

# Why Israel?

Biblical understanding concerning God's purposes for Israel and the Church

Studies

## Where are the lost tribes of Israel?

About 2,700 years ago the land of Israel was invaded by Assyria and ten of the nation's tribes were carried away into captivity. No return of these tribes to their land has been recorded in the Bible or in secular histories. Nothing more has been heard of them. Apparently they vanished without trace. But the Bible says they have an important place in Israel's future.

Many Christians understand that, just as he promised long ago, God is once again taking up his ancient people, the Jews, and is returning them to their land. But any understanding we may have of what God is doing in the Middle East today is incomplete if it ignores the question of the lost tribes. God's programme for Israel involves the whole nation. So the question is: where are the lost tribes of Israel?

## Hebrew, Israelite and Jew

We must begin by being clear as to the true biblical meanings of the words Hebrew, Israelite and Jew. Contrary to what most people think, these words are not interchangeable. Abraham came from the city of Ur in ancient Chaldaeia (Gen 11:27-28, Gen 15:7). He was called a Hebrew (Gen 14:13). Some say that this word comes from the name of Abraham's ancestor Eber (Gen 10:21) or Heber (Luke 3:35). Others say that it comes from the word *ibri* which meant, in Abraham's language, 'a person from the other side'. All Abraham's descendants are Hebrews.

Abraham's grandson Jacob was renamed Israel (Gen 32:28). He became the father of twelve sons - Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin. These were the founding fathers of the tribes of Israel. All members of these tribes are Israelites since they are descended from Jacob. Since they are also descended from Abraham they are also Hebrews.

When the Israelites came out of Egypt to occupy the land God had promised them the conquered territory was divided among the tribes. The Levites, however, as the tribe from which the priests were exclusively appointed, received no tribal territory but were given cities of their own in various places throughout the land (Num 35:1-8). These cities had only

limited amounts of land surrounding them. The Levites were subsidised by the other tribes (Num 18:24). The tribe of Joseph was subdivided into the two half-tribes of his sons Ephraim and Manasseh and these two half-tribes were promoted to the status of full tribes for purposes of land division. That was in accordance with an instruction of Jacob (Gen 48:3-6) that these two grandsons should be considered founders of separate tribes and should possess separate territories, ranking equally with his sons Reuben, Simeon and the others. If the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are considered separately and if the tribe of Levi is included there are actually thirteen tribes. When the Bible speaks of the twelve tribes of Israel it means, according to context, either (a) ethnically, all the descendants of Jacob's twelve sons or (b) territorially, the twelve divisions of the land and their inhabitants.

### **Jew comes from Judah**

The word Jew comes from the name Judah and originally meant a member of the tribe of Judah. Both these words - Judah and Jew - came to have wider meanings. So did the word Ephraim. To discover how this came about we have to look at some of the nation's history. After many military campaigns against other nations occupying the land, which had continued, on and off, for about 300 years since the Israelites' entry under the leadership of Joshua around 1200 BC, the country was eventually consolidated and made secure by King David, who was of the tribe of Judah (Mat 1:3-6). David's son Solomon thus inherited a kingdom at peace with its subjugated neighbours. It was during Solomon's reign that the first temple was built in the capital, Jerusalem. Although God gave Solomon great wisdom (1 Ki 3:12), he was foolish enough to disobey God by taking many foreign wives. Predictably, these women brought their heathen religions with them and, under their influence, Solomon instituted officially approved worship of heathen gods in Israel (1 Ki 11:1-8). God was angry with Solomon for this and told him that he deserved to have the kingdom taken away from him. God remembered, however, a promise he had made to David that, come what may, he would never take the throne away from David's son and descendants (2 Sam 7:12-16). God told Solomon that, although he would remain king, he would allow his son and successor, Rehoboam, to be king over only one tribe. The other tribes would be given to someone else (1 Ki 11:11-13).

### **Jeroboam of the tribe of Ephraim**

Solomon had appointed a man called Jeroboam, of the tribe of Ephraim, director of forced labour gangs recruited to carry out certain building repair and construction work. The prophet Ahijah identified Jeroboam as the man God had chosen to be king over the tribes to be separated off after Solomon's death. When Solomon found out about this he tried to have Jeroboam killed, but Jeroboam fled the country and took refuge with Shishak, king of Egypt (1 Ki 11:40).

