both countries have endured long centuries of servitude imposed upon them by the realities of geography and history.

There is a clue to the paradox of Finnish/Estonian history. During World War II General Mannerheim led the Finnish army in two separate conflicts against the Soviet Union. Astonishingly, he addressed them as 'Men of Issachar'! Could there be a connection between the people of Finland and their Estonian cousins and a tiny, supposedly extinct, tribe of ancient Israel.

Israel's Battleground

Issachar was the youngest son of Jacob's wife Leah, born not long after his brother Zebulun. Leah named him Yissakar, which meant 'he will bring a reward', which derived from sachar, which meant 'payment'. Leah named her last son this because she had to hire Jacob to sleep with her !

By the time of the Exodus in 1446 BC Issachar had grown into a tribe of people and marched alongside his brother Zebulun. The tribe received the flat plain and rich farmland of the Jezreel Valley. Soon Issachar fell under the power of the Canaanites who remained powerful in Hazor. In the late 1300's BC the Issacharites and other northern tribes became servants to Jabin and his general Sisera.



The land of Issachar occupied the fertile Jezreel Valley

Issachar was to endure a troubled history: “His lovely valley was Israel’s battlefield’ according to Jacob’s Sons , a character study of the Twelve Tribes written George Petrie. Issachar’s history ‘was written in letters of blood’. ’s territory became Israel’s battleground. Around 1290 Deborah and Barak defeated Sisera’s armies by the River Kishon. Fifty years later Gideon would engage the Midianites in Issachar’s valley. Over 200 years later The Philistines crushed the armies of King Saul near Mt. Gilboa. Saul killed himself in the battle and David eventually became king. Issachar not only joined Jeroboam’s revolt against the House of David but fathered the short-lived dynasty of the wicked Baasha. The tribe figured strongly in the events of King Ahab’s reign and that of his successor, Ahaziah. Ahab built a palace in the Valley of Jezreel not far from Mount Gilboa. He wanted to own the entire region but the vineyard of the peasant Naboth stood in the way. No amount of money could bribe this son of Issachar into giving up his land. Ahab and Jezebel had to result to political murder to displace him.

The prophet Elisha was also a son of Issachar. Elisha lived as a rich farmer where the Jordan met the brook of Beth-Shean. During his ministry he was befriended by a rich farmer and his God-fearing wife in the Valley of Shunem. When Elisha offered a favor, the Shunemite declared that he dwelled contented among his own people. Later, the man’s only son was reaping and died of heat prostration. The Shunemite sought out the prophet who raised the boy from the dead.

One more major battle is not recorded but hinted at in the Book of Hosea. Israel’s decisive military defeat at the hands of Tiglath-Pileser III took place in 733 BC The Assyrian chariot corps scored a knockout victory over the chariots of the upstart King Pekah. The land of Issachar became part of the Assyrian province of Magiddu. Between 733 and 720 BC the clans of Issachar were taken to Assyria and Media along with the other tribes.

