

A Short Summary of
“The Ephraimite Error”
Submitted to the International Messianic Jewish Alliance
(the full paper can be found on this website under the title, “The Ephraimite Error”)

Author: Kay Silberling, Ph.D.
Advisory Committee Members: Daniel Juster, Th.D.
David Sedaca, M.A.

Introduction

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 Israelites who were exiled in the Assyrian invasion of Israel in 722 B.C.E.¹

Primary among the movement’s spokespersons are Batya Wootten and Marshall, a.k.a. Moshe, Koniuchowsky.

Analysis

Logic and Exegetical Method

Batya Wootten and Koniuchowsky build their theology of the church as physical Israel on typological and grammatically suspect readings of the stories of the biblical patriarchs and the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C.E.

A Multitude of Nations

Starting with the patriarchs, Wootten argues that Jacob’s promise to Ephraim in Gen 48:19 predicted the transformation of Ephraim/Israel into Gentiles.² Wootten claims that every time the Hebrew word, *goy*, is employed, it is a reference to a Gentile or a Gentile nation.³

This is incorrect. In the Hebrew Bible and the Apostolic Writings, while the word *goy* (English: people, nation; Greek: *ethnos*) may refer to a Gentile nation, it may, just as easily, refer to the nation of Israel. The term is used to refer to Israel or the Jewish people in Exod 19:6; Deut 32:28, cf. 32:45; Josh 10:12-13; Isa 1:4; Isa 26:2; Jer 31:36; Zeph 2:9.⁴ Note especially Jer 31:36: “‘If this fixed order departs from before me,’ declares the LORD, ‘Then the offspring [lit. “seed”] of Israel also shall cease from being a nation (*goy*) before me forever.’” In the Greek Apostolic Writings, the word *ethnos* refers to the Jewish people in Luk 7:5; 23:2; John 11:48-52; 18:35; Acts 10:22; 24:2,10,17; 26:4; 28:19; 1 Cor 10:18; Phil 3:5. The first contention, then, that *goy* or *goyim* is always translated as Gentile or Gentiles is patently incorrect.

Because of this error, Wootten and Koniuchowsky argue that all the blessings promised to Abraham’s and Joseph’s physical heirs are in fact blessings promised to Gentiles. But because the premise is wrong (that *goy* always means Gentile), the conclusion is also wrong.

Dust of the Earth

Another major cornerstone of this teaching is that social-historical Israel, as it is traditionally perceived, cannot possibly fulfill the promises of physical multiplicity that was to equal “the sand of the sea,” “the dust of the earth,” or the “stars of the sky.” Such a hyper-literalist reading of these phrases, which rules out their common-sense interpretation,

ignores the scriptural record. For 2 Chron 1:9 states clearly that the people over whom King Solomon reigned [Israel] were “a people as numerous as the dust of the earth.” Isa 10:22 also refers to the people of Israel being “as the sand of the sea” in number. Recognizing hyperbole in the Bible is not a matter of “spiritualizing” the promises as Wootten and Koniuchowsky contend. It is a matter of being knowledgeable about the rhetorical conventions used by the biblical writers.

Parallel Universes

Fundamental to Wootten’s and Koniuchowsky’s claims is a suspect view of history. Wootten argues that the northern Israelite tribes taken captive by Assyria in 722 B.C.E. were “*never once...call[ed] Jews* [italics hers].”⁵ For her, the exile of the northern kingdom automatically transformed that people into Gentiles.⁶

Wootten and Koniuchowsky hope to establish that the members of the former northern kingdom cannot possibly have been called Jews from the post-exilic period on. If successful, they then hope to ask the question as to how God could allow for 10/12ths of God’s people to be annihilated. The obvious answer to this is that God could allow no such thing! They then hope to demonstrate that these “lost tribes” are indeed Christians — that they are not lost at all but have been waiting for this end-time prophetic movement to reveal their true natures. As Wootten states, “God allowed them to become lost among the nations. He allowed them to become — *Gentile Israel* [italics hers].”⁷