Solomon died in 922 BC and was succeeded by his son Rehoboam. When Jeroboam heard that Solomon was dead he returned from Egypt and got an audience with the new king. He wanted to know whether Rehoboam would continue the harsh domestic policies of his father - forced labour and heavy taxation - or whether easier times could now be expected. Rehoboam first consulted his older, experienced advisers who recommended an easing of the burdens. Then he consulted inexperienced younger men of his own generation. The young men recommended a heavy-handed policy. Rehoboam took their advice, telling Jeroboam that the people could expect even harsher treatment from him than they had received from Solomon. Outraged, ten of the tribes rebelled and, forming a separate state in the north, made Jeroboam their king (1 Ki 12:1-18). They eventually established their capital at Samaria.

According to the Bible Rehoboam was left with only one tribe, his own tribe of Judah (2 Ki 17:18). That statement, however, needs amplifying. Israel's first king, Saul, had been of the tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam 9:21). In the days of Saul's reign a close friendship sprang up between David and Saul's son Jonathan. The story of Saul's unjust hatred and pursuit of David is told in the first book of Samuel. During this period David and Jonathan made a solemn agreement that David, if he came to power, would not take revenge on Jonathan's family (1 Sam 20:12-17). When David became king one of his first desires was to keep this agreement and be reconciled with any remaining members of the house of Saul. He showed special kindness to Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, a cripple (2 Sam 9:1-13). From that time forward the two tribes were considered linked in a special way. When Jeroboam rebelled the Benjamites joined forces with Judah with the intention of recovering the other tribes for Rehoboam, but God blocked that plan (1 Ki 12:21-24). Rehoboam was left with Judah, Benjamin and, of course, those Levites who were resident in his territory. When God said 'one tribe' he was speaking territorially, Benjamin being regarded as incorporated in Judah.

Jeroboam thought it would be unwise to allow the subjects of his new kingdom to continue to visit the enemy capital, Jerusalem, to worship at the temple or keep the traditional festivals of Israel. They might be tempted to change sides. He established two new religious centres in his own kingdom, one at Bethel and the other at Dan, at which the worship of golden calves was instituted (1 Ki 12:25-33). He also established new heathen priesthoods in various other places (1 Ki 13:33). The Levites who lived in cities in his territory were forbidden to continue to go to the temple at Jerusalem to serve by rotation as priests. These Levites therefore left their cities and removed to Rehoboam's kingdom where they continued to enjoy their priestly privileges. Some others of Jeroboam's subjects followed the Levites' example, removing to Rehoboam's kingdom and clinging to their historic faith (2 Chr 11:13-17).

### **The southern kingdom**

The southern kingdom thus came to contain not only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin but also the whole tribe of Levi and a smaller admixture of refugees from other tribes. (Later on, in the reign of King Asa, who instituted certain reforms, more refugees from the tribes of Simeon, Ephraim and Manasseh came over to the southern kingdom (2 Chr 15:9)). This kingdom called itself Judah after the name of its senior tribe. From that time forward the word Jew no longer had the restricted meaning of a member of the tribe of Judah but the wider meaning of a subject of the kingdom of Judah. All Jews you meet today are descendants of subjects of the southern kingdom of Judah, although they are not all of the tribe of Judah. When our Lord was presented as a child at the temple in Jerusalem his family was greeted by a woman named Anna who was a Jewess of the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36-38). She would have been a descendant of one of the refugees who left Jeroboam's kingdom for Rehoboam's. The word Jew, in fact, is used in the Bible only in this sense of a subject of the southern kingdom or a descendant of one. The Bible calls the patriarchs Hebrews, not Jews. The people God brought out of Egypt were called Hebrews or the children of Israel, not the Jewish people. Subjects of the northern kingdom were Israelites but not Jews. If anyone doubts this, because he has been taught otherwise, he may check the fact in a concordance to the Bible (Authorised Version). He will not begin to find the words Jew, Jews or Jewish until he comes to verse 6 of chapter 16 of the second Book of Kings - nearly halfway through the pages of the Old Testament.

