

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

A Sifting Among the Nations

All of us in the Judeo-Christian world have difficulty capturing the reality of the events which took place with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with the people of the Exodus, and with daily life in Canaan land. What were their views of planetary programs? How did they understand the promises made to Abraham and Moses? What spectrum of secular, cultic, or devout attitudes influenced their cultural goals? Did they discuss these problems among themselves? Did they write letters to one another? Did religious leaders formulate theories which spread among the people? We simply do not have a good grasp of such practical concerns.

Recognition and discussion of larger planetary programs is virtually blank in the biblical text. The presentations are given in the light of strict commandments from God under the pressure of a stern Judge who does not think enough of his people to offer explanations. Or was social understanding common among the people, therefore taken for granted, and never plainly discussed? Did such views influence lifetime decisions? How many doubters spread disaffection? How many half-believers taught their children skepticism?

The Bible gives us many different stories about those people but we cannot always penetrate to a deeper sense of their motives. Miriam and Aaron were against Moses' marriage to a Cushite woman, Num 12. Perhaps they felt he had betrayed the blood lines. They also must have held him in some disrespect because he was so meek, Num 12:3. His inability to organize was also an indication of plain human weakness. His father-in-law, Jethro, wanted to know why he was wasting his time taking care of all minute details, and not delegating those tasks, Exod 18:13. In light of these transparent human frailties they may have had considerable difficulty understanding why he was chosen for the great honor as God's personal representative. They probably thought they were equally capable to serve in such role. They presumed to speak for Yahweh and were reprimanded by their celestial visitors. Miriam turned white as a ghost, Num 12:10. But this interplay among human personalities is poorly described in the Bible text. If

Miriam and Aaron, the sister and brother of Moses himself, carried human doubts in the worthiness of their brother, how much more so did others who were unrelated to him? How did such skeptical attitude influence the people?

They were warned about their attitudes and their faithlessness with God. But we see those warnings as coming from a stern Judge who was continually angry with his people. We do not view them as the necessary consequence of failure to follow celestial instructions. Hence our appreciation of the Godly voices who spoke through the centuries is darkened and twisted by false misconceptions. We view the promises as mostly mythological, inventions derived from attitudes of special privilege. Hence the concept of a chosen people loses its essential validity and becomes the object of scorn. By what right would such people, who display obvious frailties of humankind, be privileged to become God's chosen representatives? The history of those people, whether during the age of the Judges, the period of the kingdom, the era of foreign conquest, or the violent policies of the modern state, are indicative not of a special people with outstanding social, moral, or spiritual potential, but rather of a group moved mostly by self interests.

We can readily understand why modern anthropologists, historians and theologians would view those people mostly as no different from the rest of the world. Such incredulous attitudes tainted study of the biblical text, with consequent distortions of the significance and meaning of the promises. Perhaps the people of Israel are recognized for their moralistic legacy upon the world but assessment of their role neglected genetic potentials.

In the following discussion I shall show how those promises take on a different cast when viewed in the light of higher cosmic perspectives.

From her earliest beginnings as an identifiable group the people of Israel were warned about their worldly propensities. In the last discourses before his death Moses emphasized the consequences of their waywardness. Deuteronomy 28 repeats again and again the results of disobedience. They would receive untold afflictions, sickness, disease and death. They would be conquered by their enemies and plucked out of their land.

And Yahweh will scatter you among all people, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known, Deut 28:64.

How was Abraham to become the father of many nations? Would the

people of Israel become shining examples of righteousness? Would the nations admire them for outstanding devotion and allegiance to a living God? Would upright conduct attract people near and far? Would they be admired for fairness, care of the land, and building of a highly moral society? Would foreign people ask the people of Israel to be their teachers and guides? Would they want them to be biological fathers and mothers of their children, mixing and blending with those populations? Was this the way God intended that Abraham would become the father of many nations?

Or did God know from the beginning the waywardness of his people, that they would not follow his commandments, obey his laws, or serve him with devotion? Did he recognize that the promises to Abraham had to be executed beyond the voluntary choices of the people? Did he know beforehand he would be forced to scatter the people among the nations, from one end of the earth to the other?

But the promises were more than a scattering among the nations. When all those things were to come upon the people, both the blessings and the curse, they would remember wherever Yahweh drove them. If they would then return to Yahweh, they and their children, obey his voice with all their hearts and all their souls, then he would restore their fortunes; he would have compassion upon them and gather them again from all the peoples where he had scattered them, Deut 30: 1-3.

