

British Israelism

[Home](#)
[Up](#)
[Nature of the Church](#)
[British Israelism](#)
[Watson Charismatic Ec](#)

CYBERJOURNAL FOR PENTECOSTAL-CHARISMATIC RESEARCH #22

Prophecy and Politics: British-Israelism in American Pentecostalism

By Christopher J. Richmann

Most historians of Pentecostalism agree that as a group, “like the holiness people with whom they were once associated, pentecostals were overwhelmingly uninterested in, if not contemptuous of, politics,” as Randall J. Stephens argues.^[1] In short, until perhaps the mid-twentieth century, Pentecostals did not have a political bone in their bodies. As far as presidential elections and local political controversies are concerned, Stephens is correct. Because of the “otherworldliness” of early Pentecostals, historians have often isolated their histories from the larger political world in which Pentecostalism developed.^[2] Yet this assessment should not lead us to believe that early Pentecostals were significantly distanced from the major political trends and assumptions of the early twentieth century. A substantial minority of early Pentecostals ascribed to British-Israelism, the belief that the Anglo-Saxon people are the direct biological descendants of the ten “lost tribes” of Israel. With the language of biblical prophetic interpretation, these Pentecostals endorsed and participated in the larger political program of Anglo-Saxon global expansion and control that captivated British and American minds at the turn of the twentieth century.

Republican Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana told Congress in 1890 that the question of imperialism is deeper than any question of party politics; deeper than any question of isolated policy of our country even; deeper even than any question of constitutional power. It is elemental. It is racial. God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-contemplation and self-admiration. No! He has made us master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns.^[3]

With its very political and earthly consequences, this deeply ingrained sense of Anglo-Saxon superiority was at the heart of imperialism—and it was echoed even by the “otherworldly” Pentecostals who adhered to British-Israelism.

British-Israel teaching was peripheral to mainline Christianity, but was in many ways similar to dispensationalism, another system of biblical prophecy that captured the attention of many Pentecostals. Historians of Pentecostalism have had little sympathy for British-Israelism and less understanding of it, and have been content to relegate the teaching to the

miscellaneous details of certain peculiar individuals.^[4] The allure of the teaching and its influence on early Pentecostalism are therefore left unnoticed and uninvestigated. Pentecostal British-Israelism is a story that has not been told.

One issue plaguing our understanding of the place of British-Israelism in Pentecostalism is the misleading assumption of Pentecostal political noninvolvement. The other issue is related to our understanding of British-Israelism itself. Since it is often described as a religious justification for British imperialism or racialism, scholars argue that “British-Israelism often appeals to the well-to-do and patriotic.”^[5] It is true that British-Israelists^[6] counted many among its adherents in the ranks of the royalty and aristocracy for precisely these reasons, but this does not help us understand its appeal for early Pentecostals.

By investigating the British-Israel teachings of three key figures in the development of Pentecostalism, this essay will attempt to correct our understanding of both British-Israelism and early Pentecostalism. First, British-Israelism was not merely a thin religious veneer on imperial ambitions. British-Israelism was in fact a thorough biblical hermeneutic intended to validate the veracity of scripture and the faithfulness of God. Second, early Pentecostals were not allergic to political and earthly affairs. As part of the political milieu of the early twentieth century, Pentecostals, through British-Israel ideas, contributed to the discourse of Anglo-Saxon expansionism and imperialism.

British-Israelism: Context and Beliefs

British-Israelism (also known as B.I., Anglo-Israelism, and “the identity”) is the belief that the Anglo-Saxon peoples are the direct biological descendants of the ten tribes of Israel who never returned to their homeland after the Assyrian exile of the eighth century, BC. The whereabouts of this “lost” people has entertained and frustrated Bible teachers and scholars for centuries, but in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, a small, uncoordinated group of British writers and lecturers declared they had solved the age-old conundrum. John Wilson’s lectures and subsequent publication of *Our Israelitish Origin* (1840) were the beginning and main source of British-Israelist thought. By the turn of the century, the teaching had prolific apologists in America as well as England. At the height of its influence in the early twentieth century, British-Israelism probably claimed two million adherents, and carried a representative cross-section of the British and American population.^[7]

British-Israelism was a racial, biological, national, and territorial theory.^[8] According to adherents, an important distinction must be made between the two kingdoms of God’s chosen people. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was in large part composed of the descendants of Joseph, to whom had been promised the divine birthright—becoming many nations. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was in large part composed of the descendants of Judah, who had been promised the throne, or the “scepter” of rule. This promise is twofold, with a spiritual and a physical dimension. From the tribe of Judah came both the Davidic dynasty and the messianic King, whom Christians confess to be Jesus Christ. From the tribes of Israel (especially Manasseh and Ephraim) came the promises of a prosperous and expanding nation. The Northern Kingdom was exiled by the Assyrians in 722 BC, and the Southern Kingdom was also exiled in 586 BC by the Babylonians. While the Southern Kingdom was allowed to return from exile in 538 BC, the Northern Kingdom never returned to their native land. Yet the Hebrew

prophets promised return for both Israel and Judah. Since God is faithful to his promises, British-Israelists reasoned, the Israelites still may expect their homecoming, as well as fulfillment of myriad other prophecies spoken directly to Israel. While common history has described the ten northern tribes as “lost,” British-Israelists labeled this blasphemy, a giving up on God and his promises.

Through a complex and convoluted system of biblical interpretation, British-Israelists pieced together the migration of the Israelites from their exile in Assyria, through the “Caucasus Passage,” and into northern Europe. In some versions, the tribes migrated directly to the British Isles. The promise to Joseph’s descendants of many nations therefore continued its fulfillment in the settlements of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England. This was “Joseph’s birthright.” It was further realized in the expanding rule of the British Empire.