### **The northern kingdom, Ephraim**

The northern kingdom was sometimes called Ephraim after the name of its senior tribe, to which Jeroboam belonged (e.g., Isa 11:13, Hos 6:4). But the prophets usually called the northern kingdom Israel and the southern kingdom Judah. The greater number of the tribes of Israel - ten of them - belonged to the northern kingdom. But now the possibility of confusion arises because Judah also called itself Israel. That was not incorrect since the subjects of both kingdoms were all descended from Jacob, who was renamed Israel. When Bible writers who lived after the time of Solomon use the expression 'the house of Israel' they mean the northern kingdom. When they use the terms 'Judah' or 'the house of Judah' they mean the southern kingdom. When they use the word Israel they could mean either or both but usually the northern kingdom (e.g., 2 Ki 15:1, 2 Ki 17:1). When they refer to all descendants of Jacob collectively they call them Jacob, all Israel or the whole house of Israel, but sometimes just Israel. When we see the word Israel we must study the context to see exactly who are meant. Similarly, when we see the word Ephraim we have to study the context to discover whether it is the whole northern kingdom which is meant or just the tribe of Ephraim. In a few rare instances the name of Joseph (Ephraim's father) is substituted for that of Ephraim (e.g., Rev 7:8). Fortunately, the contexts make matters fairly clear, but I shall keep things simple by referring to the southern kingdom as Judah,

and its people as the Jews, and the northern one as the ten tribes. These matters are summarised in the diagram appended to this paper.

### **Kings of Israel**

Over the next 200 years nineteen kings, from Jeroboam to Hoshea, reigned over the ten tribes. Not one of them returned to the worship of the God of Israel. God sent his prophets to the ten tribes - Elijah, for example - but any success they had was only temporary and limited. The story of the reigns of the northern kings is one of unbroken spiritual and moral degeneration. Eventually God's patience was exhausted. The ten tribes would be rejected and driven out of their land. God announced that decision through the prophet Hosea in a particularly graphic way. He told the prophet to take an adulterous woman to wife, symbolising the infidelity of the ten tribes to himself. Three children were born of this union. God told Hosea to call the third *Lo-ammi* which means 'not my people' (Hos 1:2-8). The ten tribes would no longer be God's people and he would no longer be their God. That, however, would not be a permanent state of affairs. A day would come when God would bring their descendants back to their land and be reconciled with them. This statement is very important for our understanding of what God is doing in the Middle East today and I quote it here in full:

*Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi, for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God. 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, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head. (Hos 1:9-11a.)*

### **Difference between the Jews and the tribes**

It is important to realise that the words 'Ye are not my people and I will not be your God' were addressed to the ten tribes, not to the Jews. The Jews remained God's people. Not only would God reject the ten tribes, but also the ten tribes would no longer acknowledge the God of Israel. In effect they would entirely cease to be recognisable as an Israelite community. The unity of Israel was based on a spiritual unity. Without spiritual unity there can be no lasting social or political unity. The Bible teaches this lesson repeatedly. The reason why, for the last 2,700 years, no one has been able to identify the ten tribes is that they have, unlike the Jews, utterly lost sight of their spiritual roots and have therefore also lost their social cohesion. They did not have to wander far from Israel, or from each other, to lose that cohesion. They began to lose it the moment they crossed the border. The Jews, on the other hand, although they have been scattered to the ends of the earth, have retained their sense of communal identity wherever they are found. The Jews know who they are, but the ten tribes do not. If, throughout the last 2,700 years, members of the ten tribes have not known who they truly are then it follows that no one else, apart from God,

can have known either. That is why we must dismiss all the romantic theories which have been put forward about descendants of the ten tribes being represented among the North American Indians, in communities in China, in the British royal family or anywhere else. They became completely indistinguishable from their new compatriots and we cannot know who they are until they reappear in the land of Israel.