Wootten tries to make a strong distinction between post-exilic Judah and Israel by quoting Jeremiah speaking to “‘the house of Israel *and* the house of Judah’ (Jer 11:10).”⁸ Based on this phrasing, she claims that the two “houses” were distinct. As a matter of fact, while there are indeed cases in which Ephraim and Judah are referred to separately, scripture just as often uses the terms “Ephraim” and “Judah,” or “Israel” and “Judah,” in tandem, employing the two terms as a parallelism — a poetic way of speaking synonymously of the two groups. Thus when the Psalmist states, “God is known in Judah; His name is great in Israel,” the intention is not to differentiate Israel and Judah but to equate them.⁹

“All Israel”

Despite their arguments, the Bible tells us that many of the northern kingdom’s subjects rejoined the southern kingdom both before and after its people were exiled. Based on this, scripture makes the claim that the Jews today represent “all Israel.” The term, “Gentile Israel,” used by Wootten, is an oxymoron in terms of the biblical world of ideas.¹⁰

Jer 30:10 addresses the Judahite exiles (cf. Jer 29:1, 30-31) and calls them “Jacob” and “Israel.” Jer 31:17-20 reports that Ephraim has repented (past tense) and describes Ephraim grieving over its own acts. Ezra 2:70 states of the returned exiles, “and all Israel lived in their cities.” Zechariah addresses the same Medo-Persian returnees as “Oh house of Judah and house of Israel” (8:13; cf. 8:15) and distinguishes them from the people of the nations (Zech 8:23). It is thus not accurate to argue that references to post-exilic Judah are unique to Judah and do not apply to Israel.

Those who returned from exile referred to themselves both as Jews and as the people of Israel because they affirmed the theocratic reign of God centered in Jerusalem, the capital of the former kingdoms of united Israel and, later, Judah (*Yehudah*).

Thus the phrase “the Jewish people” has become the title for all of Israel. The term *Jew* encompassed all those who were taken into captivity by the time of the Babylonian exile, both

former Israelites and Judahites, “the remnant of Israel” (Jer 31:7. Cf. Jer 50:33; Neh 12:47; Dan 9:11; Lam 2:5). By the time of the writing of Esther, the term *Jew*, derived from *Judah*, could refer to someone from the tribe of Benjamin (Esth 2:5). In the Greek Tobit 11:17, in a clear reference to the Assyrian exiles, it states, “So on that day there was rejoicing among all the Jews who were in Nineveh.” This designation became so widespread that by the time of the Hellenistic period, the term *Jew* identified those of all the former tribes who dwelt in the diaspora and who affirmed a particular religious system. Wootten’s claim that the northern Israelites were “never once called Jews” is false.¹¹

Israel in the Apostolic Age

The Apostolic Writings reflect this Hellenistic usage. In Acts, Peter refers to his Jewish audience members as “all the house of Israel” (Acts 2:36; cf. 4:10; 5:21; 10:36; 21:28). In Acts 13:24, John proclaims his baptism of repentance “to all the people of Israel.” His audience was comprised of Jews. In Acts 26:7, Paul refers to the hope of “our twelve tribes” with no reference whatsoever to Ephraim. Luke 2:36 mentions Anna as being from the tribe of Asher. Paul states that he himself is of the tribe of Benjamin (Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5). Thus some members of non-Judahite tribes still maintained a memory of their original tribal affiliations. Yeshua claims that his followers are to sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30). Their function here is that of representatives of the full twelve tribes.

In fact, the Apostolic Writings make no mention whatsoever of a gathering of lost Ephraimites. Instead, they portray the ingathering of Gentiles as a *novum*, an unexpected move in the history of redemption and a breaking in to the present of God’s final age of redemption.

In Romans 11:7-14, Paul states that salvation has come to the Gentiles in order to make Israel jealous. If Gentile believers are Israel, then how can Israel make Israel jealous? Note that while Paul makes a clear distinction throughout his writings between Gentiles and Jews, he refers to Israel and to Jewish people interchangeably.

The Ephraimite message undermines the great power of the claims of the Apostolic Writings. It tries to change a message of hope and comfort for all peoples regardless of their heritage, regardless of their station in life, into a racist and race-based plan of salvation for those with the proper bloodlines.

Who Is Israel?

