

Is British Israelism Relevant to Christianity?

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Definition, Development and Basis for This Teaching

This view, generally called Anglo-Israelism, is that modern Britain and the Anglo-Saxon peoples of Canada, the U.S.A., and the North-western nations of Europe comprise the lost ten tribes of Israel and that the Jews are not Israel and so are not the ones who will be restored in the Millennium. Indeed after the apostles died a number of legends developed connecting Britain with Israel. These were that:

- Joseph of Arimathea was said to have travelled to Glastonbury.
- King Arthur was thought to be descended from Joseph of Arimathea.
- Jeremiah was considered to have been the “Olan Fadlah” of Celtic lore.
- The Apostle Paul was supposed to have visited Britain.

Henry VIII broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, the British theologians of the newly formed Church of England combined this legendary material with the theory of ten lost tribes of Israel as being the British nation and with Henry as being descended from King Arthur. This combination of ideas served to promote and justify Henry’s separation from Rome. The teaching was later popularized in 1840 by John Wilson and reached a high point in 1939 when the Prince of Wales became King, but was soon dashed when he abdicated. A revival of this teaching came about in the 1950s.

The teaching is based on the following Bible-related facts and assumptions:

- A massive depopulation of the ten tribes in Samaria took place in 721 BC at the hands of the Assyrian Empire.
- The branch of Scythians (Cimmerian or Saka), that were later called the Germanii, were the original lost ten tribes.
- Certain place names in Britain are similar to those in Israel.
- Only members of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin returned to their own land from Babylonian exile. Therefore, a Jew must be defined as exclusively from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.
- King David’s royal line has remained unbroken because it has continued with the British Royalty. On this basis Queen Elizabeth II is said to sit on King David’s throne as one of a continuous line of royalty.
- The stone that was Jacob’s pillow (then used as a pillar) was taken after the conquest of Judah by the daughter of Zedekiah down to Egypt. From Egypt it was shipped by Jews to Ireland, and then to Scotland and coming eventually to Westminster Abbey. It is called the Stone of Scone.

There are four main texts set forth by believers in British Israelism as proof for this teaching. They are **Genesis 35:11; Ezra 1:5, 2:1; Jeremiah 33:17; and Jeremiah 43:5-7**. However, when the context of these texts is taken into account and when other Scriptures are brought to bear on the subject do they really support this theory? First we must consider if there actually were 10 lost tribes of Israel and if they could have become the Anglo-Saxon nations:

Were There Ten Lost Tribes Who Became The Anglo-Saxon Peoples?

Genesis 35:11:

“Also God said to him: “I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; **a nation and a company of nations** shall proceed from you [*Jacob*], and kings shall come from your body.”

The argument is made from this verse that because the Jews have never been “a company of nations” this prophecy must apply to the USA as the single great “nation” and the “company of nations” would be the British Commonwealth. However, this view has no basis in Scripture as shown below:

• *THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM*

- ❖ “Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to **those who are of the faith of Abraham**, who is the father of us all (as it is written, “*I have made you a father of many nations*”) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did”

(*Rom. 4:16, 17*).

So the blessing cannot be only to those who are physical descendants of Abraham, as proposed by British Israelites, but rather to those of the nations who have the faith of Abraham. Hence, the governing factor for obtaining God's blessing is *faith* and **not Anglo-Saxon origin**.

- *A HOLY NATION*

- ❖ “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 marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy”
(1 Pet. 2:9, 10).

So the fulfilment of God's words to Jacob in Genesis 35:11 is in the Christian Congregation which is *a holy nation* and is based on faith rather than physical descent.

- *“THE PROMISED LAND”*

The Scriptures never mention the North-western countries of Europe or what would later become the U.S.A. It was the land of Canaan that was promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

- *NOT A LARGE-SCALE DEPOPULATION OF SAMARIA*

After the Assyrian invasion many of Israel's leading citizens were exiled, the remnant of Israel's army was absorbed into the Assyrian army, and only the smaller portion of the native population was deported to northern Mesopotamia (Halah and Gozan). This far eastern location is in the very opposite direction needed for the theory of a migration through Europe. According to Otzen: “*most of Israel's population remained in their land.*” Soon foreigners were introduced into the land by the Assyrians and, through intermarriage with them, the Israelite population became diluted.