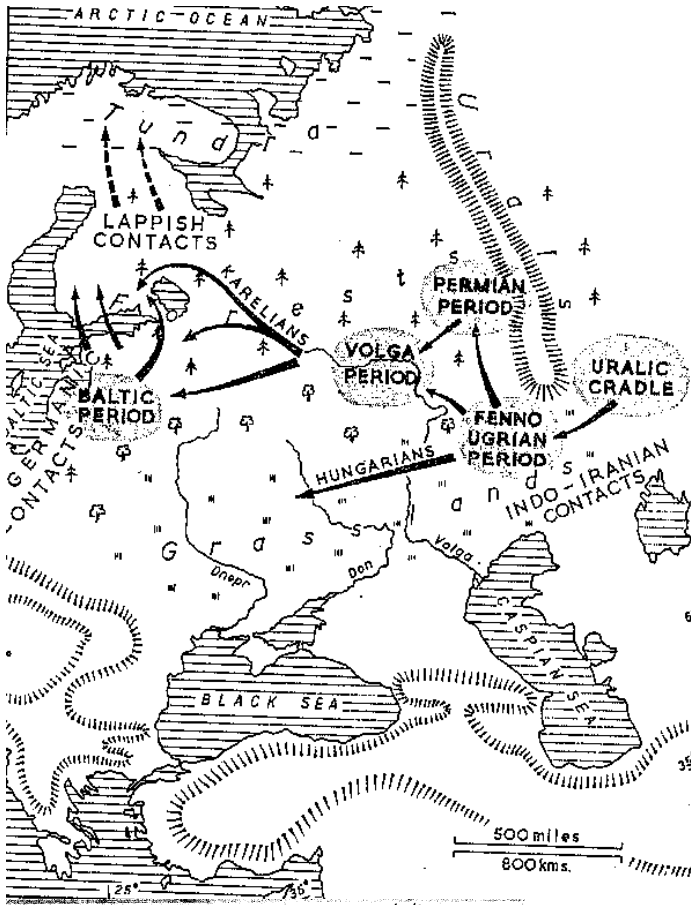
Issachar's Wanderings

In the Zagros Mountains of Media a tribe known as the Asakarta or Sagartii appears not long after Israel was taken there. Much of Issachar, together with Zebulun, migrated north and east into Scythia and Central Asia. The trail led them to Afghanistan, where British geographers found the territory of Zabulistan and the River Isagaurus. Other clans of Issachar settled further to the north on the Caspian shore where Greek

geographers found the Sakaraucae. Also present east of the Caspian were the Ithaguri. In Siberia the tribe of the Abii represented the clan of Job or Iob.

Linguists found the cradle of the Finno-Ugric peoples in Central Asia, near the Rhiplean or Ural Mountains. Many Bible scholars have traced the Japhetic families of Gomer to these regions. Riphath, the second son of Gomer, became the father of the original Finno-Ugric peoples. Many of these occupied Russia before the Slavic sons of Tubal and Meschech displaced them. A portion of the wandering Issacharites, though, began to mix with the Finnic peoples. Fair-haired and Nordic in appearance these children of Issachar became Finnish in language and culture. The Book of Hosea prophesied that when Israel would become estranged from God they would become 'not My people', the children of the prostitute Gomer (Hosea 1).

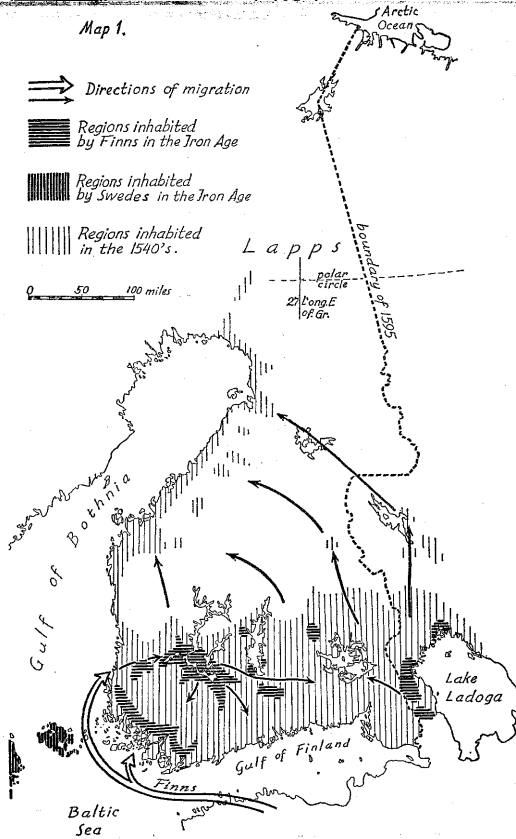
Issachar's first son was named Tola (Numbers 26:23). His descendants, now speaking Finnish, migrated up the Volga and left their name at Tula, not far from Moscow before moving on towards the Baltic. Tula was founded near the Tulitsa River.



Map 1.

- Directions of migration
- ▨ Regions inhabited by Finns in the Iron Age
- ▤ Regions inhabited by Swedes in the Iron Age
- ▧ Regions inhabited in the 1540's.

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Most of the Finno-Ugric peoples descend from Riphath and Gomer , but the sons of Issachar migrated with them to the Baltic.