Wootten and Koniuchowsky give contradictory evidence as to how all believing Christians throughout history could be physically descended from the ancient northern Israelite exiles. At times, they argue that all people on *earth* are physically descended from Israel. At other times, they concede that there may indeed be “perhaps some true Gentiles” among the believers.¹² Or they call believing followers of Yeshua “another ‘sect’ of Judaism,” without any explanation as to how they can be a sect of Judaism and not Jews!¹³

Wootten further confuses things by declaring that Gentiles become Ephraimites only at the moment when they become “grafted in” to the olive tree of Israel and no sooner.¹⁴ Thus we see wild contradictions in the effort to explain how non-Jewish Christians today can be natural descendants of ancient Israelites.

What about genealogy? Is it statistically possible that everyone on earth is descended from one man? Only if no one but Abraham had ever produced offspring that survived — making Abraham the “new Adam.” Intuitively recognizing the flaw in this argument, Wootten desperately tries out another angle, arguing that today’s followers of Yeshua, although

considered Gentiles, are actually physical offspring of those early Jewish and Samaritan believers.¹⁵ Thus descendants of Jews, who are not Ephraim by Wootten's own definition, have somehow become Ephraim. Not only is this inherently contradictory, but it is statistically and historically untenable. Finally, as we will see, Wootten and Koniuchowsky claim that these descendants are found primarily in the West. Yet, if one were to follow this logic, if any Christians today can make the claim to physical descent from the early Jewish followers of Yeshua, it should be Christians of North African, Egyptian, Syrian, and Palestinian descent, all non-white peoples. However, we will see that Wootten and Koniuchowsky focus their hopes primarily on white people, reserving only threats of annihilation for the Palestinians and others from this region.¹⁶

Finally, Wootten and Koniuchowsky protest repeatedly that their claims to Israelite heritage are physical and are not spiritual. Yet, the basis for their claims are often wholly subjective -- when "you knew in your 'knower,'" as Wootten claims.¹⁷ She cannot have it both ways. Either it is physical or it is spiritual. Wootten makes both contentions, but ultimately she rejects the spiritual angle and bases her argument on physical, race-based claims.

This *pseudo*-genealogy that Wootten and Koniuchowsky have created is a desperate and contrived one — one that exists if you "know it" in your heart. This differs drastically from the kinship groups of social-historical Israel which have shared communal memories of kinship that are supported by a rich history of literature, archaeology, and epigraphic evidence.

Parallels to Anglo-Israelism and Racial Theory

Where have these ideas of Wootten's and Koniuchowsky's come from? The sources they give are few. Koniuchowsky cites Yair Davidy as a major source, but attributes to him few specific citations.¹⁸ Neither he nor Wootten make any mention of theirs or Davidy's dependence on another probable source, the writings produced during and after the eighteenth century movement called Anglo-Israelism or British-Israelism. And it is for good reason that these sources are not mentioned, as they are popular among some American anti-Semitic groups for their pro-white, racial claims to being Israel. Wootten and Koniuchowsky make the same pro-white, racial claims.

I will list several parallels that are striking in their agreement. Both groups (Anglo-Israelites and Ephraimites) build their theories on the mythic story of the ten "lost tribes" of the northern kingdom. Both groups put great store by suspect and contrived etymologies of English words based on Hebrew. Both groups claim pre-eminent, "first-born" status as purported heirs of Ephraim. Both share an innate hostility toward Roman Catholicism and Judaism. Both proclaim that the teaching they propound is a "mystery" revealed only through their teachers. Both argue that the lost tribes migrated to areas where they eventually became known as Saxons. Both groups make mention of the nobility of anglo-Saxons as evidence for their biblical, Israelite heritage.

White Supremacy

Of most concern about the Anglo-Israelite and the "Two House" theory is the racial element found in both. Both focus primarily on the anglo-Saxon "race." Wootten uses other racial terms such as "blood-line Israelites." She is concerned about "dilut[ing] the bloodlines."¹⁹ She refers to Jews today as "biological Jews."²⁰

Yet God's relationship with Israel is not racial. The social-historical people of Israel have never claimed racial priority as the basis for their covenant relationship to God. Jewish

identity is based, not on racial deliberations but on a shared communal memory and on choice.