Was it only those of the Tribes of Judah/Benjamin Who Returned from Babylonian Exile?

Ezra 1:5, 2:1:

“So the heads of the *families* for **Judah and Benjamin**, and the priests and the Levites—to all whose spirit God had stirred—*prepared* to go up and build the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem. ... Now these were the **people of the province who came up from the captivity** of the exile whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon carried captive to Babylonia. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his *own* city.”

These verses are used to present the idea that the ten tribes were lost because only Judah and Benjamin are noted as the ones who returned to the land of Canaan. Furthermore, those in Jerusalem in the time of Christ must also have been from just two tribes and not of “the house of Israel.”

TEN TRIBE MIGRATIONS INTO JUDAH

- ❖ “Then after them [the Levites], from **all the tribes of Israel**, those who set their heart to seek Yahweh, the God of Israel, **came to Jerusalem** to offer to Yahweh, the God of their ancestors. And they strengthened the kingdom of Judah and made Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, secure for three years, for they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years” (2 Chron. 11:16, 17 LEB).
- ❖ “Rehoboam reigned over **the children of Israel** who *dwelt in the cities of Judah*” (1 Kings 12:17).
- ❖ “And he [Asa, King of Judah] gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those sojourning with them, from **Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon**, for **many** had deserted to him from Israel when they saw that Yahweh his God *was* with him” (2 Chron. 15:9).

THE RETURNEES INCLUDED THE TEN TRIBES

When the Assyrian ruler Sargon II deported those of the ten tribe kingdom of Israel out of their land of Samaria after 721 B.C.E. he sent them to various lands, mainly to Assyria and Media. Yet with the release in 539 B.C.E. of all those of Judah and Samaria by the victorious Cyrus, a mixed remnant from all of the twelve tribes returned to their homeland. At least by this time the term ‘Jew’ was synonymous with the phrase “Children of Israel.”:

- ❖ “Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning **the Jews** who had escaped, who had *survived the captivity*, and concerning Jerusalem ... When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of **the children of Israel**” (*Neh. 1:2 and 2:10*).
- ❖ “And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their **Jewish brethren** ... And I said to them, “According to our ability we have redeemed our **Jewish brethren** who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?” Then they were silenced and found nothing to say ... And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us ... and **all Israel** dwelt in their cities” (*Neh. 5:1, 8, 17 and 7:73b*).
- ❖ “So **all Israel** was recorded by genealogies, and indeed, they were inscribed in the book of the kings of Israel. But Judah was carried away captive to Babylon because of their unfaithfulness. And the first inhabitants who *dwelt* in their possessions in their cities were **Israelites**, priests, Levites, and the Nethinim. Now **in Jerusalem** the children of Judah dwelt, and some of the children of Benjamin, and of **the children of Ephraim and Manasseh...**” (*1 Chron. 9:1-3*).

Therefore, it was a mixed company of those from the tribes of Judah, Ephraim, Manasseh and “all Israel” who had returned after 539 BC from the exile imposed by both the Assyrians and Nebuchadnezzar. This again shows that the terms “Jew” and “children of Israel” were synonymous and so it directly contradicts the teaching that only those of the tribe of Judah were exiled.

THE RETURNEES SACRIFICES WERE MADE FOR “ALL ISRAEL”

- ❖ “Then **the children of Israel**, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering **for all Israel twelve** male goats, according to **the number of the tribes of Israel**” (*Ezra 6:16, 17*).
- ❖ “The **exiles that returned** from captivity offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel; **twelve bulls for all Israel**, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve goats as a sin offering. All was a burnt offering to Yahweh” (*Ezra 8:35 LEB*).

So, one cannot legitimately separate the term ‘Jew’ from Israel and propose that there are ten lost tribes. It is very evident, from the scriptural record, that people from all of the tribes of Israel were deported by Nebuchadnezzar in stages during the 7th and 6th centuries B.C.E. It is equally evident that people from all of the tribes of Israel returned after 539 B.C.E.

