

THE ORIGINS OF THE EPHRAIMITE MOVEMENT

A Research Paper

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OUTLINE

- A. Preface. The Ephraimite Movement: A new twist on an old plan.
- B. Description of and beginnings of the Ephraimite Movement.
- C. The Relationship to the Adventist Churches and the Jehovah's Witnesses.
- D. The Relationship to the Worldwide Church of God.
- E. The Relationship to the Church of Latter-Day Saints.
- F. The Relationship to the Christian Identity Movements.
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PREFACE

While contemplating the topic for this paper, I wanted to examine a topic which would cause me to examine my own theology in-depth while expanding my base of knowledge of Messianic Judaism, and at the same time to learn more about differing beliefs that are related, so the topic of the Ephraimite Movement drew me in fascination.

I realized in the research for this paper that it was not the belief system which fascinated me so much as the origins from which it appears to have been derived. While I have learned much in the process, I am left puzzling over the reasons that the adherents of this belief system seem to be so blinded to the evidence which clearly points to origins which are not derived from, or even related to, Judaism. While remaining adamant to the belief in the Ephraimite Movement and the One-Law, Two-House Theology it espouses, the adherents appear to be unwilling to critically examine evidence which might shake the firmness of their beliefs. My sincere intent in writing this paper is to ensure that I have not done the same. I have tried to critically examine evidence on both sides of the issue, and to present a fair and just treatment of the evidence I have found.

The Origins of the Ephraimite Movement

“A movement alternately known as the “Ephraimite,” “Restoration of Israel,” “Two-Covenant Israel,” or “Two House” movement has recently gained ground in some areas among ardent Christian Zionists. Proponents of this movement contend that members of the “born-again” segment of the Christian church are, in fact, actual blood descendants of the ancient kingdom of Israel in 722 B.B.E.”¹ With this statement, intrigue set in. It became incumbent for me to gain a deeper understanding of what exactly this statement meant to me as a Messianic Rabbi in training, that it become possible to understand the beliefs of both the adherents of this position, and to be capable of explaining the importance of a correct theological basis for our beliefs to those that I am called to lead.

There are a number of related movements which will be treated in this paper. These include the movements named above as well as the One-Law movement, the British Israelite movement, the British-American Israelite movement, the Mormon

¹ Kay Silberling, *The Ephraimite Error: A Position Paper Presented to the International Messianic Jewish Alliance*, 1.

movement, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Watchtower Society, the Seventh-Day Adventists, various Christian Identity groups, and the Worldwide Church of God. These groups demonstrate a commonality of beliefs as well as demonstrating similar origins, and therefore will all fall under the purview of the topic of this paper.

The Ephraimite movement appears to have had its beginnings in the 1970's through the teachings of Angus and Batya Wooten, who were drawn in to the emergence of Jews for Jesus and the Messianic Jewish movement. They felt they had been treated as "second-class citizens by these groups, and took this to mean that Gentiles were being rejected by the Messianic Jewish movement". I have noted a similar response in fellow students in the Messianic Theology course, and may perhaps assume this is where the response originates. As a direct response to their feelings of rejection, the Wootens developed a theology which they base upon Scriptural evidence that they conclude demonstrates that there are two houses to Israel, Judah and Ephraim. In *The Olive Tree of Israel* Batya Wooten claims that the Ephraimites are not Jews, for never in Scripture were they so named. Therefore, she argues that the Ephraimites could never have reunited with the survivors of Judah in sufficient numbers to maintain their corporate identity after the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles. According to her reasoning, this then made the exiles from the Northern kingdom Gentiles.² Therefore, she reasons, all born-again Gentiles are Israel.

The Ephraimite gained adherents. In the 1980's Your Arms to Israel was begun under the leadership of Marshall (Moshe) Koniuchowsky. Other names involved with the

² Batya Ruth Wooten, *The Olive Tree of Israel*, (White Stone, VA: The House of David, 1992), 43.