The promise to Judah of a kingdom, reiterated to David as a perpetual throne, was also left intact in spite of exile. The prophet Jeremiah figures importantly as he who is commissioned by God “to uproot and to tear down.” British-Israelists believed that Jeremiah fled to Egypt during the Babylonian exile, along with “daughters of the king,”^[9] allowing for the Davidic dynasty to continue. This remnant then made its way to Ireland where a descendant of David was reunited with the Israelites, and again ruled over God’s chosen people. In this scheme, the monarch of Britain is in the direct lineage of King David.

With regard to race, the British-Israel theory unequivocally claimed that Anglo-Saxons were the direct biological continuation of biblical Israel. All the “unfulfilled” prophecies of the Old Testament could therefore be claimed by this chosen race, which inhabited the contemporary regions of the British Isles and the United States of America. The white race was modern-day Israel in the most literal sense:

The conception, and the birth of Jacob and Esau were also supernatural, for there were “two nations,” two distinct races—a white child and a red one—Caucasian and Arabic, in one womb; and the manner of their birth was so supernaturally manipulated, that, as they struggled in the womb, Jacob held Esau’s heel, and thus they were born: the very manner of which, as we hope to show, is one of the most striking types in all the Word of God. And yet, none of these events are any more supernatural, nor attended with any greater manifest power of God, nor is his will any more clearly manifest in them, than is the transfer of the Sceptre, and the birthright, by dying Jacob, to Judah and to Joseph.^[10]

The desire to put themselves in the center of the biblical narrative was not wholly self-serving. Like all Israelites, British-Israelists understood that their privileges implied responsibilities. British-Israelism had a missionary impulse. As J.H. Allen wrote, “[T]he Anglo-Saxons are pre-eminently the evangelists of the world.”^[11] Britain had all the rights and duties of biblical Israel because it was biblical Israel.

Frank Sandford

While not becoming a Pentecostal himself, Frank Sandford had a direct impact on two of the most important early Pentecostal leaders: Charles Parham, the originator of the doctrine of Spirit-baptism with the evidence of speaking in tongues, and A.J. Tomlinson, the dynamic leader of the Holiness-turned-Pentecostal denomination, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN).^[12] For his practice of speaking in tongues, divine healing, and reliance upon the Holy Spirit, as well as his connections

to other proto-Pentecostals and early Pentecostals, Pentecostal historians agree that Sandford is a significant figure in the rise of Pentecostalism.^[13]

In the early 1890s, Sandford was a promising young minister in the Free Baptist church but was also deeply unsettled spiritually. Upon returning from a worldwide inspection of Free Baptist churches, Sandford resigned his lucrative pastorate and began evangelizing without regular support—a daring move in any age, but striking during the financial collapse of 1893. After some success in his itinerant ministry, Sandford established “The Holy Ghost and Us Bible School” in coastal southern Maine. The community that eventually developed around Sandford became known as Shiloh.

In his personal life and his school, Sandford was determined to read and live the Bible as literally as possible, which led him to strict Sabbatarianism and celebration of Jewish feasts. He was particularly concerned with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Because of the enormity of prophecies still unfulfilled, he could not bring himself to agree with his dispensational brothers and sisters that all of the prophecies would be fulfilled for the Jewish people upon their return to Israel. When George B. Peck, a friend of healing evangelist A.B. Simpson, introduced Sandford to the British-Israel theory in 1895, he felt that many of his scriptural questions—particularly concerning Old Testament prophecy—were answered.^[14] Sandford’s global sojourns—especially through the colonies of the British Empire—confirmed the truth of the teaching, as his first-hand witness of Britain’s colonies “inspired [Sandford] with the spiritual certainty of the Anglo-Israel truth.”^[15]

In order to get a firmer grasp of the teaching, Sandford immersed himself in the writings of Charles A.L. Totten, the Yale military instructor who wrote volumes on British-Israelism. After digesting Totten’s arguments, Sandford became convinced that British-Israelism rescued scripture from irrelevance. As Frank S. Murray, Sandford’s early biographer explains:

Regardless of the way it has been abused or misconstrued by carnal-minded advocates, the fact that the English-speaking peoples in general are the blood descendants of Israel’s ten lost tribes makes the Bible come to life for every man who understands and accepts it.^[16]

British-Israelism would not remain a matter of private interpretation for Sandford. From 1896, the teaching, as Murray says, “lent its force and color to all the activities of the Bible School.”^[17]

In 1898, Sandford heard the Holy Spirit say “Jerusalem next.” He soon began plans for a trip to the Holy Land. From Jerusalem, Sandford and his companion and student Willard Gleason composed an extended essay on the topic of British-Israelism entitled “Who God’s Ancient People Israel Are.” In a purportedly inductive manner, Sandford wrote that the key to identifying Israel was “to search the Scriptures to ascertain what God said they were to be.”^[18] After listing the “sevenfold description” of the chosen people from the book of Genesis, Sandford rhetorically asked, “Now as you glance over the face of the earth what people comes to your mind as fulfilling the description that we have given?”^[19] In short, the expanding Empire of the Anglo-Saxon people was proof enough for Sandford:

The United States is a ‘great’ nation: England is a ‘greater’ nation, ruling over sixty colonies and three hundred and fifty millions of people—a great, dominant power among the nations; and these two, the ‘great’ and the ‘greater’

nations, are *of the same blood*, and in every particular meet the sevenfold description of the text. NO OTHER TWO NATIONS ON THE GLOBE MEET THE DESCRIPTION. THESE TWO DO. OUR SEARCH IS ENDED. *The lost is found.*^[20]

