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LAST DAYS

Israel's still future return to the Holy Land

Exclusive: Scott Lively explains his theology on the Millennial reuniting of two 'houses'



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In my theology, the House of Israel is Christianity and will be reunited in the Holy Land on equal terms with the House of Judah (defined by Judaism) in the Millennial Kingdom. I believe that Messianic Judaism, which has risen suddenly in our generation, is both a foreshadowing of that reunion and a pre-millennial form of the religion of the Millennial Kingdom. I am not Messianic Jewish, but recognize its important role and view my own role (as founder of First Century Bible Church) to be that of a liaison and mediator between it and traditional forms of Christianity.

My perspective is unfamiliar to most of Christendom because of an ancient false teaching in the church about the return of the Hebrew tribes to the Holy Land. That false teaching holds that the House of Israel returned to the Holy Land with the House of Judah at the end of the Babylonian exile, thus supposedly fulfilling the numerous prophecies of the reunion of the two houses. But in fact they have not been fulfilled.

It was common knowledge in the days of the early church that the large majority of Israelites (House of Israel) never returned to the Holy Land. The historian Flavius Josephus recorded that fact in A.D. 93 in *Antiquities of the Jews* (11:133): "The 10 tribes are beyond the Euphrates till now, and are an immense multitude and not to be estimated in numbers." And the Apostle James begins his epistle: "James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings" (James 1:1).

1 Chronicles was written almost a century after Ezra and Nehemiah led the newly freed Jews to Jerusalem from Babylon, and it states that Israel remained in exile

"to this day" (1 Chronicles 5:26). The context is a genealogy of Reuben, which was the first of the 10 tribes captured and relocated by the Assyrians along with Gad and Manasseh long before 722 B.C. It is silent on the other seven tribes, but there is no indication anywhere in Scripture that the other seven did not remain with these three. The 10 tribes are almost always addressed as a single entity.

The Bible says that House of Israel does eventually return, in the last days and in association with the second coming of Christ and His establishment of the Millennial Kingdom, but not half a millennium before Christ's first coming, and not under the auspices of the House of Judah.

It must be remembered that the 10 tribes had abandoned Temple-based true Judaism for golden calves and increasing paganism a full four centuries before the Babylonian return. By what logic does one assume that Israel (in exile for 135 years before the Jews) would suddenly choose to resubmit to Judaism and to the Levites and relocate to Jerusalem just because the Jews were freed by Babylon?

Moreover, ALL the families who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon are clearly identified in Ezra and Nehemiah as Judeans.

"Then the heads of fathers' households of Judah and Benjamin [the two tribes of the House of Judah] and the priests and the Levites [who had defected en masse to Judah after Jeroboam's rejection of Temple worship] arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:5).

"These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city" (Nehemiah 7:6).

Some Israelites of the 10 tribes did return to the Holy Land over the years, but the Bible makes clear they were relatively few in number: "though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, Only a remnant within them will return" (Isaiah 10:20-22). Only in conjunction with the second coming of Christ will the

10 tribes return in full numbers.

But in the context of Isaiah's prophecy of the first coming, these same returnees had just been mentioned in Isaiah 9:1-2: "in ... the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali ... [known in the time of Jesus as] Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light."

This is why there were "lost sheep" of Israel in Galilee at the time of Christ, and why during the same general time period the Apostle Paul could testify truthfully to King Herod Agrippa in Acts 26:6-7 that "I stand on trial because of my hope in the promise that God made to our fathers, the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to realize as they earnestly serve God day and night." There was a remnant of all the tribes in the land, some under the auspices of the House of Judah and its system of synagogue worship (including some members of the 10 northern tribes who had long before defected to Judea immediately after the formation of the Kingdom of Israel – 2 Chronicles 11:16), and others who were "lost" in paganism of various sorts. But it was only a remnant.

However, "it shall come to pass ... that the Lord shall set his hand again the *second* time to recover the remnant of his people ... and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim" (Isaiah 11:11-13). [Emphasis added.]

And Ezekiel adds, "I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel associated with him, and I will put them together with the stick of Judah. I will make them into a single stick, and they will become one in My hand. ... Then they will no longer be two nations and will never again be divided into two kingdoms. ... My servant David will be king over them, and there will be one shepherd for all of them" (Ezekiel 37:19-24).

THAT is the second coming we Christians, the House of Israel, await today, when we will be restored to our inheritance alongside the House of Judah who are already there.