Two-House and One-Law movements are Eddie Chumney, Monte Judah, Steven Collins, Tim Hegg, and a whole host of others. There also seems to be an indirect relationship with the growing Hebraic Roots movement within the Christian church. Many adherents of the Hebraic Roots movement promote strict Torah observance among the Gentile members of their groups, and encourage their proponents to tell others to do so.

A wide variety of teachings accompany such groups. There are those who believe that all Gentiles are Ephraim, those who believe only born-again Gentiles are Ephraim, and those who believe that the British are Ephraim and Americans are Manasseh. There are those who believe that only those Gentile believers that are drawn to their Hebraic roots and the Feasts and customs of Israel and the Jewish people are Ephraim. Furthermore, there are those who believe that since the “lost ten tribes” (from which they believe they are descended) are ten-twelfths of Israel, they are entitled to the ten-twelfths of the Land of Israel as their birthright. The majority of these groups appear to believe that *since they are Israel*, they are called to complete Torah observance; there does, however, appear to be an exception: most believe they are exempt from the requirement of circumcision. A disturbing trend is seen when it is demonstrated that a number of these groups believe that only white Anglo-Saxon Christians are the Ephraimites. This is not surprising when you delve into the origins of the belief system we are discussing.

While Wooten and others may make some convincing arguments for their beliefs, her response to those who ask for evidence that Gentile believers are Israel is extremely subjective. “No one can prove that they are – and no one can prove that they are not...It

will be as it was when you were born from above: You knew it in your ‘knower.’”³ Eddie Chumney asserts that “obviously, there’s not going to be paper documentation” for the Ephraimite/Northern Kingdom/Lost Tribes/House of Joseph connection. The only “proof,” it seem, is that one adheres to Chumney’s directions. On the other hand, Rick Ross, an internationally recognized cult expert...calls [the Chumney/Wooten type of teaching] it a “growing phenomenon in the United States.” “The Hebrew roots movement is really just an old teaching with a facelift. He points out that the Worldwide Church of God, founded by Herbert Armstrong in 1934, taught that Anglo-Saxons are direct descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel...At its peak, there were 65,000 Armstrongists, says Ross.”⁴

Much of the evidence offered as support for their beliefs are the same among all adherents, and most appear weak and faulty at best. Wooten, for example, assumes that the Hebrew word *goy* means either Gentile or Gentile nation, disregarding basic Hebrew translation which provides the meaning of *goy* as nation: Israel is referred to in Scripture as a *goy gadol* – a great nation. Additionally, “at the time of Joseph and Ephraim...there was as yet no tribal coalition as we see in the later history of Israel that would have allowed for an in-group/out-group identifier term such as “Gentile.” To read that into the text is to read a concept as understood centuries later into the language of the Torah writer.”⁵ Koniuchowsky argues that where Genesis 13:16 states, “And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth,

³ Ibid., 117-119.

⁴ Rick Ross, www.rickross/reference/general/general/776.html

⁵ Silberling, 3.

then your descendants can also be numbered,” it is to be understood literally. Therefore, since the Jewish people of the world today is approximately 16 million – and can be counted – then the promise to Abraham is not pointing to the Jewish people, but to the Christians of the world. This disregards elsewhere where hyperbole is used in Scripture to achieve a desired effect.