### **Tribes returning**

The words 'in the place' and 'there' contained in the statement can bear only a geographical interpretation. The ten tribes must one day return to their land, resume their ancient faith and be gloriously reunited with their brothers the Jews. If they returned to their faith before they returned to their land there would be no problem of spiritual, social and political reunion with the Jews. If, however, they returned to the land before they returned to their faith there could be no real social or political unity with the Jews for as long as that situation lasted. Which of these two possible conditions must we expect to turn out be the actual one? The answer is, the second. God said in this statement that he would re-adopt the ten tribes 'in the place' where he had rejected them. They must obviously be in the land again before this happens. The ten tribes must return to the land of Israel still in ignorance of their real identity, and until God opens the eyes of both the ten tribes and the Jews we would not expect any fraternal feelings to develop between the two sides. The final thing to notice about the statement is that, on or following the return of the ten tribes, both they and the Jews will be united under one king. That king will of course be that Son of David who declared himself to be 'greater than Solomon', namely the nation's Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the reign of King Pekah (737-732 BC) the Assyrian king Tiglath-Peleaser invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and carried some of the population into captivity in Assyria (2 Ki 15:29, 1 Chr 5:26). In 722 BC the army of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser again invaded the land and captured the capital Samaria after a three-year siege. Then his forces went throughout the northern kingdom taking the entire population captive. The people were forcibly removed and resettled in other territories administered by Assyria (2 Ki 17:1-6). They were replaced by colonists brought there from other parts of the Assyrian Empire. These colonists did not at first prosper. In fact they were continually attacked by wild beasts. They attributed their difficulties to the opposition of the God of the land, so they found among the exiles someone with some knowledge of the Israelite religion and brought him to Bethel to establish a form of it there. They continued, however, also to worship their own heathen gods (2 Ki 17:24-41). These newcomers came to be known as the Samaritans, after the name of the capital Samaria. They were despised by Judah as supplanters of their Israelite brothers and practitioners of an inferior form of worship of the God of Israel not centred on the temple system (John 4:9, John 4:20). There are Samaritans in Israel today who claim to be members of the ten tribes. They are mistaken. The Samaritans replaced the ten tribes, taking over their vacated lands.

There are no known histories of any subsequent wanderings of the ten tribes or of their establishing their own communities in remote places. There is no reason to think that they did anything other than become quickly assimilated into the societies in which they had been placed - chiefly at Gozan and along the banks of the river Habor (northern Syria), in the cities of the Medes (western Iran) (2 Ki 17:6) and in Egypt (Hos 9:3). Although their descendants may have moved around somewhat in the Middle East there is no evidence that any significant numbers of them left those countries which are neighbours of modern Israel, and these are the regions from which we would expect them to return.

### **Historical timeline**

By contrast, accounts of the subsequent history of the Jews are fully available to anyone who cares to read them in the Bible and other books. Although there were some reforming Jewish kings, the history of Judah over the next 330 years or so to the reign of King Jehoiachin was a downward spiritual and moral spiral, although not quite so bad as that of the ten tribes. Consequently, in 587-586 BC, about 130 years after the disappearance of the ten tribes, Judah was carried off, in two main waves of deportation, by the forces of King Nebuchadnezzar into exile in Babylon (Iraq). Judah's exile, however, lasted only 70 years. By the time this period expired Babylon had been conquered by the empire of the Persians and Medes (Iran) and under their rule the Jews were permitted to return to their land and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar's army had destroyed. The conquests of Alexander the Great brought Judah under the rule of the Greeks in 332 BC. Following the division of the Greek Empire after the death of Alexander the nation eventually came under Seleucid Syrian control in 198 BC. There was a struggle for independence from 166 BC and some success but, in 63 BC, not long before Julius Caesar invaded Britain, Jerusalem was taken by Pompey's troops and Judah, or Judaea to give it its Latin name, became part of the Roman Empire. In 70 AD, some 40 years after our Lord's death, resurrection and ascension, the Romans crushed a Jewish revolt, destroyed the second temple and banished all Jews from the city of Jerusalem. The horrors of this event are fully described by the contemporary historian Josephus in his book *The Jewish War*, although he was a turncoat Jew who sided with the Romans. In 135 AD another revolt, led by a man called Bar Kochba whom many believed to be Israel's Messiah, was also crushed by the Romans and the people began to be deported from the land, many sold into slavery. So began the almost 2,000 years of Judah's exile, wanderings and persecution. The Zionist movement, directed at creating a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, as the region had come to be called, was formally launched at a conference of Jews in Basle in 1897, although a slow homeward drift of Jews to the land had by that time already begun. The First World War put an end to Turkish control of the region, which then came under British administration. Following the end of the Second World War in 1945 Jewish survivors of the Nazi holocaust began to return to the land in large numbers, in spite of British opposition. In 1947 the United Nations carried by a margin of one vote a resolution

ratifying the creation of the modern state of Israel (independence granted May 1948) since when the Jews have successfully resisted a number of attempts by powerful neighbours to eliminate the young state. Jews are today continuing to return to the land in significant numbers from all parts of the earth. But where are the ten tribes?