The same exegesis, the same contrived etymologies, the same constructed histories, the same white, Anglo-Saxon racial focus, the same arguments against the church and the Jews — the parallels are unmistakable and undeniable. Wootten and Koniuchowsky have built their “Two Houses” on the shifting sand of Anglo-Israelite theology. The concerns that this raises for Jews, whether Messianic, rabbinic, or secular, and for non-Jewish Christians are evident.

Anti-Jewish Elements in the “Two House” Theology

Certainly Wootten and Koniuchowsky are not overt Jew-haters. But their words often echo and have the same effect as those of people who hate Jews.²¹ Thus despite the fact that Koniuchowsky claims to be Jewish (we have not verified this), and despite his vigorous protests, there is indeed a great deal of anti-Jewish rhetoric in his and Wootten’s claims. Following what has become a typical motif among Christian critics of Jews, Wootten accuses Messianic Jews of “feelings of superiority,” of believing they are ““Twice Chosen,”” and of having a “false racial pride.”²² The motif of the “blind Jews,” a long-standing, standard motif of Christian anti-Jewish rhetoric, is there also.²³ Wootten states, “They cannot hear. They cannot see. Until the Lord lifts the veil...”²⁴ She scolds Jews, demanding that they “must accept” her own viewpoint.²⁵ Wootten and Koniuchowsky demand to set the vision for Messianic Jews today. Wootten argues that it is only when Jews follow *her* teaching that they will be obedient to God, “for only then,” she promises, “will you be what the Father called you to be...”²⁶

With an irony that Koniuchowsky seems to be unaware of, he refers to his solution for the problem of Jewish and Christian relations as “the biblical final solution.”²⁷ We do not need another “final solution.” The Jewish people barely survived the last one. In this, Wootten and Koniuchowsky, in their grand claims to have solved the issue of racial pride, merely replaced an old racial argument with a new one. For them, race and “bloodline” is the determining factor.

Dangers of the Movement

Wootten’s and Koniuchowsky’s words elicit the gravest concern in the images they construct for the future. For along with their claims to be physical Israel, they expect someday to wield territorial control over 10/12th of the ancient tribal boundaries of Israel. They create an “enemy” that includes Jews now living in regions once occupied by the ancient tribal groups, which, they contend, now belong to the Ephraimites. For the Palestinians they expect total eradication.²⁸ In the pages of both Wootten’s and Koniuchowsky’s writings lies a strong assumption, sometimes stated implicitly, sometimes explicitly, that the land belongs to them (along with the Jewish people, whose portion, they contend, should be limited to 2/12ths of Israel’s territory). For the “Two House” proponents, the land of Israel is “their land.”²⁹

Here again, the acorn has not fallen far from the tree. Traditionally, Anglo-Israelite thinking has also included an expectation that the land would be theirs as physical Israel.³⁰ It evokes for us memories of the Crusaders of the 11th through 13th centuries, who also, based on the claim to be heirs of Israel, sought to take their “rightful place” as dwellers of the land through conquest and warfare.

Conclusion

The position of the I.M.J.A. is that the Ephraimite, or “Two House” movement is in error for the following reasons:

- 1) flawed, unwarranted, and dangerous interpretation of scripture
- 2) inconsistent logic and contradictions
- 3) racist and race-based theology
- 4) theology that functions in the same way as supersessionism
- 5) historically inaccurate depictions of Israel
- 6) dangerous, false, and militant claims to the land which threaten the stability of the current State of Israel

¹ Moshe Koniuchowsky, in “Your Arms to Israel: Updated Doctrinal Statement Reflecting Kingdom Restoration Views of the Ministry of *Your Arms to Israel*” (www.teshuvah.com/yati/articles/full_restoration1.htm) states, “the Jewish people have been the identifiable representatives and offspring of Judah. Non-Jewish followers of Messiah from all nations have been up to now the unidentifiable representatives and offspring of Ephraim (Zechariah 8:23).” It should be stated that Koniuchowsky would not use the term “Christian.” See Moshe Koniuchowsky, “The Full Restoration of All Israel: Part 3,” 8. Please note that for purposes of research, we printed out all four parts of the series, and our page number references are to that of the final printout. Because of the size of the document, we determined that it was important to have more detailed reference than just to the document as a whole.