It was more than the search for the lost ten tribes that was ended in this manifesto; it was also Sandford's search for a God who was finally and completely true to his promises in scripture. His common response to those "fundamentalists" who refused the British-Israel teaching was "What are they going to do with the Scriptures?"^[21]

Although the Empire served as corroboration of British-Israelism, Sandford also viewed the general prosperity and military strength of America and Britain as support for biblical blessing. Beyond the Empire, the victories of both World Wars were proof of which people served as God's "battle-axe and weapons of war."^[22] But the power of the Anglo-Saxon nations was not an end in itself. Sandford saw the two overlapping "Israels" working together in their separate spheres:

God has used carnal Israel to fight our enemies with, and we have a civil government in this land beneath which flag we can in peace proclaim the everlasting gospel. It is wonderful; carnal Israel is to fight real battles, and let spiritual Israel fight real battles on the battle-field of faith in behalf of God, and we shall have the same result as they had.^[23]

For Sandford, the early stages of American interventionism and imperialism were more than a spur to dedication and sacrifice—they were evidence of God's election and would be of direct service in spreading the gospel. America as a whole was "carnal Israel," which worked in cooperation with Christian believers, or "spiritual Israel," to spread the blessings of the gospel.

Like most early British-Israelists, Sandford did not reject dispensationalism completely, although the two prophetic systems were at root antithetical. Sandford was heavily influenced by the premillennial theology of the Dwight L. Moody and the Niagara Conferences. As with many evangelists and Holiness leaders of this time, Sandford's eschatology can be described as "a theological patchwork quilt."^[24] But Sandford's task was made more difficult because the optimism and pride associated with British-Israelism were not easily reconciled with the pessimism and retreat of dispensational premillennialism. Yet William Hiss describes how Sandford overcame these tensions, "by viewing Anglo-America as the 'lost tribes of Israel,' stiff-necked, rebellious, deserving God's punishment, yet still God's chosen people and rod for the nations."^[25] British-Israelists like Sandford often had to correct the false judgment that they preached divine favoritism. The teaching, in Sandford's mind, issued both divine blessing and divine command. Sandford came to the conclusion that "we, God's ancient people, must see the world evangelized (for the Scriptures *cannot* be broken), [which] dignifies our national existence."^[26] The eschatological benefits of British-Israel identity made the Anglo-Saxons *primus inter pares*:

[I]t will be Israel first, then the Gentiles; it will be the hundred and forty-four thousand first, and then the countless multitude. That's the way God has chosen to work, and we had better work with God.^[27]

According to Sandford, the Anglo-Saxon peoples had biblical blessing as well as biblical mandate. Although not favored, the Anglo-Saxon people were *chosen*, and Sandford spoke the language of British-Israelism to make this explicit and literal. The greatness of Britain and American on the global scene were self-evident proofs of this chosenness—literal, direct fulfillment of

prophecies regarding Israel. For Sandford, to deny British-Israel identity was to deny the plain evidence of scripture, which would call into question both the veracity of God's word and the trustworthiness of God himself.

Charles Parham

After spending a number of weeks at Sandford's Bible school in Maine and travelling with Sandford on an evangelism tour of Canada in 1900, Charles Parham returned to Topeka convinced that glossolalia (speaking in tongues) had not ceased with the passing of the apostolic era. But unlike Sandford's community, which practiced glossolalia but did not attach any specific theological importance to it, Parham's group would make it the center of their theological program. Parham was also by this time won over to Sandford's British-Israelism, and he claimed to be nurtured in this teaching also by the well-known Church of God (Holiness) minister and ardent British-Israelist, J.H. Allen.^[28]

Today's scholars disagree as to the meaning and import of Parham's British-Israelism. As the originator of Pentecostalism's most distinct teaching (baptism in the Holy Spirit with initial evidence of speaking in tongues), Parham has come under closer scrutiny as a theologian than many of his Pentecostal peers. For one scholar, Parham's adherence to British-Israelism—and its white supremacy—is an inseparable component of his theological vision of Spirit-baptism.^[29] For other more charitable scholars, Parham should be seen as “a man of his times” concerning his racial mores.^[30] One theologian even argues that within the context of Parham's expansive soteriological system, his British-Israelism provides for his “amazingly optimistic attitude toward the Jews,” and furnishes the material for a positive Pentecostal theology of religions.^[31]

Parham's adventurous attitude toward theology was the cause of his fall from Pentecostal prominence around 1907 as much as it was the reason for his initial importance. While he gave to the burgeoning Pentecostal movement its chief distinctive, Pentecostals in general would accept none of the other theological gifts Parham had to offer. His belief in the final annihilation of the wicked (as opposed to the orthodox view of eternal suffering in hell) and the inclusion of non-Christians in his soteriological scheme sat along with his British-Israelism as beliefs that did not enter the Pentecostal mainstream.

Coinciding also with Parham's separation from the Azusa Street-stream of Pentecostalism was his aborted attempt to travel to the Holy Land in search of the Ark of the Covenant. This strange episode must be understood in light of Parham's British-Israelism, which buttressed his support for the Zionist movement:

[W]e studied for years as to what would be the most certain article to turn the eyes of Jewry homeward. We finally decided that the Ark of the Covenant, the most precious relic of Jewish history, would cause the Jews to ‘flock like doves to the window.’ We made a study as to its location....^[32]

With a pensive eye on the eschatological clock, Parham looked for the time when Israel and Judah would “become one stick.” According to Parham's chronology, the return of the Jews to Palestine was the first in a series of end-times events that would facilitate the inevitable reuniting of “all Israel.”^[33] Like most British-Israelists, Parham envisioned a fraternal relationship with the Jews. And he mourned over the prophetic fact that “very many of our Jewish brethren...will accept [the Anti-Christ].” Parham counted a Jewish rabbi among his friends and spoke with affection of Palestine and its rightful inhabitants.^[34]