These same warnings and promises are described in Lev 26. If they obeyed Yahweh they would have manifold blessings, 26:3-13. But if they did not obey him they would receive multiple curses, even to the point of eating their own sons and daughters in their extreme affliction. Their high places would be destroyed, their cities laid waste, their sanctuaries made desolate, and their lands devastated, 26:27-32. They would be scattered among the nations; God would take vengeance for the covenant. But if they confessed their iniquity, and the iniquity and treachery of their fathers, and humbled their hearts, he would remember the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, 26:33-45.

These warnings continued down through the times of the kingdom and into the centuries immediately following Solomon. The long and peaceful reign of Jeroboam II, circa 786-746, witnessed national prosperity and territorial expansion. The military security and economic affluence was regarded as a sign of special favor. Unfortunately, their worship was centered in extravagant support of shrines and idols, contrary to the express

commandments of Yahweh. The establishment of the kingdom had effectively blunted devotion to God; kingly rule had diverted attention to national honor and prestige. Out of this scene sprang several prophets who again warned the people of the consequences of their behavior. Amos and Hosea published ringing denunciations. As Amos stated it clearly around 760 BC:

For lo, I will command and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble shall fall upon the earth, Amos 9:9.

This was confirmation of the warnings God had made at the time of Moses. Amos was merely repeating for his generation the warnings which had been given so many centuries before.

The warnings were repeated again by Jeremiah to the Jews during the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century:

I will hurl you out of this land into a land which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor, Jer 16:13.

This appears as a mere repetition of the earlier warnings. Why would Jeremiah forecast a removal from the promised land if the Jews were already deported to Babylon? Was he repeating it merely for emphasis? Indeed, he added new emphasis. No longer would the people of Israel refer to the awesome events of the Exodus in sentimental memory; they would someday know the God who brought them out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them. He would bring them back to the land which he had given to their fathers, Jer 16:14-15. Jeremiah did not mean merely the Jews; his promise was for all the people of Israel.

This same promise of return is repeated in Jer 24:6. When he brings them back he will set his eyes upon them for good. Forever after he will build up and not tear down. Then they will be his people and he will be their God. No longer will they turn to lifeless idols of wood and stone, of political finesse or military power. The promise is repeated in Jer 32:37. But in 30:3 it is cast in a different light:

For behold, days are coming, says Yahweh, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah. I will bring them back to the land which I gave to their fathers and they shall take possession of it.

Here Jeremiah distinguishes between Israel and Judah; both will be brought back.

But this view of a two-body Israel is contrary to understanding which has prevailed among the Jews since the times of Alexander the Great, and among most Christians since the time of the Apostles. Israel is regarded as Judah, and Judah as Israel; in all modern eyes they are synonymous terms.

Most of us forgot how Israel was fractured into two people. We no longer distinguish between those Israelites known as Joseph, Ephraim or Israel, and those known as Judah. The word Israel once referred to the northern ten tribes, while the word Jews referred to the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin. When the prophets used the name Israel they meant the northern tribes; they did not mean Judah. When they wished to distinguish Judah and Benjamin from the northern ten tribes they used the designation Judah.

This distinguishing difference is illustrated many places. Ezekiel 37 describes the two sticks of Israel:

Son of man, take a stick and write on it, "For Judah and the children of Israel associated with him." Then take another stick and write upon it, "For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with him." Join them together into one stick that they may become one in your hand. . . . Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all sides, and bring them back to their own land. And I will make of them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be over them, and they shall no longer be two nations and no longer divided into two kingdoms.

It is believed that Ezekiel wrote his prophecies in the decades immedi-

ately preceding and following the Jewish captivity in 585 BC. Why would he refer to the two divisions of Israel when northern tribes no longer existed? Only the people of Judah were then known. The northern tribes held no political or religious importance; they were already lost. But God recognized their role in his plans for the future of this world; he could identify them. Men would hardly believe they could revive. Ezekiel was not offering a human assessment; he was a voice for God who knew the future.

In order to more fully appreciate the difference between Joseph and Judah we must recognize the great antagonisms which prevailed between the two people after the death of Solomon. They were in great enmity with one another; they thoroughly despised each other. I and II Kings describe their hatred, expressed in both cold and hot wars. As Isaiah stated it in 11:12-13.

He will raise an ensign for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the despised of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off. Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah and Judah shall not harass Ephraim.

The intense efforts of modern Jewry to fulfill the prophecies are not founded in correct understanding. Those promises were made to the entire body of people, to both Israel and Judah. If the promises are to be fulfilled they must be fulfilled with the people of Joseph and Ephraim, as well as with the Jew. Any other view would contradict God's word. This contradiction in understanding so greatly hampers the modern state of Israel. She does not understand the promises; neither do Christians. Both fail to recognize the importance of the role of Ephraim.

The divisions among the tribes weakened them, militarily and nationally. Surrounding kings began to cast eyes upon the people and upon the land. In their weakened condition they were susceptible to conquest.

