

## The Land of Israel in Prophecy

Many readers of the Bible have misunderstood a variety of important prophecies because they have not paid close and strict attention to geographical terms used by the prophets which show where their prophecies would take place. It is common practice to gloss over place names as being relatively unimportant to modern readers of the Holy Scriptures. By not comprehending what the geographical terms mean (and failing to look them up in an ordinary dictionary or encyclopaedia of the Bible) has resulted in a sad display of ignorance by many prophetic interpreters, and this includes some of the top people in the field today. It is time to slow down, and be aware of all the geographical terms associated with the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments. When this is done, a great deal of enlightenment will come on the scene which will make the prophecies come alive with pertinent information for us who live at this period known as the End of the Age. This article will point out some significant prophetic indications regarding the land of Israel that will help us understand what will happen in that area of the world in the few years just ahead of us. And significantly, what happens in the Middle East will profoundly influence the lives of all of us who live in Europe, America and the rest of the world. All should be aware of these prophecies.

There is an old hymn that many of us may be familiar with titled "There is a balm in Gilead." when one of the four groups on the busses began to sing this hymn as they were journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho on the recent trip that my wife Ramona and I were on to Israel, I asked them a question when they concluded their singing about the location of the region of "Gilead" of which they were singing. The primary thing I was after was the location of this geographical region near the land of Israel. When no one immediately seemed to know the answer, I then proceeded to give them a prophecy in which the area of Gilead was prominently featured. The prophecy was that found in Zechariah chapter ten. I began to show them what the prophecy stated would happen in the region of Gilead not long before the messianic kingdom of Christ would be established in the land of Israel. When I finally gave the answer in relation to the prophecy in Zechariah most people on the bus expressed astonishment at what the prophecy stated. And well might astonishment be shown because it shows that a major settlement of Jews will establish themselves in a critical and strategic region of the Middle East in which there are no Israelite settlements at the present. But vast numbers of Jews (especially those who will come out of the north countries into the Holy Land) are destined to swarm into this region of the Middle East and the area will become a part of the land of Israel. Let me relate the essential teaching of the prophecy to all of you reading this Prophetic Report.

The first thing that should be noticed is the fact that the last six chapters of Zechariah are very different in style and teaching from the first eight chapters. Most commentators who study the text closely have noticed this. The geographical terms and expressions are reminiscent of those found in prophecies of the late seventh or early sixth centuries before Christ, and indeed this is the very time period in which the last six chapters of the Book of Zechariah were written. We even have the New Testament telling us who wrote these last six chapters (which were later tacked on to the eight chapters of Zechariah's prophecy). It was Jeremiah the prophet. Notice Matthew 27:9 where we are told that Jeremiah wrote this section of the prophecy now found attached to the Book of Zechariah.

It is important to realize that it was Jeremiah who prophesied these last six chapters because they can then fit in with some of the prophecies of Jeremiah about the re-establishment of the people of Israel in the Holy Land before the Kingdom of God is implemented on earth when Christ returns the second time. This is when the people of Ephraim (the ten tribes of Israel which had been taken captive by the Assyrians in the eighth and seventh centuries before Christ) will be brought back from the north country to team up with Judah to form a united Israel once again like Ezekiel prophesied in Ezekiel 37. In this prophecy, Jeremiah said: "And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph [Ephraim], and I will bring them again [to the Holy Land] to place them; for I have mercy on them: and they shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am the Lord their God, and I will hear them" (Zechariah 10:6). The "two Israels" then unite in chapter eleven.

It was the northern ten tribes of Ephraim (the House of Joseph) which were taken into captivity by the Assyrians and led away into the countries of the north. But the House of Judah was taken into Babylon and into Egypt where they remained until after the Babylonian Captivity and some returned to Judah (the Holy Land) while many continued in Babylon and Egypt and became mighty peoples in those areas. The people of Judah were always much closer to Jerusalem and the Holy Land than were those of Ephraim (the House of Joseph). But in the time of James (the half brother of our Lord), he directed his epistle to all the twelve tribes who were located in the dispersion (James 1:1). The apostle Paul was well aware of the location of all twelve tribes of Israel which were in his time scattered in various countries around the Mediterranean and the Parthian Empire. According to Paul they all were praying to the God of Abraham and keeping as best they could the teachings of Israel (Acts 26:6,7). In no way, were the early British people the "lost ten tribes of Israel." We have written information that proves dogmatically that the House of Joseph (that is, those of Ephraim and Manasseh and the other ten tribes) were not lost to other Israelites in the time of James and Paul, and they were not then reckoned as heathen peoples who no longer knew the laws of Moses and were living in the British Isles awaiting to be discovered at the end of the age. The so-called "British/Israel Theory" (that the British, white Americans with many northwestern Europeans are modern descendants of the "lost ten tribes of Israel") is pure nonsense. I have studied this matter extensively and have found conclusively that the theory is sadly wanting in historical or biblical teaching.