The bulk of the Finns and Estonians are Israelite, but the Karelians are Japhetic.

Descendants of Issachar settled in western Finland and Estonia

(Sources: Eino Juttikala and Kauko Pirinen, *A History of Finland*, 1974. p.13; W.R Mead, *Finland*, 1968, p. 56)

Other sons of Issachar had already migrated to the Baltic. The Roman writer Tacitus in his *Germania* located the Fenni and the Aestii. The Fenni are the ancestors of the Lapps who were of Japhetic origin. The Aestii spoke a language akin to the British Celts. These were a rearguard of the Israelites who had long since migrated further west. The Aestii settled in the Baltic territory of Estonia where they were joined by other sons of Issachar who spoke Finno-Ugric. Estonians today call their country Estii. By the first century AD some of these were crossing the Gulf of Finland to settle around what is now Helsinki. The name Helsinki recalls the Danish settlement of Helsingfors.

Finland was settled during the late Iron Age from the time of Christ up until about AD 800. Western Finns began to move from Estonia across the Gulf of Finland Eastern Finns founded settlements on the shores of Lake Ladoga and became known as Karelians. Linguistically and ethnically these were the same people who still lived in the Russian territories. They were the sons of Riphath and Gomer. They and their spoke the eastern dialects of Finnish spoken in Russia and Siberia today. The western Finnish dialects , though were spoken in Estonia and carried into western Finland and even parts of Latvia. Those who spoke then settled on the southwestern Finnish shore and then penetrated into the lake regions of the western interior. They became known as Tavastians. According to Finnish historians Eino Juttikala and Kauko Pirinen, the Finns were not blood relatives of the Hungarians. The Karelians and the eastern Finns tended to be round-faced and stocky like many of the eastern Slavs and other peoples descended from Japheth. The Estonians and western Finns, though, were built like the Swedes and Norwegians. Among the Finns, ‘especially among the inhabitants of western Finland, there are many representatives of the “Nordic” racial type, which is characterized by a long skull and tall stature.’(Eino Juttikala and Kauko Pirinen, *A History of Finland*, trans. Paul Sjöblom, New York, Praeger, Second Edition\, 1974, p. 7).

Between Two Burdens

The first thousand years of Finnish history are almost blank. The Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*, describes an agricultural people not unlike those of ancient Issachar. Enduring great hardship, they sometimes prospered. The ancient sons of Issachar were assigned a rich plain of land in which they could settle and farm. They would not have to journey abroad like the sons of Zebulun. However, the regions that they would be assigned to would become battle grounds. The two biggest international battlegrounds of Europe inhabited by Israelites lay in Belgium and along the Baltic. Issachar is a strong donkey, Lying down between two burdens; He saw that rest *was* good, And that the land *was* pleasant; he bowed his shoulder to bear *a burden*, and became a band of slaves.(Gen.49:14-15, NKJV). The Finns and the Estonians migrated into a flat and rich plain to the west of which lay Germany and Sweden and the east of which lay Russia. Even during the Iron Age, Finnish peasants were being carried away as slaves into Novgorod, which became Russia. In the 1200’s Swedish knights conquered western

Finland and German knights conquered Estonia. By 1300 western Finland was part of the Swedish empire. The Karelians were taken over by Novgorod.

The Finns and Estonians were truly between two burdens and this would greatly shape their history. Finnish poet Uno Kailas expressed Finland's historic dilemma:

'Like a chasm runs the border, In front, Asia the East; In Back, Europe, the West; Like a sentry, I stand guard. ', (Eric Solsten and Sandra W. Meditz, eds., *Finland: A Country Study*, Washington, DC, Library of Congress, 1990, p. 40).

The western Finns became part of the Swedish empire. Many of them began to speak Swedish. Sweden was also part of the House of Israel descended mostly from Naphtali and prophesied to rule an empire stretching around a lake or an inland sea. Finland and later Estonia became the heart of that empire. From Sweden Finland inherited western traditions and eventually the Lutheran Reformation. On the other hand many Finns died in Swedish wars. Estonia, meanwhile, became the battleground between the German Teutonic Knights and the rising power of Muscovy. In the 1600's it also fell under the Swedish flag, but after 1721, Peter the Great took Estonia into the Russian Empire. Peter also conquered Finland but returned it to Sweden for another ninety years.