THE TEN TRIBES WERE NOT PHYSICALLY LOST

- All twelve tribes existed *in Paul’s time*.
- ❖ “And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this promise **our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day**, hope to attain. For this hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews” (*Acts 26:6, 7*).
- The Apostle Paul classifies himself as a Jew who is also an Israelite from Benjamin:
 - ❖ “I am **indeed a Jew**, born in Tarsus of Cilicia...” (*Acts 22:3*).
 - ❖ “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*” (*Rom. 11:1*).
- The Apostle Peter was a Galilean (Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59) and so possibly of the either the tribe of **Naphtali or of Zebulun**. He is also classified as a Jew according to Paul:
 - ❖ “I [*Paul*] said to **Peter** before them all, “If you, being **a Jew**, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?” (*Gal. 2:14*).
- Anna was “of the tribe of **Asher**” (*Luke 2:36, 37*).

ALL TWELVE TRIBES WERE LOST SPIRITUALLY

1. Jesus was sent to “the lost sheep of the House of Israel” (Matt. 15:24), yet he generally remained inside Palestine. Certainly he did not travel to Europe or Britain.

2. The twelve apostles were sent to “the lost sheep of the House of Israel” (Matt. 10:6), yet this particular commission did not send them outside of Palestine.

Has the Davidic Dynasty Been Continuous?

Jeremiah 33:17:

“For thus says Yahweh: ‘A man who sits on the throne of the house of Israel will not be cut off for David’ (*LEB*).

Along with the annals of Ireland this passage is used to prove that Queen Elizabeth now sits on King David’s throne and that if this was not the case Christ would return to a non-existent throne.

● CONTINUITY OF PRIESTLY SYSTEM

However, the context of the next verse shows that if verse 17 referred to past continuity then the whole **priestly and sacrificial system** also would need to have continued from King Zedekiah’s time. God said:

- ❖ “...nor shall *the priests, the Levites*, **lack a man** to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and to sacrifice continually” (*Jer. 33:18*).

However, no such priestly/sacrificial system operated during the exile of Judah and no such Jewish system has ever operated in any other country.

● A MESSIANIC PROPHECY

Nevertheless, these verses give an as yet unfulfilled prophecy that refers to the permanence of Messiah’s future reign and a future priesthood that will offer commemorative sacrifices in the Millennial temple (Isa 56:7; 60:7; Ezek. 40-44; Zech.14:16-21)—in memory of Christ’s finished work. The proof of the Messianic future fulfilment is seen by an examination of the earlier verses:

- ❖ “‘Look, days *are* coming,’ declares Yahweh, ‘and I will fulfill the good promise that I promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. **In those days** and in that time I will make **a branch of righteousness** sprout for David, and he will execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell *safely*, and this *is* what they shall call it: “Yahweh *is* our righteousness”’
(*Jer. 33:14-16 LEB*).

The reference here is to a single individual and not to a successive line of royalty. Notably no individual king or queen of Great Britain ever fulfilled these messianic words.

● TEMPORARILY DISCONTINUED KINGSHIP

- ❖ “The children of Israel will remain for many days **without a king** and prince, without sacrifice and stone pillar, ephod and teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel will return and seek Yahweh their God and David their king. They will come in fear to Yahweh and to his goodness at the end of days”
(*Hos. 3:4, 5 LEB*).
- ❖ “...thus says the Lord Yahweh: ‘Remove the turban and **lift off the crown**; things *are* no longer the same. Exalt the low and bring low the high. **A ruin, a ruin**, a ruin I will make it! Also this has not *ever* happened; *it will remain until the coming* of *the one* to whom the judgment belongs and I have given it *to him*’
(*Ezek. 21:26, 27 LEB*).

These prophecies completely contradict the notion that there has never been a break in the Davidic dynasty. There will be no king on David’s throne until Messiah Jesus returns.

Did Jacob’s Stone Reach Britain?

Jeremiah 43:5-7:

“But Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces took all the remnant of Judah who had returned to dwell in the land of Judah, from all nations where they had been driven— men, women, children, **the king’s [Zedekiah’s] daughters**, and every person whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah. So they **went to the land of Egypt**, for they did *not obey the voice of the LORD*. And they went as far as Tahpanhes.”

These verses concerning the desolation of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar are used for the purpose of teaching that Jacob's stone (Gen. 28:10-22) was taken on a journey which terminated at Westminster Abbey. On this basis Queen Elizabeth II is said to be currently sitting on King David's throne as one of a continual line of royalty.