The simple truth is, there have always been two major divisions within the people of Israel: those of the House of Joseph who were taken primarily into the north quarters from the Holy Land and never returned, and those of the House of Judah who did return to the Holy Land (or always in close contact with Canaan even though they lived in Babylon, Egypt or in North Africa or Spain). These latter people became more mixed with native races (often Arabic or Edomite peoples) than those of the House of Joseph who found themselves in the north quarters from the Holy Land. Note that in the Book of Esther we find that many native peoples of the Persian Empire became Jews (they mixed with the Jews in Babylon, Judaea and Egypt) at the death of Haman. As the Holy Scriptures state: "And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them" (Esther 8:17).

Later, about a hundred years before Christ, the Arabic tribe of the Itureans became circumcised and took up Jewish religious principles (Josephus, Antiquities 13.318-319). It is well known that the Edomites (out of whom came King Herod) were converts to Judaism and became Jews in the century before Christ. whole hosts of Syrians became Jews in this same period of time. Josephus stated: "The Jewish race, densely interspersed among the native populations of every portion of the world, is particularly numerous in Syria, where intermingling is due to the proximity of the two countries" (War 4.43). Even with the Gentile population at Damascus, Josephus tells us that almost all the Syrian women of the city had become Jewish in their religious orientation. He said: "The only fear [of the Gentile men of Damascus] was of their own wives who, with few exceptions, had all become converts to the Jewish religion" (War 2.561). Besides this, multitudes of Greeks who had come with Alexander the Great and married into the native populations of the east also became Jews in the period just before Christ. "Moreover, they [the

Jews] were constantly attracting to their religious ceremonies multitudes of Greeks, and these in some measure incorporated with themselves [Jews and Greeks]" (War 4.45). Recall that Christ called attention to the Jewish proclivity in the first century of making Gentiles to be Jewish proselytes (Matthew 23:15).

This mixing of Jews around the Holy Land with the native peoples of Syria, Edom and parts of Arabia and North Africa led to many of the Jews taking on an "Arabic" or what we call today "Middle Eastern" racial characteristics. They are known today as Sephardic Jews. On the other hand, those who lived in areas where the surrounding populations were white European types (when any mixture took place) retained or attained more "European" characteristics. These latter are known as Ashkenazi Jews because they settled in the general area of Europe first designated to Ashkenaz in the table of nations mentioned after the flood of Noah. The patriarch called "Ashkenaz" went to the general region that later became known as Germany and Poland. Once the European Jews were established there, they then spread to Russia, Britain and America. It is the Ashkenazi Jews (those who went to the north quarters from the Holy Land) who have most of the political power in the State of Israel today. These people represent the remnants of the House of Joseph (Ephraim) whereas the Jews that remained in the Babylonian and Mediterranean areas of the east and south (along with those of Spain) represent the remnants of the House of Judah and they are the Sephardic Jews today.

These two main divisions (and there are a host of other diverse ones -for example the Ethiopian Jews are clear converts to Judaism with hardly any original "Jewish blood" in them) represent the principal peoples of the descendants of Jacob today, and often they do not see eye-to-eye with one another in their political or social outlook. But in spite of these racial mixtures and differences, the people who adhere to the basic concepts of Judaism as expressed through their attachment to the Law of Moses are to be reckoned as "Jews." They have become part of the covenant that God made with Jacob and God considers them Israelites. It was perfectly proper for various Gentile peoples to join Israel if they would adopt Israel's religious and social ways and reject the practices of their ancestors (Deuteronomy 23:1-8).