Examples of circular reasoning abound in the Ephraimite teachings. Wooten deduces that since John 10:27-28 quotes Messiah as saying, “My sheep hear my voice,” and all believers of Messiah hear his voice, therefore all believers are physical Israel.⁶ Such an argument is hardly convincing. In addition, proponents of the Ephraimite theory make unsubstantiated claims that those of the Northern tribes which were exiled became pagan Gentiles, despite Scriptural evidence that demonstrates all who desired – either from Judah or from Israel – to return to the land after Babylon fell to Persia under the leadership of Cyrus. In fact, the designation Jew came to mean all who were taken captive during the Babylonian exile. This is evidenced in Scripture in passages such as Esther 2:5 as well as the deuterocanonical book of Tobit. The supporters of the Ephraimite belief disregard such evidence since it would undermine credibility of their statement that the Northern tribes were assimilated into Assyrian society and all became Gentiles. Also disregarded is the Scriptural evidence of those from the Northern tribes in the New Testament writings, such as Luke 2:36 (Anna from the tribe of Asher), Romans 11:1 (Paul from the tribe of Benjamin) as well as such statements as that of James (Jacob) who in James 1:1 addresses the book to the twelve tribes (rather than the two remaining after ten were “lost”) of Israel (not Judah). This statement indicates wholesale acceptance

⁶ Ibid., 6.

of the fact that the term Israel or Jews are inclusive of one another, rather than exclusive as the Ephraimites would have us believe.

It seems rather ludicrous to base a movement on the words of people who not only fabricate the meaning of Scripture to say what they desire it to say, but also attempt to modify history to meet their expectations. “Koniuchowsky argues that the diaspora occurred only in seventy C.E.,” disregarding completely the two captivities which took place much earlier, in 722 B.C.E. and 586 B.C.E.⁷ One of the issues the movement does not address to my satisfaction is how the “ten lost tribes” became dispersed not to the nations which would be most likely, those nearby nations which would, over time be accessible by land and by sea, but rather to extremely far-distant lands as yet undiscovered at the time of the dispersion. Additionally, they offer no substantive proof that even in the unlikely scenario that the lost tribes, per se, managed to disperse so far as Great Britain and America as pagans that these same peoples would become the tribe of Ephraim/Manasseh which seems to exclude the other eight-tenths of the lost tribes. Furthermore, that this would happen in such a mysterious way that only these particular people would be the Gentile Christians of today seems inexplicable. At any rate, it appears that even the proponents of Ephraimite theory vacillate on whether or not all Gentiles or merely Gentile believers are Israelites. Of course, there is a point of definition lacking here. Just how much Israelite/Judean or Jewish blood is required to be defined as Jewish (or Israelite)? The accepted standard in Judaism has traditionally been one parent. Some would extend that to one grandparent, or even one great-grandparent. But it appears rather ludicrous to define as Jewish (or Israelite/Judean) one who fits

⁷ Ibid., 18.

Koniuchowsky's definition: "you can rest assured that almost everyone on this planet has a drop of (sic) Israelite blood since Yahweh' (sic) blessing of physical multiplicity would fill the globe through Ephraim's banishment and subsequent intermarriage and assimilation."⁸

One must ask why people are drawn to a movement such as this. "God blessed Avraham, Itzak, and Yakov and their seed after them". Ever since that blessing was given it has provoked jealousy amongst all other people. And why not...who would not want to be blessed of the Most High God...The Ephraimite Deception is such a fruit of jealousy. It is the doctrine that the gentiles are the lost tribes of Israel and that they are in some way or fashion inheritors of the blessings upon Avraham, Itzak, and Yakov. As such it tickles the ears of gentile believers in Messiah with the promise that they are really heirs to the promises of the patriarch, not after the spirit but after the flesh...The subtle deception of the Ephraimite error lies in the idea that the gentiles are not wild by nature and thus by implication that they do not need to be grafted in."⁹ Another author offered his opinion of why some people desire to be Jewish when immersed in a Messianic culture. "Most of these folks are Gentile and are caught in an identity trap because they are not Jewish and feel the need to be Jewish, so they go overboard on kippas and shofars and tallits and everything else that has come to be understood to be the domain of the Jewish people. Then they get so consumed with Jewish culture that they are sidetracked away from what is important: sharing the good news with the Jewish people. What Titus is saying here (in Titus 3:8-11) is unless they get involved with the business at hand, namely to share the

⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁹ *The Ephraimite Deception: A Lie to Lead Gentiles Away from Y'shua*. [http://www.heart of Israel.net/mdl/Ephraimite.htm](http://www.heartofisrael.net/mdl/Ephraimite.htm), 2.

good news of the Gospel with the Jewish people, they get caught up in other non profit enterprises such as trying to be Jewish.”¹⁰

One must ask where such theologies/theories originate if there is to be serious consideration of the validity of their claims. It appears that the beliefs espoused by such groups have a long history behind them. Koniuchowsky sites Yair Davidy as a source in his writings. Yair Davidy is supposedly an Orthodox Jew on British Israelism. The reason I find this dubious is that one of the arguments the British Israelism group uses to “prove” their point is their claim that British is a word evolved from the Hebrew Brit (actually *B’reit*) and *Ish*. Hebrew for man. They force the interpretation of covenant-man unto this “word.” It would be expected that one who speaks Hebrew, or a linguist, would be quick to point out that this is not how words evolve. This same group finds meanings in words such as Saxon from Saac-son (Isaac’s son), and Danube, Denmark, and Danzig which “demonstrate” the migration pattern of the tribe of Dan. By this type of logic, one could also state that the Samurai of Japan are descendants of the Samaritans. While Koniuchowsky attributes Davidy as a source, neither he nor Wooten acknowledge the close relationship between their stated beliefs and the teachings of British Israelism. One possible reason for this is the strong pro-white racist claims perpetuated by the British Israelism beliefs, claims which have been adopted by a number of American White Supremist type of groups.

In addition to the British Israelite groups, there appears to be a relationship in the developments of such religions as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Seventh Day Adventists,

¹⁰ Alan Poyner-Levinson, *The Messianic Movement and its Perpetual Identity Crisis*.
<http://www.messianicassociation.org/ezone08-messIDcrisis.htm>, 2.

and the Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormonism) emerging from the same or similar belief system. Apparently the idea that the ancestors of the British people could be the descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel emerged in the prophetic speculations of one Richard Brothers. Brothers saw himself the “Prince and Prophet of the Hebrews and Nephew of the Almighty,” claimed to being an ancestor of Jesus’ brother James, and thus descended from King David. He saw himself assuming the throne of Great Britain, which would initiate the process of the restoration of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. Rather than being proclaimed king, Brothers wound up declared insane and was confined to an insane asylum. Brothers was then succeeded by a disciple, John Finleyson, who expanded the scope of the identity of the Lost Tribes to include not only the Anglo-Saxons, but also the Scots, Irish, and Germans. Finleyson was followed in this quest by John Wilson, who published his *Lectures on Our Israelitish Origin*.

Around this same time, William Miller began preaching about the soon return of Jesus in 1845. When this did not come to pass, the just emerging Millierite movement began to lose steam. It managed to become somehow involved in the British Israelism movement, and worked its way into the British Israelism movement beginning in America. Many of these followers became convinces that (once again) Jesus would be returning soon, and as a result, entrenched themselves in such beliefs as the need to observe the Sabbath and follow the Jewish festivals. George Storr began teaching the doctrine of soul-sleep: that is that the dead are merely unconscious until given eternal life at judgment by Jesus. These Adventists began following prophetess Ellen G. White, whose teachings led directly to the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Storrs influence was underestimated, as every branch of Adventism, including the

Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of God (Seventh Day), the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Worldwide Church of God owe their doctrines of conditional immortality to him.