In many ways, Parham's British-Israelism was typical. Parham's earliest book in 1902 contained essays on "The Tribe of Judah," "The Ten Lost Tribes Discovered," and "Queen Victoria's Descent from Adam."^[35] In the pages of *The Apostolic Faith*, the official organ for his movement, Parham frequently wrote on British-Israel themes. He also published articles by other British-Israelists, spreading to his readers the notions that the word "Tutons [*sic*]" is an old Gothic term meaning Ten-tribes,^[36] and that the Britons, being biologically God's children, have been throughout history the people most eager to receive and most successful in spreading the gospel message.^[37] In a collection of selected sayings on British-Israelism, Parham told his readers that the teaching "provides a Master Key to the Bible, and to Prophecy and History," "kills pessimism," provides "the best means for Interdenominational Platform," and is "THE cure for Communism, Sabbath Desecration, Class Antagonism, Strikes and kindred evils."^[38]

According to Parham, the British-Israel teaching was neither peripheral nor optional: "I do not think that any Full Gospel preacher ought to longer delay in acquainting himself with this subject as I believe it belongs with the Full Gospel message and that the message of the last day must include this subject or we are not preaching the full gospel."^[39] British-Israelism was the only option for those who wished to remain faithful to scripture. With the teaching in hand, "the Old Testament will become a new book to you full of vital importance and interest."^[40] God's faithfulness was proven by the historical record. To defend the belief that British royalty inherited the scepter of Judah, Parham wrote, "Let us trace this sceptre; to find that not only does God keep His Word, but by so doing has wrought the romance of history."^[41] Like other British-Israelists, Parham was deeply concerned about the attack of the "infidel" who, when comparing biblical prophecy to the pages of history, concluded bluntly, "Your God has lied."^[42]

The exalted language with which the Bible described Israel convinced Parham that only one group of people fit the description. Although some theories placed the lost tribes in Asia, Russia, and even pre-colonial America, for Parham, it was self-evident that such races could not be true Israel: "the fallacy of this theory is proved by the word of God which says: He will make them the head and not the tail of nations."^[43] As with Sandford, the economic, military, and political strength of Britain and America were the trump card. In fact, Parham saw the multi-faceted power of the Empire as the most important proof of the British-Israel truth:

All the prophecies concerning these two nations concerning the sons of Jacob are fulfilled in these two nations [England and the United States], who stand almost inseparable united as brother John and Johnathan [*sic*].

Some of these prophecies: 'They should be the head and not the tail of nations; 'Never overcome except by their own people; where [*sic*, were] to be the Mistress of the seas; Possess the gate ways [*sic*] of their enemies; which accounts for the possession of Gibraltar, Suez and Panama Canal; they were to possess the gold and silver and precious stones of the world. This accounts for the U.S. acquiring Alaska and the way the boor [*sic*] war was settled.^[44]

Since no other nations matched the biblical description, it was clear to Parham that the English-speaking nations were the lost

tribes of Israel. Parham saw imperial progress as proof of British-Israel doctrine, but this was not a blanket approval of everything done in the name of Empire:

Ere long Justice with flaming sword will step from behind the pleading form of Mercy to punish a nation which has mingled the blood of thousands of human sacrifices upon the altar of her commercial and imperialistic expansion.^[45]

Parham's British-Israelism coupled with his evangelical-prophetic stance against sin produced a tension-filled mix of approval and condemnation of imperial activities.

Parham's connection to J.H. Allen must stand at the center of any discussion of his British-Israelism. Allen wrote the highly influential *Judah's Scepter and Joseph's Birthright* (1901), which laid out the basic biblical, historical, and genealogical argument for the teaching, and which Parham ardently promoted. The essays of this "dear bishop"^[46] were featured often in the pages of Parham's periodical—sufficient evidence to place Parham within the major stream of American British-Israelism. What has not been mentioned by other historians is that beginning February 1927 Allen was named associate editor of Parham's magazine, and remained so until Parham's death in January 1929.^[47] In 1920, Allen was a featured speaker at the Anglo-Israel Congress in London, and he related his experiences to readers of *The Apostolic Faith*.^[48] In one essay of idiosyncratic biblical interpretation, Allen noted that Jesus' only post-resurrection miracle was a miraculous catch of 153 fish. Having determined that King George was the 152nd generation from Adam (making the heir apparent the 153rd generation), Allen declared that "the end of fishing—of work—had come."^[49] His numerology combined with his British-Israelism allowed him to declare that Christ's return was imminent and could be expected during the reign of Britain's next monarch. While Allen was not Pentecostal, his British-Israelist teaching reached numbers of first-generation Pentecostals, and carried the endorsement of the "Projector of the Apostolic Faith Movement."

The common claim made by scholars that British-Israelism has no soteriological significance is true in general, but was not the case for Parham. As Leslie Callahan has demonstrated, Parham's British-Israelism had distinct eschatological and soteriological significance. In Parham's scheme, humans met one of three fates: eternal heavenly life, perfect earthly life, or utter destruction. Heavenly life belongs only to those who receive Christ and live holy lives. But this category was further narrowed by a racial stipulation. Parham wrote, "We believe it to be an impossibility for any one [*sic*] to have adoption, to-wit: the redemption, or membership in the Church all of gold which is His Body, who are not of His own blood, the seed of Abraham."^[50] The more elite category, the Bride of Christ, "must be chosen from among his own blood relations, His own house Israel, and no one who has not Israelitish blood in their veins will have in part or lot in the [B]ride of Christ (there seemingly will be people from all races.)"^[51] What exactly Parham meant by "there will *seemingly* be people from all races" is difficult to discern, but it has something to do with his belief that the blood of Israel has made its way also into other races: "[B]y the inter-marriage of the Israelitish nations, Israel's blood has found its way among the races."^[52] For Parham, the broad strokes of salvation were easily discerned along racial lines, but he admitted that the blood of Abraham—which predisposes

one toward right belief—was present in some members of all races.