Jeroboam wanted reassurance that he would rule long over Israel. On pretense he sent his wife to Ahijah the prophet, I Kings 14, seeking Yahweh's favor. But Ahijah said Yahweh would smite Israel (not Judah) as a reed is shaken in the water; he would root up Israel (not Judah) out of the good land which he gave to their fathers and scatter them beyond the

Euphrates, I Kings 14:15. When Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, became sick he sent his messenger Hazael to Elisha the prophet inquiring if he would live. Elisha told Hazael to tell Ben-hadad that he would live but actually he would die. Hazael stared at Elisha for such deceptive response until Elisha hung his head in shame. Elisha then began to weep and Hazael wanted to know why he wept. Elisha replied that he knew the evil which Hazael would do to the people of Israel. He would burn their fortresses, slay their young men, dash their little ones in pieces, and disembowel pregnant women. But Hazael could not believe that he would do such terrible things. Elisha replied that he was to be king over Syria. Hazael returned to Ben-hadad and smothered him in his sick bed, II Kings 8:7-15. According to one inscription Shalmaneser III was victorious over Ben-hadad in 846 BC, and in another inscription he was victorious over Hazael in 842 BC. The consultation with Elisha had to fall between those two dates. From other inscriptions Shalmaneser III was victorious over Ahab, an ally to Ben-hadad, in 854 BC. This great battle was fought at Kir-haraseth (Karkar) on the Orontes River, II Kings 3:25. Although Shalmaneser won the battle he was in a weakened condition and was not able to prosecute conquest of Syria and Palestine. Nevertheless the people of Israel became subject to foreign invasions, conquest, and dispersion. According to I Kings 15:20 Ben-hadad captured cities of extreme northern Israel, including Ijon, Dan, Abelbethmaacha, *"and all Chinneroth with all the land of Naphtali."*

In those days Yahweh began to cut off parts of Israel. Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel, from the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is the valley of the Arnon, that is, Gilead and Bashan, II Kings 10:32-33.

This territory was east of the Jordan. We have no historical records to show if the people remained in their territories after conquest, or if some moved to other regions.

For the next hundred years Israel lived in mortal danger until Tiglath-pileser III, king of Assyria from 745 to 727 BC, conquered Ijon, Abelbethmaacha, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, Galilee and all the land

of Naphtali. These were the eastern and northern most lands of the twelve tribes.

He carried the people captive to Assyria, II Kings 15:29.

Kings 15:19 says that Pul was the Assyrian king who was appeased with heavy ransom by Menahem. This is an unfortunate translation of older texts; he was Tiglath-pileser (or Tilgath-pilneser) as identified in I Chron 5:26. He carried away the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh and brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river Gozan, *"to this day."*

The last phrase was a remark made by Jewish scribes during the Babylonian captivity, more than a hundred years later. The northern tribes were still remembered, at least to their Jewish brothers.

The conquered Israelite cities were located in the tribal territories north of a line extending from Mt. Carmel to the Sea of Galilee. The tribes, as listed in I Chron, were those east of the Jordan river.

The cities of Assyria were located in the upper reaches of the Euphrates and the River Habor, west of Nineveh as far as Haran, approximately 150 miles south of Lake Van. These areas are the northernmost regions of modern Syria and Iraq.

The list of Assyrian cities probably is not exhaustive; it may be merely indicative. The resettlement of the people of Israel in the Assyrian cities could have extended to the boundaries of the kingdom -- west to the Mediterranean north of Lebanon, on around the coast to ancient Tarsus, northeastward through the Anti-Taurus Mts, into the lands of the Urartu north of Lake Van, southward past Lake Urmia, and into the Tigris-Euphrates river valley. It is possible that groups migrated beyond the regions of the Assyrian Empire, north to the Black Sea and upward to the Cyrus River and the Caucasus Mts.

The date was 732 BC.

The conquest of Israel continued over the next decade. Shalmaneser V made Hoshea his vassal, forcing tribute, II Kings 17:3. When Hoshea sought help from the Egyptians and refused to pay the tribute, Shalmaneser V put him in prison and invaded all the land. He besieged Samaria for three years, finally taking it to carry away the people to Halah and to Habor, the river of Gozan, and *"to the cities of the Medes,"* II Kings 17:6.

The date was 722 BC.

The cities of the Medes extended as far in the northeast as the Caspian Sea and the Araxes River. Although Shalmaneser V died in 722 the conquest of the people of Israel was completed by Sargon II in 721. According to the records of Sargon he carried away 27,290 people, settling them in the regions of upper Mesopotamia and in Media^{NET}. From that point they lose their identity as Hebrew people.

But they were not lost.

Those *Ibri* (*Iberi*) became the Iberi of Asia, of Spain, and of Ireland. They also became other people.