Wilson promoted the idea that Scripture provided evidence of three separate and distinct racial groups emerging after the Great Flood. He promoted the idea that there were definite and visible characteristics which distinguished between the three races, as well as differences in intellectual capacities as well as moral character inherent in each race. Wilson saw the Jews as children of the curse, having become hopelessly intermingled with the Canaanites and the Edomites, thus viewing the modern Jewish people as fake Israelites at best. He also taught that the blacks lacked the mental capability for higher religious concepts. "Religious movements and churches that originated in the nineteenth or early twentieth century often bore traces to that era's obsession with race. In one particular field of scriptural enquiry, racial science seemed eminently suited to provide assistance to scholars and theologians: namely the search for modern ethnic groups descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel."¹¹

Wilson was followed in this endeavor by Edward Hine, who restricted the identity of the Israelites to the peoples of the British Isles. Along with Edward Wheler Bird, Hine founded the London Anglo-Ephraim Association, which was later absorbed within the Metropolitan Anglo-Israel association with Bird as President of the association. During the 1870's and 1880's British Israelism achieved a measure of doctrinal coherence. By the early twentieth century, Anglo-Israelism was reputed to have two million adherents in Britain and the United States.¹² British Israelism offered a religious justification for

¹¹ Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 203.

racism in the guise of white superiority, and as such, offered justification for the imperialistic ambitions of Great Britain. This would also be offered as justification for various attempts at ethnic cleansing of minorities within territories conquered by the British such as the Maoris of New Zealand and the Aborigines of Australia.

Anglo-Israelism not only provided a justification for the wide-reaching claims of British Imperialism; it also provided prophetic sustenance for the Manifest Destiny and global responsibilities of the United States. Did not Genesis 48:19 promise the independence and glory of Ephraim's junior sibling, Manasseh – that is, in British Israelite exegesis, the United States? In the late nineteenth century, Anglo-Israelite societies sprung up in different parts of the United States.¹³ Howard R. Rand, a second-generation British Israelitist, was probably the individual most responsible for the spread of British Israelism within the United States. He established the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America in Detroit, Michigan in 1930, receiving financial and organizational support from William J. Cameron, an associate of Henry Ford and fellow anti-Semite. The ideas promoted by the Federation and its supporters were especially well-received during the Great Depression. British Israelism would go on to influence a number of unsavory organizations, among them the Ku Klux Klan and the Christian Identity movement.

The tentacles of the British Israelism movement seemed to reach far and wide, encompassing those who one would least expect to be within its grasp. Charles Fox Parham, the principal founder of the modern Pentecostal movement subscribed to a version of the Anglo-Israelite belief, considering groups such as non-Europeans to be

¹² Ibid., 208.

included among the descendants of the Lost Tribes. Parham looked down upon those ethnic groups he felt were inferior to the Anglo-Saxons and other Israelites. He felt they were less attuned to deep spiritual truths, and as such were limited (due to racial incapacity, of course) to the half-truths of Catholicism, or worse.¹⁴

Herbert W. Armstrong was a Sabbatarianist minister who adopted a belief in British Israelism, later becoming its major 20th Century advocate. In 1934, Armstrong began the Radio Church of God, a broadcast ministry in Pasadena, California. Armstrong embraced the beliefs inherent in the British Israelism movement, including observance of a seventh-day Sabbath, observance of the Old Testament Feast days, and the form of church government. It also included a belief that the traditional Christian holy days such as Christmas and Easter were pagan holidays. This resulted in a controversy which would eventually divide the denomination. Armstrong's group formed a separate branch of the Church of God in West Virginia, withdrawing from the Church of God (Seventh Day) and continued his ministry with the Radio Church of God. His following became the Worldwide Church of God in 1968, and developed an international following. Armstrong's son, Garner Ted Armstrong, played a major role in the development of the church until his fall from grace due to illicit sexual affairs. The Worldwide Church of God has been strongly criticized by conservative evangelicals as a cult. Since Armstrong's death in 1986, the church revised its doctrine in order to realign it with

¹⁴ Kidd, 215.

orthodox evangelical Christianity, joining the National Association of Evangelicals in 1997.¹⁵