Perfect earthly life, according to Parham, belongs to those who had not accepted the Gospel, but who during the Judgment Age (the era following the millennium) are deemed worthy by their works.^[53] In this group, Parham placed infants, heathens, and members of “formalistic churches,” which he primarily identified with members of Catholic (non-Anglo-Saxon) nations. Callahan astutely argues that what these three groups have in common is an “inferior capacity for accepting the truth, which meant that they were not as accountable as others.”^[54] With regard to heathens and members of formalistic churches, what they also have in common is a racial distinction in being, according to Parham, *not* descended from the tribes of Israel.

Utter destruction is the lot of those who hear and reject the gospel, backslide, or are otherwise reprobate. One can discern the contours of Parham’s theology of race in the following quote:

Today the descendants of Abraham are the Hindus, the Japanese, the high German, the Danes (tribe of Dan), the Scandinavians, the Anglo-Saxon and their descendants in all parts of the world. These are the nations who have acquired and retained experimental salvation and deep spiritual truths; while the Gentiles—the Russians, the Greek, the Italian, the low German, the French, the Spanish and their descendants in all parts are formalists scarce ever obtaining the knowledge and truth discovered by Luther,—that of justification by faith or of the truth taught by Wesley, sanctification by faith; while the heathen—the Black race, the Brown race, the Red race, the Yellow race, in spite of missionary zeal and effort are nearly all heathen still; but will, in the dawning of the coming age, be given to Jesus for an inheritance.”^[55]

For Parham, race was not unrelated to salvation, although it did not determine it completely. But for him, history had proven that Israel was distinguished not only by its worldwide dominance, but by its embrace of gospel truths. Parham’s British-Israelism also helped him resolve the questions of scripture’s veracity and God’s faithfulness. Informed by his British-Israelism, his theological speculation and biblical interpretation served to support the prevailing attitude of Anglo-Saxon superiority and to justify continued British and American global dominance.

George Hawtin

Though British-Israelism peaked during the height of the British Empire in the early twentieth century, it continued to exert an influence in Pentecostal circles throughout the century. As we have seen, Frank Sandford continued to hold the belief through both world wars, constantly adapting his prophetic interpretations to fit new global-political circumstances. The belief showed strength in some Pentecostal circles after World War II, as seen in the work of George Hawtin.

In 1948, a revival began in an independent Pentecostal Bible school in Saskatchewan. This movement was led by George and Ernest Hawtin and Percy Hunt, former leaders in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (the Assemblies of God counterpart in Canada). Hawtin’s school began displaying many of the practices common in early Pentecostal Bible schools: fasting, long hours in prayer, and intense study of the Scriptures. They believed they had received a revelation from God regarding the outpouring of latter rain—the early days of Pentecostalism being downgraded to “early rain.” Along with this conviction was a renewed interest in the practice of laying on of hands, which they believed imparted Spirit-baptism, and a range of spiritual gifts and offices. While the movement was disowned by the major North American Pentecostal

denominations, it had an immense impact on the post-war Pentecostal healing revivals and the later development of the charismatic movement.^[56]

Standing at the center of the movement and its subsequent development among independent Pentecostals was George Hawtin. He published his British-Israel doctrines in his periodical the *Page*, and later in book form as a series of articles. Hawtin's British-Israelism focused on the grand plan of God. "[T]his seeming tragic division between the house of Israel and the house of Judah *was after all ordained of God.*"^[57] Although commonly referred to as "lost," the people of Israel, Hawtin wrote, "are not lost! *God would not be God* if they were not *at this very moment* fulfilling every detail of his covenant with them..."^[58] For Hawtin and other British-Israelists, the power and reliability of God was at stake in their identification of Israel.

Hawtin used the same logic as Sandford to "prove" the identity of the Anglo-Saxon people. By process of elimination based on thirteen "marks of identification," only one group fit the description as outlined in scripture. These proofs were all facets of the economic, expansionistic and political supremacy of the English-speaking peoples. Among the marks: "I will make thy name *great*," (Gen. 12:2) which Hawtin said was fulfilled only in the name of *Great Britain*; "Israel was to be exceedingly fruitful and very populous"; and "Israel shall rule over many nations, but none shall rule over her."^[59] British-Israelist glorying in the triumphs of Anglo civilization was not dampened by the dissolution of the Empire. Hawtin, writing after 1967, was able to reassess biblical prophecy in light of the new political situation. "In Eph. 2:12 Paul speaks of Israel as a *commonwealth*," wrote Hawtin.^[60] In fact, the changing global political map was all part of God's plan: "The present crumbling of the British Commonwealth and Empire, together with the dreadful weakening of the power of the United States of America, is definitely foretold in scripture and is one of the principal signs that we are at the end of the age when all things shall be finished."^[61]

The dark side of British-Israelism was its readiness to disparage non-Anglo-Saxons. "[N]ever in history has a tribe of white savages been discovered," wrote Hawtin.^[62] The implication was clear: God's favor was written in the evidence of civilization:

Why then should students of scripture waste their valuable time searching for Israel among the primitive and poverty-stricken tribes and nations when God's word declares that His covenant people are to be the *leading nations* of the world and this especially so *in the last days*?^[63]

The racial theories Hawtin espoused were more vicious than those of earlier British-Israelists. In 1974, he published *The Living Creature: Origin of the Negro*. Hawtin also added the curious notion that "a large portion of the house of Israel had already moved into the British Isles *centuries before* the Assyrian captivity began..."^[64] According to Hawtin, the Israelite population grew rapidly during Solomon's day, and began colonizing. Hawtin was thus able to push the greatness of the Anglo-Saxon race even further back in time: "The kind of people who could build Stonehenge and the Avebury Circle must have been

possessed of the wisdom of Solomon.”^[65] While this interpretation did not alter the basic contention that Anglo-Saxons were the superior race, it does demonstrate the flexibility of the British-Israelism system, able to accommodate any scriptural-historical arguments that support the main contention: the biological descent of the Anglo-Saxon people from the tribes of Israel.