While most of the Israelite tribes elsewhere began to prosper and move towards freedom, Estonia sank into a serfdom that lasted well into the nineteenth century. In 1809 Sweden ceded Finland to Russia. Both nations of Issachar were now under Russian rule. As a Grand Duchy, Finland enjoyed many freedoms and even had her own laws and parliament. Under Nicholas II, however, ultranationalists attempted to Russify both Finns and Estonians. In World War I the German army advanced into Estonia. The Russian Revolution and Civil War was fought on Finnish soil. Finland proclaimed her independence in 1918. Communist forces, strong in Karelia, sought Soviet backing. The Finnish right enlisted German help to defeat them. Finland became an independent country for the first time in 700 years!

Estonia also became an independent republic in 1919. During the 1920's both Finland and Estonia became democracies. Finland was the only country to repay its war debts to the United States. During the depression, Lithuania and Latvia became dictatorships, but Estonia retained more freedom. Her chief export was oil extracted from shale. These were some of the 'hidden treasures of the sand' described in Deuteronomy 33:19.

World War II was to bring terrible ordeals to both Finland and Estonia. The two burdens on either side became ever more heavy. In 1939 Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia divided Eastern Europe and modern Issachar landed in the Soviet sphere. Stalin demanded much of Karelia and a naval base at the mouth of the Gulf of Finland. Finland refused his demands and endured a six-week war with the USSR. She retained her independence. Estonia did not. Stalin annexed the three Baltic Republics and imposed both Russification and Communism on the Estonian people. Once again, Issachar 'bowed his shoulder to bear ,and became a slave at forced labor' (Genesis 49:15).

Fearful of Soviet domination, Finland joined the Axis and fought on the side of Nazi Germany. It was during this Continuation War that Marshal Mannerheim, Finland's Supreme Military Commander, addressed his country men as 'Men of Issachar'. During this time, however, Mannerheim refused to cooperate in the Holocaust against the children of Judah. Antisemitism in Finland has always been virtually nonexistent. Mannerheim warned Hitler that if he deported one Jew from Finland, Finland would leave the Axis. By 1944 the Red Army smashed Finnish resistance. Stalin was shrewd enough, though, not to wage a war of conquest against Finland.

Estonia endured far greater suffering than Finland. A large portion of the population held evangelical beliefs but antisemitism was a lot stronger than in Finland. Already under Soviet rule, Estonia lay right in the path of Hitler's drive on Leningrad. Estonia became part of Alfred Rosenberg's Baltic New Order until 1944 when the Red Army reimposed Stalinism. Caught in the worst war between the two worst dictatorships in history, Estonia lost one-third of her people.

For the next forty years Estonia endured as the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. Finland fared much better, but still remained a 'servant unto tribute' as an independent satellite. Finland paid the USSR \$300m in tribute and clung to a precarious neutrality under the shadow of the Russian bear. All major foreign policy and even some domestic ones were subject to Moscow's veto. 'Finlandization' became a byword for having to endure under the shadow of Russian influence.

Issachar's Blessings

A new phase opened beginning in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Estonia once again became an independent republic. Finland continued to pursue close economic ties with Russia but was freer to chart her own course. Both Finland and Estonia joined the European Union.

According to Deuteronomy 33 :19 Issachar was to rejoice in his tents and draw out the hidden treasures of the sand. Tents are a symbol of sovereignty and independence. No Israelite nations have rejoiced more in their hard-won independence than Finland and Estonia. 'Tents' of course also can signify dwellings and buildings. The Finns have excelled and distinguished themselves in the realm of modern architecture.

