

British-Israelism Is It Christian?

A candid and courteous Discussion of the
Theory that the British People are the
"Lost Ten Tribes" of Israel

BY

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Is It Christian?

What is British-Israelism? According to its leading exponents and their voluminous literature, it is the theory that the Anglo-Saxon people—the British and Americans—are the direct descendants of the "Lost Ten Tribes" of Israel, and heirs of all the promises that God made to Abraham and his descendants. The Ten Tribes, according to this teaching, when their Kingdom of Israel was overthrown by Sargon of Assyria in 721 B.C., were carried off into captivity in Assyria and never returned. Instead of coming back to their own land as the Jews did later, we are told the Ten Tribes finally escaped from Assyria and wandered through Asia and Europe, journeying westward under different names until long afterwards they arrived in the British Isles as the Jutes, Angles, Danes, Saxons and Normans.

We are also told that after the destruction of Jerusalem, in 586 B.C., Jeremiah, the prophet, escaped to Egypt accompanied by the daughter of King Zedekiah. From there they went to Ireland where they found a colony of the tribe of Dan, and the princess, Tea Tephi, married the king of Ulster and became the ancestress of Queen Victoria and George VI. They also brought with them the pillar of stone which Jacob had used for a pillow at Bethel, and it is now under the Coronation Chair of the British kings in Westminster Abbey. So they assure us that the throne of England is the throne of David and the lion on the King's royal standard is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. And the British nation will never fall; it is destined of God to conquer the world and no weapon that is formed against it shall prosper. Before long, they tell us, Jerusalem will be the capital of the Empire and Christ will come in bodily form and reign in the Holy City on David's throne and the whole world will be "under the British banner of love, joy, peace, etc., because Israel is to be the heir of the world." (Pamphlet, "Why Britain Will Never Be Destroyed," Bolt, p. 4.)

That, in briefest outline, is the British-Israel doctrine, which we are assured is proved to be utterly true by Scripture, by language and by history, and a multitude of Bible texts are produced in order to prove it. Most of those who believe it are earnest, devout people, many of them members of our Christian churches. They are deeply sincere in their belief and thoroughly convinced that it is in accord with the teaching of both Old and New Testaments. But a careful study of the Bible and the pages of reliable history shows that they are profoundly mistaken and that this doctrine is fundamentally opposed to Christian truth.

THE ORIGIN OF THE THEORY

Where and when did this theory arise? In 1649 an Englishman, John Sadler, published a book in which he claimed certain resemblances between Hebrew and English laws and customs. But the real founder of the theory was Richard Brothers, another Englishman, born in Newfoundland in 1757, who published about fifteen volumes in which he claimed that the English people were direct descendants of the "Lost Tribes of Israel." He was a half-pay officer of the British navy but he proclaimed himself to

be "the Nephew of the Almighty," descended from King David, and prophesied he would be revealed as "Prince of the Hebrews" on November 9, 1795. Israel would then be restored to the Holy Land and he would become ruler of the world. He was finally taken to a lunatic asylum and died in 1824 without having attained the throne of David.

Twenty-one years later, John Wilson, in a book, *Our Israelitish Origin*, placed the movement on its present basis, and other men, like Edward Hine and Piazzi Smith, the Astronomer Royal, took it up later. Hine gave about 300 alleged identifications of Britain with Israel and in a magazine of which he was editor he announced the immediate "National Salvation" of Israel, with himself as "the Deliverer out of Sion." That was in 1871, just 75 years ago, and the great deliverance has not yet arrived.

CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP AGAINST IT

It may be well just here to record the fact that the dependable scholarship of the Christian world repudiates the whole theory. The recognized authorities on Hebrew history, language and religion are unanimous in their rejection of this theory as baseless and unsound. Professor George Rawlinson, the famous orientalist of Cambridge University, says of Hine's book, "It is not calculated to produce the slightest effect on the opinion of those competent to form one. Such effect as it may have can only be on the ignorant and unlearned, on those who are unaware of the absolute and entire diversity in language, physical type, religious opinions, and manners and customs, between the Israelites and the various races from which the English nation can be shown to be historically descended." Dr. Charles Foster Kent of Yale University, in his "History of the Hebrew People," says, "It is obvious that the wild theories concerning the fate of the 'Lost Ten Tribes of Israel' are entirely without foundation, since they never were lost." Prof. W. G. Jordan of Queen's University, has said, "The idea of ten tribes disappearing to be discovered two thousand five hundred years later in the form of a modern empire is absurd . . . it is not in such a narrow treatment of history, built upon imagined facts, baseless legends and outworn tribalisms, that the manifestations of God in history will be vindicated." With these authorities all other scholars are agreed. As the *Encyclopædia Britannica* says in its famous 11th Edition, "The theory . . . rests on premises which are deemed by scholars—both theological and anthropological—to be utterly unsound." And the *Jewish Encyclopædia* condemns the whole theory for its "wild guesswork about historical origins and philological analogies" and its "slavish interpretations of selected phases of prophecy."

I. "LOST TRIBES" NEVER WERE LOST

Why has Christian scholarship come to this conclusion regarding the British-Israel teaching? What are the facts as revealed in the Bible and human history? Let us look first at the Old Testament, and we shall find that the Ten Tribes of Israel were never lost at all.

When the Ten Tribes revolted under Jeroboam and formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel, a faithful remnant of them, including the tribe of Levi, remained faithful, deserted idolatrous Israel and came to Jerusalem to worship, some of them settling in Judah and Benjamin permanently. (2 Chron. 11: 13-16.) "And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts . . . and after them out of *all the tribes of Israel*, such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers. So they strengthened the Kingdom of Judah and made Rehoboam the

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