### **The Prophecy of Zechariah Ten**

Let us now look at the prophecy of Jeremiah that is found in the Book of Zechariah. It speaks of a time when the House of Judah and the House of Joseph will return to the Holy Land from their great dispersion that took place in the time of the Assyrians and the Babylonians when they return (as we find in chapter eleven), they will enter into a league with one another to be a single nation once more. But after a short while that bond of togetherness will be broken and they will begin to fight with one another. This civil war among the two divisions of Israelites described in greater detail in Zechariah 13:7-9. It will result in a final war staged by the nations of the world against Jerusalem and then Christ Jesus will return from heaven (with the Mount of Olives splitting into two parts -Zechariah 14:1-4) and then will appear the glorious Kingdom of God on earth with Christ Jesus at the head of it. But go back to chapter ten and see the areas that those of the House of Judah and the House of Joseph are to settle once they come back from the north country (Ephraim) and from Egypt and North Africa (Judah). Here is what the prophecy states: "And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man [this is the Ashkenazi Jews], and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord. I will hiss for them [Ephraim and Judah -as a keeper does his bees], and gather them; for I have redeemed them: and they shall increase [again] as they have [once] increased. And I will sow them among the people [of the Holy Land]; and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again [to God and his laws]. I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt [Judah], and gather them out of Assyria [Ephraim]; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and place shall not be found for them [they will overflow the lands]. And I will strengthen them in the Lord; and they shall walk up and down [in all the Holy Land] in his name, saith the Lord" (Zechariah 10:7-12).

This is a prophecy that will occur in the Holy Land before the Second Advent of Christ Jesus back to this earth. Chapter eleven starts out with Lebanon being defeated by the incoming Israelites (and already, now at the end of 1991, Israel occupies southern Lebanon with its army) and the "oaks of Bashan" (that is the Golan Heights which Israel captured from Syria in the Six Day War in 1967) will be under their control. But not only will parts of Lebanon and the Bashan area (the Golan Heights) be settled with the incoming masses of Israelites arriving from all regions of the world, but Israel will also possess the region of Gilead. The Bible clearly prophesies that God "will bring them into the land of Gilead" (Zechariah 10:10). And what is Gilead? where is "the Balm of Gilead"? It is the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan located on the east bank of the Jordan River. It takes in all of the lands east of the Jordan River up to the outskirts of Amman, the capital of Jordan.

When Ramona and I were in Jordan two years ago, we rented a taxi and went down into the Jordan valley and then back up the slopes towards Anunan. The Arab taxi driver was an elderly Muslim man who was formerly from Jerusalem. when we got back on top the plateau overlooking the Jordan valley I asked him if he ever thought he would return to Jerusalem. His answer rather plaintively was "no." And then he said: "See all this land in front of us which now belongs to the Kingdom of Jordan. One day the Israelis will be here too and settling it as they are the West Bank." I asked him why he felt that way and he answered that it was in the biblical prophecies and that the will of Allah will always be done.

The fact is, people of the Middle East can read the prophecies. They know what Zechariah 10:10 states. They also know that the people of Israel are following the statements of the prophets precisely. when we were in Jerusalem in late November, Ramona and I (with a group of Christian pastors who were on a tour of Israel) attended a personal conference with the Minister of Religious Affairs for the government of Israel. He told us all confidently that the prophecies of the prophets were all coming to pass and that Israel was simply fulfilling what God had long ago prophesied. He told us that while we ban Bible teaching in our schools in America, in Israel all children are taught from it from the first grade onward He said it is the book that guides them in their every-day activities and in their plans for the future.

And while we at A.S.K. take no sides in the controversies that are now occurring in the Holy Land and the areas of the Middle East in general, it is the easiest thing in the world to read what the prophecies state will happen in the period just prior to the setting up of the Kingdom of God on earth. I am personally convinced that we are seeing, just like the Minister of Religious Affairs told us in Jerusalem, the prophecies being fulfilled right in front of our eyes. I am simply pointing out what the prophecies state that are guiding Middle Eastern peoples -particularly the Israelis.

Besides that, the Bible also shows that there will be a Palestinian State. It will not occupy the West Bank of Judah or Samaria, but it will be in the area of Ashkelon, Ashdod and the Gaza Strip. These areas were always Philistine territories (even at the height of the Solomonic Empire) and they are destined, according to prophecy, to be in the hands of the Philistines (that is, the Palestinians) just before the Second Advent. See Psalm 83. Those ten nations mentioned in Psalm 83 will equal the ten nations mentioned in the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation. There are some momentous times just ahead of us in the Middle East. And what will happen there will influence the political, social and religious events even in Europe, the Americas and the rest of the world. Let us keep our eyes on the Middle East. The prophecies of the Bible are soon to be further fulfilled for the whole world to see.

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