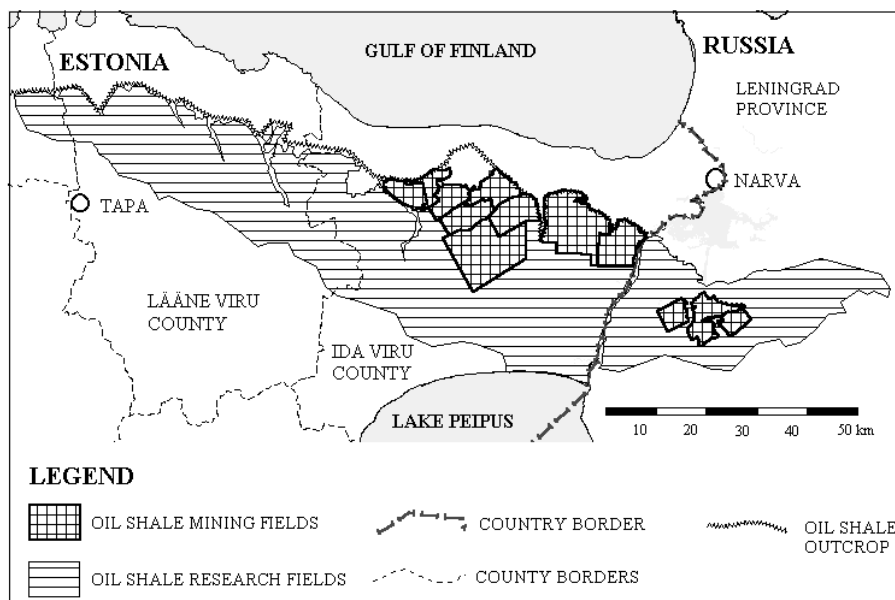


The work of Finnish architects such as Alvar Aalto and Eero Saarinen is renowned the world over .

Issachar was to mine treasures hidden in the sand. One of these treasures, of course is glass, and the Finnish glass industry has been renowned for over a century.



Estonia, meanwhile, was to become a leading miner of shale oil:



Oil shale deposits formed an important part of Estonia's economy.

Finland is now one of the world's big economic success stories. Once a mere supplier of pulp and paper, she began to dominate the leading edge of mobile telecommunications in the 1990's. Nokia now accounts for sixty percent of the shares on the Helsinki Stock exchange. Its handsets, mobile phones and fiber-optic systems dominate the European Union and much of the global market in m-commerce. Issachar was prophesied to mine treasures hidden in the sand. This includes glassware, fiber optics and silicon chips. Estonia is the most successful of the former Soviet Republics. No sooner had she won her freedom from the Communist yoke that she linked up with Finland as a major source of Finnish high-tech investment.



Nokia handset. and the Linux operating system designed by Dr.Linus Torvalds a Swedish-speaking Finn. During the 1990's Finland dominated the world in high-tech mobile commerce.

Silicon chips and fiber optics are the latest form of Issachar's treasures from the sand. The men of Issachar would also have 'understanding of the times'.

Even Finland's distinction in high technology is included in Issachar's blessing. In I Chronicles 12: 32 the men of Issachar were praised for their understanding of the times in which they lived. The Jamieson, Fawcett and Brown Commentary remarks on this verse that Jewish tradition described the men of Issachar as 'eminent for their acquirements in astronomical and physical science....' Men of Issachar have been on the cutting edge of information technology. The Nokia Corporation under Jorma Olilla led the world into mobile phone commerce, which Olilla, who holds several university degrees, recognized as the wave of the future. His countryman, Dr. Linus Torvalds, pioneered the

Linux operating system which is being adopted in the European Union and which threatens to dethrone the dominance of the America's Microsoft.

The Testament of Issachar and the Finnish Character

In 'The Testament of Issachar' first set down around 200 BC, Jewish writers painted a portrait of the tribal patriarch on his deathbed.

Issachar reviews his life story before before his sons Tola, Phuvah, Job or Jashub and Shimron and their families. He has lived 126 years of great hardship. He has been upright, slow to speak and slow to become angry. 'I was not a busybody in my doings, nor malicious and slanderous against my neighbour. I never spoke against any one, nor did I censure the life of any man, but walked in the simplicity of my eyes.' (Testament of Issachar, § 3) Unlike Reuben or Judah, Issachar was not a womanizer, but remained faithful to his Joktanite wife, Arida all his life.