### **But where are the ten tribes?**

Ezekiel was a prophet to Judah in the time of the Jews' 70 years exile in Babylon. Through Ezekiel, God confirmed his promise about the reunion of the ten tribes with Judah, again in a graphic way. He gave Ezekiel the following instructions, and it may be easier to understand their meaning with the help of the appended diagram:

*Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not show us what thou meanest by these? say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all. (Ezek 37:16-22).*

### **Promise**

Essentially, this was the same promise as was made through Hosea. The ten tribes would one day be reunited with Judah under one king in their own land. That reunion is a key event in the development of God's programme for Israel. There is something of great importance which God will do only when both sides are back in the land:

*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah... After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer 31:31, 33b.)*

### **New covenant**

I do not wish to enter into an argument with anyone about whether or not Christians are under a new covenant. I will strictly confine myself to what is absolutely plain from this

text. There is to be a new covenant - a new guaranteed arrangement between God and his people. The parties to this covenant will be God on one side and the reunited houses of Judah and Israel (the Jews and the ten tribes) on the other. It will be a covenant of law. God's law will be written in the people's hearts this time instead of on tablets of stone. God will cause the whole house of Israel to become law-keeping by nature. Israel will then come in for the blessings and rewards earned by obedience to the law instead of the punishments inflicted for disobedience (Deut 28). Before God turns all Israel into a model nation in this way the ten tribes must of course be reunited with the Jews in the land. Israel will subsequently become the nucleus of a kingdom of righteousness incorporating all nations of the earth (Rev 11:15). How quickly and in what numbers individual citizens of this future kingdom will accept the Lord Jesus not only as their King but also as their personal Saviour and so place themselves under grace, not law, I cannot say since the Bible does not tell me. It is plain from the Scriptures, however, that in the day of its full restoration Israel will not be a branch of the church. Israel will have a purified and worthy Levitical priesthood (Mal 3:3) and the temple worship will be resumed (Ezek chapters 40-46). The sacrificial system will continue to point worshippers to the way of salvation just as it did in the past. I am sorry if that disappoints any Christian zealous for Israel's cause, but there it is. Faith in the Lord Jesus as one's personal Saviour is invited of Jew and Gentile alike, but is never imposed on any person, let alone a whole nation.

### **Milk and honey**

Before the children of Israel entered the land around 1200 BC they had been told that it was an abundantly fruitful land supporting a variety of indigenous nations whom they were instructed to evict (Ex 3:8, Deut 7:1-5, Num 13:25-27). God said, however, that if he was ever compelled to send them into exile for disobedience the land would become barren and unproductive (Lev 26:32-35). That has indeed been the case. For the last 2000 years the land has been mostly barren, supporting only a small population. Travellers to the region more than one or two generations ago, such as the American writer Mark Twain, found it utterly desolate. God has been keeping the land dormant pending the return of the Israelites and has not allowed other communities to flourish and significantly increase there. God has therefore given the Israelites no fresh instructions, in connection with the present return, about driving other nations out of the land. Following the return of the exiles, however, the land would once again become fertile and fruitful (Jer 31:5,12). That, too, has proved to be the case. Israel is today exporting its produce to other countries.

Now, you may at this point be objecting that, far from returning to a vacant land, the Jews are in competition with indigenous other people for occupation of it. I will deal with that point in a moment but, for the present, I would merely like you notice that nowhere in the Bible are there any fresh instructions from God to the effect that those returning from exile are to fight their way into the country and displace current inhabitants as they were

required to do in the past. There is no mention in the Bible, in fact, of any substantial population already in the land at the time of their return, with the exception of a pocket of descendants of the Philistines still located on the western coast (in the Gaza Strip) against whom there is to be a punitive expedition at some future time (Is 11:14a). There were, of course, some residual Jews, descendants of the Samaritans and groups of Bedouins and others in the land when the Israelites began the present return, but for the most part the land was barren and incapable of supporting populations of any significant size. Neither does the Bible predict any rival immigration of other peoples at this time.

There is one final point I would like to draw your attention to before suggesting to you who and where the ten tribes are.

*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 for an inheritance unto your fathers (Jer 3:18).*

#### **Whole house of Israel**

This text says that the Jews and the ten tribes will come into the land not at separate times but together. It does not say that they will recognise their common ancestry before they do so. It says that both Judah and the ten tribes will start moving at the same time, principally from points to the north of Israel, and will come together in the land. That means that, if the Jews have been returning to the land, the ten tribes must also have been doing so. Where are the ten tribes of Israel today? They are back in the Holy Land. The truth of this finding is reinforced by the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel was given a vision of a valley filled with dry human bones. As Ezekiel watched, the skeletons became covered with flesh, then sinews and skin. New life was then breathed into the bodies which stood up a mighty host (Ezek 37:1-14). Notice verse 11:

*These bones are the whole house of Israel (Ezek 37:11b).*

The expression 'the whole house of Israel' includes both the Jews and the ten tribes in its meaning. Both groups must go through the same process of national emergence - from the dry bone stage to the fully restored and living stage - and must do so together. If Judah has been evidently doing so then the ten tribes must have been doing so equally evidently.