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there had been considerable anthropological speculation that the American Indian people in the New World might be the Lost Tribes. James Adair, in his *History of the American Indians*, connected tribalism when considered along with their deities' name, 'Yo-he-wah,' indicated Israelite origins. This tied into the revelations of Joseph Smith. Smith revealed two separate migrations of Old Testament Israelites to America. The Jaredites came around 2250 B.C. after the dispersion at Babel; Lehi, from the tribe of Joseph, immigrated around 600 B.C. Nephi was the son of Lehi, a prophet and author of the first two books of the Book of Mormon, First and Second Nephi. Nephi's descendants split into the righteous Nephites (whose history would be revealed in the Book of Mormon) and the Lamanites. A resurrected Messiah appeared to the Nephites (after appearing first to his disciples). The Nephites were apparently destroyed by their brethren the Lamanites in 400 A.D. in New York, where Smith would later find golden plates recording their history in America. The plates also clarified that the Native Americans were also a remnant of the ancient Israelites, as were the indigenous peoples of Central and South America, as well as the Polynesian peoples. The blacks were believed to belong to the cursed lineage of Cain, and as such were barred from the Mormon priesthood. The Mormon priesthood resembles the laity of the normal Christian church, involving all males over twelve years of age, therefore this ruling effectively removed any possibility of blacks participating in the church. Only in

¹⁵ Randall Herbert Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004). 767-8.

1978 did the Mormon Church end its bar of African-Americans from full membership and participation.

Mormonism was founded in 1830 by Smith once he had completed his translation of the golden plates he had discovered in 1823 with the help of divinely crafted spectacles. It was first known as the Church of Christ, then was renamed the Church of Latter-Day Saints in 1834. Smith led his followers to Missouri, then to Nauvoo, Illinois where considerable hostility arose among conventional Christian groups. In 1844, Smith was killed by a mob, and his successor, Brigham Young, led the church to Salt Lake City, Utah in 1847.

The British Israelite influence on Mormonism is fairly obvious, since nineteenth century Mormonism was doctrinal and ethnic. Mormons considered themselves as a gathered remnant of the Lost Tribes, in particular the tribe of Ephraim. The Ephraimites – identified with the Germanic peoples of northern and western Europe – were considered to be the most favored lineage among Mormons, with the Lamanites (Native Americans) intermediate and the Cainites (African Americans) in the least favored status. The majority of Christians know the Mormons because of their unusual doctrines unique to their faith, such as polygamy (which was formally abolished in 1890, but persists among splinter groups today) as well as the sealing of marriages for eternity – not merely until death do we part – as well as an obsession with genealogy and ethnology. The Mormon fascination with genealogy persists; the Jews are a favored lineage in Mormon Israelism. In fact, Mormon millennialism anticipates a literal ingathering of Israel in Palestine and at the New Zion in America.

Christian Identity refers to a wide variety of white supremacist groups in North America. These right-wing groups are preoccupied with fears of racial mixing and Jewish conspiracy, and they claim that their beliefs are derived directly from the Bible. The ideology of the Identity movement is heavily millenarian and draws upon the various expressions of British Israelism, the conviction that northern Europeans are the “ten lost tribes” of ancient Israel.¹⁶

Ecclesiastes 1:9 tells us, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” The Ephraimite Movement is not new, it is merely old doctrine in new clothing. The evil one knows how to make things look different so that mankind might once again fall prey to his plans. According to Francis Chan, “Most of us assume that what we believe is right (of course we do – it is why we believe what we believe) but have never really studied for ourselves. We were simply told, “This is the way that it is,” and didn’t question. The problem is much of what we believe is often based more on comfort or our culture’s tradition than on the Bible.¹⁷ Whether Christian or Messianic, Ephraimite or Zionist, one must critically examine their beliefs to ensure they are correctly dividing the Word of Truth. There is no room in this day and age to accept blindly the erroneous teachings of others, nor to fail to examine the beliefs to which we hold.

¹⁶ Ibid., 164.

¹⁷ Francis Chan, *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 29.

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