He married at age 35 and has remained faithful to his wife all their days. Tradition says Issachar married Aridah of the line of Jobab son of Joktan. Issachar became a farmer and God prospered his efforts 10,000 fold. Issachar was generous and egalitarian. He shared his wealth, the good things of the earth, with all the poor and oppressed and was single-minded in doing so: 'on every poor man and every one in distress I bestowed the good things of the earth in simplicity of heart.' (Ibid.)

Issachar wasn't a hustler like Manasseh, Gad, Judah or his brother Zebulun. Though he worked hard and prospered he frowned upon acquisition for its own sake. Modesty was very important to Issachar. He had little taste for ostentatious luxury or trendy clothing:

'The simple coveteth not gold, defraudeth not his neighbour, longeth not after manifold dainties, delighteth not in varied apparel, doth not picture to himself to live a long life, but only waiteth for the will of God, and the spirits of error have no power against him.' (Ibid., §4).

As he was dying, Issachar admonished his sons and daughters and their sons and daughters to avoid sexual immorality, envy, and to have empathy and compassion for the poor and the weak. They were also to obey and show kindness to Judah and Levi. He warned his family that in the last times, in the far future, they would forsake his example, leave the land, adhere to insatiable desire and wicked devices and eventually serve their enemies.

The portrait of Issachar that emerges is of a quiet, peaceful, modest tribe of people. They are attached to their land, are not particularly talkative, not excessively money-minded. The Issacharites will be a very tough and stoical people, able to endure great suffering and hardship without complaining. Of all the peoples of Israel, the traits of Issachar fit the Finns and Estonians the best.

Finnish choreographer Tero Saarinen told Jack Anderson of *The New York Times* that "We are reluctant to promote ourselves, Finland's geographical isolation has fostered a

sense of emotional isolation.. Saarinen went on to say ‘We don't speak much. Although we can be very jolly among foreigners, we are often severe when we are by ourselves.’ Jack Anderson, ‘From Finland, Wearing Large Tutus’, *The New York Times*, March 26, 2006.

Jacob described Issachar as a sturdy donkey bowing his head to bear the burdens of adversity and servitude. Could any other temperament endure the Finnish winter of freezing cold, gloom for nineteen hours a day and the oppression of its Russian neighbor? Ask any one commuting across Helsinki’s icebound harbor in the depths of January. The most northerly inhabited Finland country in the world, Finland has no room for complainers. The Finns have learned, according to Georgetown University Professor Richard Stites, to enjoy rather than endure winter. The Finns are able to live in Finland because of a trait in their character known as *sisu*. *Sisu* can best be defined as a mixture of stoicism, stubbornness, endurance, patience, and determination. There is no question Finns and Estonians have to be, like the Russians, among the toughest human beings in the world.

‘To understand *sisu*’, Stites explains, ‘it's important to know about Finnish history, which includes lots of wars, invasions and foreign occupation. Finns aren't just the victims of severe weather. They haven't been treated that well by next-door neighbors Sweden and Russia, either. *Sisu* has sustained Finns through all of their long struggles.’ (Bill Thomas, The Finnish Line, *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2006).

What is prophesied for Finland and Estonia?

History is likely to repeat itself. Both countries remain sandwiched between Europe and Russia. Both are now members of a European Union that the Bible predicts will turn into the final revival of the Roman Empire. Revelation 9 shows that just before Jesus Christ returns to earth that mankind’s final war will rage between the new Holy Roman Empire, described as the Beast in Revelation 13 and 17 and a coalition of Asian powers led by Russia and China. Finland and Estonia will once again be caught in the middle . The sufferings they will endure, combined with the testimony of representatives God will provide will this time bring them to a realization of who God is and who they are. In Deuteronomy 13 Moses prophesied that Issachar , together with Zebulun, the modern Netherlands, will be among the first of modern Israel to acknowledge God. They and the other children of Israel will then be delivered.

The Finns and Estonians, however are not the only sons of Issachar. The story of the others merits another article.