To sum up, we must look for a community, or a collection of communities, which has in recent times come into occupation of the Holy Land alongside the Jews and whose numbers are being added to just as the numbers of the Jews are. Those people would have no present idea that they are descendants of Jacob and they would belong to the religions of the countries from which they have come, which would chiefly be other countries of the

Middle East. Prior to their entry into the land they would have been indistinguishable from other members of their former societies. They would now officially be citizens of the modern state of Israel. They would be likely to have political and economic aspirations similar to those of the Jews and they would probably resent the Jews' control of the country.

Contrary to what most people think and to what is put across by news media, most of the Palestinian citizens of modern Israel are as recently arrived in the land as the Jews are, and it may confidently be deduced that these immigrants are the returning ten tribes. It is not the case that the arriving Jews callously pushed aside a large population already living in the land. Before the development of the land by the Jews it could not have supported the present numbers of Palestinians. Winston Churchill, in a speech to the House of Commons in 1949, corrected a previous speaker on this very point in these words:

*"We could not have had it said that newcomers (Jewish immigrants) were coming in, pushing out those who have lived there for centuries. But the newcomers who were coming in brought work and employment with them and the means of sustaining a much larger population than had lived in Palestine and Transjordan. They brought the hope with them of a far larger population than had existed in Palestine at the time of our Lord. One has only to look up to the hills that were once cultivated and then were defaced by centuries of medieval barbarism to see what has been accomplished.*

*"In twenty-five years the Jewish population of Palestine doubled, but so did the Arab population of the same areas of Palestine. As the Jews continued to reclaim the country, plant the orange groves, develop the water system, electricity and so forth, employment and means of livelihood were found for ever larger numbers of Arabs - 400,000 or 500,000 more Arabs found their living there - and the relations of the two races were tolerable in spite of external distractions and all kinds of disturbances. General prosperity grew.*

*"The idea that only a limited number of people can live in a country is a profound illusion; it all depends on their co-operative and inventive power. There are more people today living twenty storeys above the ground in New York than were living on the ground in New York 100 years ago. There is no limit to the ingenuity of man if it is properly and vigorously applied under conditions of peace and justice"*

The great statesman did not realise that these people were not Arabs but Israelites. No one did. They did not know it themselves and they still do not know it. I am, of course, identifying the ten tribes with these immigrants and not with Samaritans, Philistines and other indigenous groups who are also called Palestinians today. Churchill went on to say that, when the British quitted the scene and Arab armies from neighbouring lands rolled forward in an attempt to extinguish the Jewish national home, these people fled to behind the advancing lines of their fellow-Moslems. That is the explanation of the existence today

of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The refugees were not driven there by the Jews but were panicked into flight by their own co-religionists. Both the Jewish and the non-Jewish populations have, of course, grown by natural increase as well as through further immigration.

When will Israel's internal strife come to an end - before or not until the return of the Lord? Chapters 38 and 39 of the book of Ezekiel describe a future invasion of Israel from the north by a large multi-national army called the host of Gog. The invaders will be destroyed in Israel by a natural disaster. It will take the Israelis seven months to complete the burying of the dead. Some experts have identified the leading nation, Gog of the land of Magog, as Russia. They may be right. I do not know - I am not an ethnologist. Gog's confederates are listed in verses 5 and 6 of chapter 38. An interesting thing about this list is that there is no mention of any internal enemy. On the contrary, the situation in Israel at the time of Gog's invasion is described as a tranquil one:

*In the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have always been waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them. Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee... And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwallied villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates. (Ezek 38:8b-9,11.)*