In the mid-twentieth century, the fluidity and flexibility of British-Israelism resulted in its occasional but increasing pairing with overt anti-Semitism.^[66] While Hawtin was not an anti-Semite, the tendency of British-Israelism to favor the Israelites (Anglo-Saxons) *at the expense of* the Jews is evident in Hawtin, and is grounded in the basic assertion that the Christian faith of Anglo-Saxons is further evidence of divine favor, while the Jewish rejection of Christ is a sign of disfavor. The distinction between the house of Israel and the house of Judah was not simply a genealogical exercise:

Israel was to be a people glorying in Christ... Though the Jew has always been an enemy of Christ and as a people has maintained her anti-Christ attitude for two thousand years, the opposite is true of the house of Israel... It is clearly evident here that *Israel* does not refer to the anti-Christ Jew, but to the *house of Israel*, for the Jew has never honored Christ.^[67]

According to Hawtin, the Jews’ rejection of Christ was *prima facie* confirmation that the Jews were not the subject of latter biblical prophetic fulfillment. In Hawtin’s definition, the “house of Israel” had to be a people historically receptive to the gospel. This people was, of course, European, and particularly, English-speaking. By following the common British-Israel convention of distinguishing between Israel and the Jews, but moving beyond genealogical or political arguments, Hawtin combined the British-Israel theory with the older tradition of anti-Semitism expressed in terms of the Jews’ rejection of Christ. Hawtin’s language shows a clear move from Parham’s philo-Semitic British-Israelism, although the same basic theory is at the root of each.

While Hawtin’s British-Israelism evinced a stronger argument for the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxons as well as a creeping anti-Semitism, his concerns were in harmony with all British-Israelists: God is faithful and God’s word is trustworthy. All of history is under God’s command, including, importantly, the history of the races.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Pentecostals have generally favored the dispensational-premillennial theory of prophetic interpretation. Their concern for a common-sense approach to scripture that assured them of the materialistic fulfillment of biblical prophecies and the imminent return of Christ were served well by this hermeneutic.^[68] These concerns could also be met, however, by British-Israelism, which contributed to or betrayed some Pentecostals’ interest in the global politics of their day—particularly with regard to the imperial, military, and economic power of the Anglo-Saxon nations. This was different from the “signs and wonders” political fascination of dispensational premillennialism, because British-Israel prophetic interpretation placed the racial and national identity of its adherents at the center of their biblical hermeneutic and their interpretation of the world around them. While most premillennialists spoke of political developments in terms of “others”—the rise of the Anti-Christ, the importance of Jewish homecoming, and the mysterious identities of players in Armageddon—British-Israelists wrote

themselves directly into the most important political events. In this way, they did not retreat from the world as is often thought. On the contrary, they looked for every way possible to place themselves—their nation and their race—in the center of the biblically-foretold global drama.

Sufficient work is yet to be done to determine the role of British-Israelism in Pentecostalism. Specifically, one cannot yet be sure how influential British-Israelism was among the rank-and-file of Pentecostal believers. But the leaders explored here suggest that significant numbers of Pentecostals were affected by the teaching. For instance, while Parham ceased to exert national influence on the movement after 1907, he still had thousands of followers across the Midwest at the time of his death in 1929, and he continued to publish his British-Israelist views through the last months of his life. Similarly, scholars are now beginning to appreciate the influence of the Latter Rain Movement and George Hawtin's ministry on North American and international Pentecostalism.^[69] Hawtin's voluminous publishing record suggests a significant readership. His periodical, the *Page*, was published for over 20 years, and over 30 books have been compiled from his writings.^[70] A promising trail for further scholarship seems to be the connection to John Alexander Dowie and his Zion City community. As is well known, Parham was deeply influenced by Dowie's ministry, and in Zion City he gained many converts to Pentecostalism—a number of whom would go on to become important in the Pentecostal story. Charles Jennings, the current Pentecostal compiler of British-Israelist names and writings, argues that Dowie had British-Israelist sympathies.^[71] There is evidence that prominent Zion residents-turned Pentecostals John G. Lake and F.F. Bosworth, along with Gordon Lindsay (the son of Zion residents) were at one time British-Israelists.^[72] A Canadian-Pacific Northwest concentration also seems likely, which is not surprising, given the strength of the British-Israelism in Canada, and growth of the British-Israel Association of Greater Vancouver from the late 1930s.^[73] From the time in 1907 when Florence Crawford left the Azusa Street Mission to build a Pentecostal church in Portland, the Pacific Northwest was also an area of strength for Pentecostals. At this point, however, only tentative suggestions can be made about the strength of British-Israelism among average Pentecostals.

Still, this investigation into three figures in the Pentecostal story challenges received notions about the political noninvolvement of Pentecostals. Insofar as the otherworldly met the worldly in their interpretation of biblical prophecy, Pentecostals—as much as any in the early and mid-twentieth century—could echo the prevailing political sentiments of their day and add their voices to the chorus of imperial expansion and racial superiority. In the intersection of Pentecostalism and British-Israelism, we also find prevailing notions about British-Israelism being challenged. The movement cannot be sung in the monotone of imperialism, since the Pentecostals who espoused the teaching defended it as the only way to maintain the reliability of scripture. According to British-Israelists, if one did not read scripture in this way it was full of logical holes and unfulfilled prophecies. If the scriptures were not trustworthy, God was not faithful. In George Hawtin's words, "God would not be God." Those who insisted that Old Testament prophecies were to be fulfilled in the Jews or in the church metaphorically only summoned atheism from those who read scripture closely. British-Israelists never tired of referring to Tom Paine and

Robert Ingersoll in this regard.