² Batya Ruth Wootten, *The Olive Tree of Israel* (White Stone, Virginia: House of David, 1992), 31. Cf. also Batya Ruth Wootten, *Who Is Israel? And Why You Need to Know* (St. Cloud, FL: Key of David, 1998), 16-17, 28.

³ Wootten, *Who Is Israel?*, 82-83, acknowledges that it sometimes refers to Israel, but she asserts that by the time of the conquest of the land by Israel, the name referred primarily to the foreign nations. This is not the case, however, for the exilic and post-exilic prophets continued to use the term to refer to Israel. Add to this the common usage of the Greek term *ethnos* in the Apostolic Writings to refer to Jews. Moreover, she constructs her doctrine precisely upon the use of the term *goy* in the *pre*-conquest period, during the time of the patriarchs. Thus a post-exilic reference is not historically appropriate when writing about the patriarchal period.

⁴ Koniuchowsky, “The Full Restoration of All Israel: Part 2,” 7, argues that these references reinforce his point that Israel is Gentile. The reasoning is circular and begs the question.

⁵ Wootten, *Olive Tree*, 42.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷ Wootten, *Olive Tree*, 43.

⁸ Batya Ruth Wootten, “House of David Herald: Muddled Doctrines” (<http://www.mim.net/hod/hod0160/rf0160.htm>), 12.

⁹ Examples of the use of parallelism to demonstrate that Israel and Judah are synonymous (the list is far from exhaustive) are Ps 114:2; Isa 5:7; Jer 23:6; 50:20; Hos 5:12-14; 8:14; 11:12; 12:1-2; Mic 1:5; Mal 2:11.

¹⁰ Wootten, *Who Is Israel?*, 93, calls the term, “Gentile Christian” an oxymoron, but has no problem using the term “Gentile Israel.” Cf. *Olive Tree*, 43.

¹¹ See above.

¹² Koniuchowsky, “Full Restoration: Part 1,” 6. But Wootten, *Olive Tree*, 107, remains steadfast, arguing, “It is very probable that these former Gentiles actually descend from the scattered Ephraimites that Yahveh said He would regather... Though their background may appear to be that of a Gentile, in reality, they probably are physical Israelites.”

¹³ Wootten, “Muddled,” 7.

¹⁴ Wootten, *Olive Tree*, 106.

¹⁵ Wootten, *Olive Tree*, 9, 106. See also “Muddled,” 8; *Who Is Israel?*, 97.

¹⁶ Cf. p. 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁸ Koniuchowsky, “Full Restoration: Part 2,” 12.

¹⁹ Wootten, *Olive Tree*, 52; “Muddled,” 5; *Who Is Israel?*, 73.

²⁰ Wootten, "Muddled," 4.

²¹ Cf. Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver, Univ. of British Columbia, 1987).

²² Wootten, *Olive Tree*, 2. Cf. also "Muddled," 10; *Who Is Israel?*, 104-105.

²³ Cf. Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, repr. 1997), 121-135. In 135, she reminds us that the cathedrals built during the Medieval period often included statuary images of two women, representing Church and Synagogue. The one representing the Church looked alive and full of power. The one representing the Synagogue looked sad and always wore blindfolds over her eyes. For an example of this identical motif in Anglo-Israelism, see John Wilson, *Sixty Anglo-Israel Difficulties Answered*: (<http://www.abcog.org/wilson2.htm>), *Difficulty 15*, 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁵ Wootten, *Olive Tree*, 124.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 125. Cf. also Koniuchowsky, "Full Restoration: Part 3," 6.

²⁷ Koniuchowsky, "Full Restoration: Part 3," 4.

²⁸ Koniuchowsky, "Full Restoration: Part 4," 8; Wootten, *Olive Tree*, 36.

²⁹ Koniuchowsky, "Full Restoration: Part 2," 5.

³⁰ Wilson, *Difficulty 3, 4*, contended that the land is lying desolate without them and looked forward to the time when "the mountains were to shoot forth their branches, and bear their fruit for the people of Israel." Cf. also *Difficulty 20*, 13.