1. NOT GOD'S WILL

However, Jeremiah 43:7 shows that this fleeing to Egypt was not in obedience to "*the voice of Yahweh.*" Hence, it could not be part of His purpose.

2. THE THRONE IS NEVER TRANSFERRED

The Scriptures never hint at the literal throne of David as ever being removed from the land of Israel nor subsequently returned. There is no mention of Ireland, Scotland or England in the Scriptures and so making this theory pure conjecture based on certain dubious details about a stone and the British Isles. However, Israel's royal rulership will be re-established at the return of Messiah (Luke 1:32, 33; Acts 15:16) after his feet step onto the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4).

3. JACOB'S STONE WAS A PERMANENT PILLAR

In Israel the action of setting up a stone as a pillar was to be a permanent memorial to commemorate a significant event. Such stones were left in place for many generations. So it is almost certain that Jacob would not have taken his stone pillar with him.

4. A DIFFERENT STONE IN BRITAIN

The Coronation stone in Britain, known as the Stone of Scone, is made of **red sandstone** and has been geologically analysed to have originated in Scotland; whereas the type of stone to be found in the Bethel area of Israel is **white limestone**. The Stone of Scone was returned to Scotland in 1996 but there is agreement that it would be returned to Westminster in the event of a coronation.

The Genetic and DNA Evidence

Modern DNA studies on the Y-chromosome of Jews worldwide such as the Human Genome Project have determined that 40% of modern Jews share common Semitic origins dating back to a common genetic source 3,000 years ago in the Middle East. So while Jews are genetically tied to the general region of Israel, they are **sharply divergent genetically from Britons** and other Europeans. This is because Jewish (Israelite) communities have tended to remain relatively isolated from other communities and with relatively little intermarriage with Europeans. Yet the Y-chromosome testing reveals that the world's Jewish communities also closely resemble Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese, suggesting that all are descended from a common ancestral population that inhabited the Middle East some four thousand years ago. This again shows that there is no genetic connection between those who originated in the Middle East and those of Anglo-Saxon stock.

Other Factors

1. Europe was already populated by the proto-Germanic (Scythian) peoples long before any Israelites were deported by the Assyrians in 721 BC.
2. Europe of the time shows no evidence of Israelite culture.
3. The similarities of less than a dozen place names between Israel and Britain are actually not so very similar and are entirely coincidental. The occurrence of short and simple words and phonetic groupings is to be expected as being naturally common to many languages.
4. The polytheistic worship (Druidism and nature worship) of ancient Britons does not match that of Israelites who were significantly monotheistic.

Summary and Conclusion

- The four main texts set forth as proof for the British Israelism teaching have been shown to have been misapplied when their context and other Scriptures have been brought to bear on the entire subject.

- The Scriptures show that the ten tribes were never fully lost in a physical sense. Also history shows that there was never a large-scale depopulation of Samaria.
- The term ‘Jew’ became synonymous with all the ‘children of Israel’ at an early date.
- It is impossible that the stone that was Jacob’s pillow began a journey leading eventually to Westminster Abbey.
- Significantly the teaching that there was never a break in the Davidic dynasty is proved wrong by both biblical prophecy and biblical history.
- The details concerning the tracing in history of the Anglo-Saxon peoples and proposing that they are the lost ten tribes of Israel are **very speculative**. The genetic evidence disproves any connection between these two groups. Furthermore, there was no real religious, cultural or linguistic connection between Israel and Britain in those early times.

All these facts indicate that there is no connection between the British Royal family and the Davidic dynasty. Neither do the facts indicate that the British are descended from ancient Israelite tribes. This is because there never were any completely lost Israelite tribes and so is an irrelevant theory for true Christians.

For Christians to believe in British Israelism and to imagine that they are part of the so-called lost 10 tribes of Israel tends to promote a form of **elitism**, thus hindering their ability to develop the various Christian qualities such as humility. It seems also to even promote a degree of **racism and of nationalism** as well as a feeling of superiority over people of non-Anglo-Saxon nationalities in total contradiction of the biblical position because:

“God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him”
(Acts 10:34, 35)

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