Pentecostals always interpreted the world around them in biblical and eschatological terms. Often, this translated into a separation from the political system and social mores of their day. But these same theological concerns could also be combined with and contribute to pervasive political thought. In the case of Pentecostal British-Israelists, the otherworldly met the this-worldly in ways that make clear that Pentecostals did in fact have at least one political bone in their bodies.

^[1] Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 214. Grant Wacker also puts it succinctly: "Pentecostals betrayed little interest in earthly affairs." *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 20.

^[2] Elsewhere Grant Wacker is even blunter: "*Politics* never ranked as more than a dot on the horizon of Pentecostals' consciousness." "Early Pentecostals and the Almost Chosen People," *Pneuma* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 144. While Wacker nuances the "otherworldliness" of Pentecostals with their pragmatism and their premillennial obsession with global politics, British-Israelism does not fit neatly into either category. Wacker mentions British-Israelism (160, n. 70) but subsumes this under patriotism born of "emotional necessity." (166)

^[3] Cited in "Albert Beveridge Defends U.S. Imperialism, 1900," in *Major Problems in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, second edition, ed. Leon Fink (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 272.

^[4] This is true of surveys, monographs and biographical works. See for example Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origin and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 21-23, 185; James Robinson, *Pentecostal Origins: Early Pentecostalism in Ireland in the Context of the British Isles* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 114, 117, 119, 159-160, 265; and Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 115. Charles Parham's biographer gives only a few pages to his British-Israelism. James R. Goff, *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 57-58, 101-102, 131. George Jeffreys's biographer analyzes his British-Israel beliefs only in terms of its impact on the leader's split with the Elim church. Desmond Cartwright, *The Great Evangelists: The Lives of George and Stephen Jeffreys* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1986).

^[5] Bryan R. Wilson, *Sects and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 55.

^[6] I prefer to use "British-Israelist" to refer to adherents of British-Israelism, as opposed to the more common "British-Israelite." As far as I know, I stand alone among scholars in this preference. While British-Israelists often use the term "British-Israelite" when labeling themselves, I find it awkward and misleading. According to British-Israel teaching, all Anglo-Celt-Saxon peoples are descendants of the tribes of Israel, and so are all "Israelites" in this sense. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to me to label those who *adhere* to British-Israelism as "British-Israelists," much as adherents of socialism are *socialists* and adherents of nationalism are *nationalists*. In part, I feel justified in bucking convention because the scholarly work on British-Israelism is still so small.

^[7] Eric Reisenauer, "British-Israel: Racial Identity in Imperial Britain, 1870-1920" (Ph.D. diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 1997), 147. The figure of two million is reiterated by an opponent of British-Israelism in Carl G. Howie, "The Bible and Modern Religions: British Israelism and Pyramidology," *Interpretation* 11, no. 3 (1957): 314. Of course, reliable statistics for a movement with no central authority and no denominational structure are impossible.

^[8] Categories from Rupert C. Thomas, *The Coming of Christ and Israel-Britain's Identity* (London: The Covenant Publishing Co., 1935), 13.

^[9] Jeremiah 43:6.

^[10] J.H. Allen, *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright: An Analysis of the Prophecies of Scripture in Regard to the Royal Family of Judah and the Many Nations of Israel* (Merrimac, MA: Destiny Publishers, 1902), 43.

^[11] *Ibid.*, 283.

^[12] For Sandford's influence on Parham, see Goff, *Fields White Unto Harvest*, 57-59, 73-74, 97, 222. For Sandford's influence on Tomlinson, see R.G. Robins, *A.J. Tomlinson: Plainfolk Modernist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 120-123. See also Harold D. Hunter, "Beniah at the Crossroads: Little Noticed Crosscurrents of B.H. Irwin, Charles Fox Parham, Frank Sandford, and A.J. Tomlinson," *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 1 (January 1997).

[13] See for instance, Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel*, 136-157; Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 75, 90; and Edith Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 47-49.

[14] Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel*, 150. See also Frank S. Murray, *The Sublimity of Faith* (Amherst, New Hampshire: The Kingdom Press, 1981), 163, 185-186.

[15] Murray, *The Sublimity of Faith*, 184.

[16] *Ibid.*, 163.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Frank Sandford, "Who God's Ancient People Israel Are," in *Who Hath Believed Our Report?: A Biblical-Historical Defense of the Anglo-Israel Message Through the Lives, Testimonies, and Ministries of Many Outstanding Men of God!*, ed. Charles A. Jennings (Owasso, OK: Truth in History, 2010), 259.

[19] Sandford, "Who God's Ancient People Are," 260.

[20] Cited in Murray, *The Sublimity of Faith*, 185-186. Emphasis in original. Also in Sandford, "Who God's Ancient People Israel Are," 261.

[21] Murray, *The Sublimity of Faith*, 186.

[22] *Ibid.* Jeremiah 51:20—a favorite Bible verse among British-Israelists.

[23] William Hiss, "Shiloh: Frank Sandford and the Kingdom, 1893-1948" (Ph.D. diss., Tufts University, 1978), 192.

[24] *Ibid.*, 72.

[25] *Ibid.*, 77.

[26] Murray, *The Sublimity of Faith*, 163. Cited in Hiss, "Shiloh," 187.