### **Future Israel**

At that time Israel will be 'at rest' and 'dwelling safely'. That does not describe Israel's condition today. A community which does not know when a bomb may next go off in a shopping centre can scarcely be said to be at rest and dwelling safely. Neither does Israel appear at that time to see any need for secure defences against a foreign invader. Before Gog's invasion some factor must both put an end to Israel's internal strife and cause the nation to think that there is no continuing reason for it to expect further aggression by foreigners. I believe that factor will be mutual recognition by the Jews and the Palestinians of a common ancestry. That is the only thing that can solve Israel's internal security problem. Partition of the country is not the answer. God says they are to be one nation never again divided. Reconciliation of Palestinian with Jew would remove all pretexts for interference in the nation's affairs, diplomatic or military, by neighbouring nations. It would silence Israel's critics. The prophet Joel predicts that, at the time of the annihilation of the northern invaders, Israel will have ceased to be a reproach among the nations:

*And I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen: but I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his*

*face toward the east sea (the Dead Sea) and his hinder part toward the utmost sea (the Mediterranean), and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things (against God's people). (Joel 2:19b-20.)*

What is your view of the current situation in Israel? Are you one of those Christians who think that it is spiritually irrelevant since God has finished with Israel as a nation and is now concerned only with the church? If so, I must tell you, in Christian love and respect, that you are seriously mistaken. Israel will never cease to be nation before God while the present heaven and earth remain:

*Thus saith the Lord; if my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then I will cast away the seed of Jacob. (Jer 33:25-26a.)*

### **National Unity**

Perhaps you are one of those Christians who favour the creation of a separate Palestinian state. Certainly, Israel's policies towards its Palestinian citizens are not always right. It must be heartbreaking to have to watch Israeli soldiers pulling down one's house. I understand your feelings, but God has said that he will work out the future of Israel on the basis of national unity, not partition. Or you may be one of those Christians who genuinely have a heart for the Jews and pray daily for an end to acts of terrorism against them. I understand your feelings, too, and I share that desire. But please understand that the bands of terrorists now constituting the Palestinian Authority are not representative of the whole Palestinian community, most of whom, like the Jews, only want peace. It is far from agreeable to be a Palestinian living in a zone controlled by these tyrannical and fanatical people. Or perhaps you are a Christian zealous for the gospel, and feel that mass conversion to the Christian faith is the only real answer for Jews and Palestinians alike. You are right to be zealous for the gospel, but please remember that our Lord said that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. God may be deferring to some distant future the conversion of the people he first chose.

### **Restoration of all of Israel**

To be a pro-Jewish and anti-Palestinian Christian is to grasp only half the picture. God is restoring all Israel. Chapters 9-11 of the Apostle Paul's epistle to the Romans are concerned with one main issue - the continuing covenant position of Israel in spite of the nation's rejection of its Messiah. Consider the following text with the appended diagram before you:

*And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Rom 11:26).*

Paul is quoting Isaiah 59:20 and he finds the key word in the text to be Jacob. There will be a national deliverance for Jacob, not just Judah, from which Paul concludes that all Israel will be preserved.

### **Book of Ezekiel**

Chapter 48 of the book of Ezekiel specifies the allocations of territory between the tribes when the kingdom is established. The country is divided from north to south into thirteen parts, one for each tribe. The central portion, around Jerusalem, is for the Levites, the priestly tribe, and contains the temple and the King's palace and its grounds. Judah's territory is to the immediate north of that area and Benjamin's to its immediate south. The rest of the land is divided among the remaining ten tribes. Only about one third of the land, the middle portion, will belong to the Jews. The rest will belong to the ten tribes. Today there are Jews in all parts of the land. God, however, will redistribute the population into tribal territories. I do not know whether this will be accomplished by peaceful gravitation or by violent upheaval. How do you feel about current territorial disputes in Israel? They are not necessarily retarding the advancement of God's plans. Are Palestinians now in the refugee camps in Lebanon actually members of the tribe of Dan, which is to have the northernmost allocation? I do not know, but I believe it is quite possible that present apparent setbacks in Israel may turn out to have been necessary stages in progress toward the arrangements set out in this chapter of Ezekiel.

Whatever your position has been hitherto, I hope you will thoroughly check the presented argument in your Bible. I assume you hold the Bible to be the authority for your faith. (If that is not so then you should start further back by asking yourself what other authority you have.) If you reach the same conclusion the next question is, what are you going to do about it? Will you bring your prayers and witness into line with what you know to be God's programme for Israel? God calls his people into partnership with himself. You may be, as I am, a person of no reputation whatever in the church or the world. You may be quite unable to command the attention of religious or political leaders. But you can witness to what you know wherever you have opportunity and you can pray for light to be given to those who are in a position to influence the course of Israel's future.

**Barry Stronge**