[27] Murray, *The Sublimity of Faith*, 186.

[28] Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 20-21. In 1926, Parham wrote, "While in California we had the great pleasure of meeting Bishop J.H. Allen in his home in Pasadena. We had known him for 35 years and from him many years ago had obtained the foundation truths of many things we are preaching today. Especially the wonderful message of Anglo-Israel." Charles Parham, "A Pleasurable Meeting," *Apostolic Faith* 2, no. 4 (April 1926): 11.

[29] Leslie D. Callahan, "Redeemed or Destroyed: Re-evaluating the Social Dimensions of Bodily Destiny in the Thought of Charles Parham," *Pneuma* 28, no. 2 (2006): 203-227.

[30] Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. *Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Nelson, 2006), 48.

[31] Tony Richie, "Eschatological Inclusivism: Exploring Early Pentecostal Theology of Religions in Charles Fox Parham," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 27, no. 2 (2007): 145, *et passim* (138-152).

[32] Charles F. Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* (1902, reprint, New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), 103. Reprinted in "Jerusalem," *Apostolic Faith* 4, no. 1 (January 1928): 3.

[33] Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, 104. Reprinted in "Jerusalem," *Apostolic Faith* 4, no. 1 (January 1928): 3.

[34] *Ibid.*, 103. Reprinted in "Jerusalem," *Apostolic Faith* 4, no. 1 (January 1928): 3.

[35] Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, 91-100.

[36] James M. Taylor, "The Meaning of this Ominous Silence," *Apostolic Faith* 2, no. 12 (December 1926): 17.

[37] "Christianity was brought to the early Britains [*sic*] direct from Jerusalem by the apostles of Christ shortly after the passion, and as early as

165 A.D. had become the National religion of the country.” “The Lost Tribes of Israel Found in Britain,” *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 7 (October 1925): 17.

[38] “Anglo-Israel Teaching:” *Apostolic Faith* 4, no.4 (April 1928): 19. Emphasis in original.

[39] Charles Parham, “The Ten Lost Tribes,” *Apostolic Faith* 4, no. 2 (February 1928): 10.

[40] *Ibid.*, 11.

[41] Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, 92.

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] *Ibid.*, 105.

[44] Charles Parham, “The Ten Lost Tribes,” 11. Also printed in Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, 107.

[45] Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, 118.

[46] Parham, “A Pleasurable Meeting,” 12.

[47] When *Apostolic Faith* was revived about a year after Parham’s death, his wife Sarah became editor. Allen was no longer listed as associate editor. Allen died in May 1930, so it is unclear if his relationship with Parham’s *Apostolic Faith* network was limited to his association with Parham, although this appears to be the case.

[48] J.H. Allen, “What We Saw at Windsor Castle,” *Apostolic Faith* 2, no. 11 (November 1926); J.H. Allen, “What We Saw at Westminster [sic] Abbey,” *Apostolic Faith* 2, no. 12 (November 1926).

[49] J.H. Allen, “Watch the 153 Great Fishes,” *Apostolic Faith* 3, no. 5 (May 1927): 5.

[50] Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, 73.

[51] *Ibid.*, 86.

[52] *Ibid.* Cited in Callahan, “Redeemed or Destroyed,” 218.

[53] Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, 51.

[54] Callahan, “Redeemed or Destroyed,” 223.

[55] Parham, *Voice Crying the Wilderness*, 107. The section titled “The Tribe of Judah,” was reprinted in *Apostolic Faith* 2, no. 9 (September 1926): 10-13. In 1899, he wrote essentially the same thing: “The Old Testament distinction of the peoples of the earth remain [sic] almost the same to-day. The Hebrews, Jews and various descendants of the ten tribes—the Anglo-Saxons, High Germans, Danes (Dan), Swedes, Hindoos [sic], Japanese, and the Hindoo-Japanese of Hawaii, and these possess about all the spiritual power of the world. The Gentiles—French, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Russian, and Turkish. These are formalistic, and so are their descendants in all parts of the world. Heathen are mostly heathen still—the Negro, Malay, Mongolian, and Indian.” *Apostolic Faith* (April 14, 1899). Cited in Callahan, “Redeemed or Destroyed,” 211-212, n. 36.

[56] For the history of the Latter Rain Movement and its connection to subsequent religious movements, see Richard Riss, *Latter Rain: The Latter Rain Movement of 1948 and the Mid-twentieth Century Evangelical Awakening* (Ontario: Honeycomb Visual Productions, 1987).

[57] George Hawtin, *The Abrahamic Covenant* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Artisan Sales, 1988), 121. Emphasis in original.

[58] *Ibid.*, 124. Emphasis in original.

[59] *Ibid.*, 128, 138, 143.

[60] *Ibid.*, 139.

[61] *Ibid.*, 154.

[62] *Ibid.*, 134.

[63] *Ibid.*, 141.

[64] *Ibid.*, 134. Emphasis in original.

[65] *Ibid.*

[66] The links between British-Israelism and the hyper-racist Christian Identity movement are traced in Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*.

[67] Hawtin, *The Abrahamic Covenant*, 143. Emphasis in original.

[68] Of course, one can detect the irony of the Fundamentalist “common sense” approach to scriptures, for while always insisting that the interpretation of scripture is accessible to every believer, dispensationalist teachers made their adherents extremely dependent on their particular grid of interpretation. Dispensationalism and British-Israelism are anything but inductive. See Timothy Weber, “The Two-Edged Sword: The Fundamentalist Use of the Bible,” in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 101-120.

[69] See for example D. William Faupel, “The New Order of the Latter Rain: Restoration or Renewal?” and Mark Hutchinson, “The Latter Rain Movement and the Phenomenon of Global Return,” in *Winds from the North: Canadian Contributions to the Pentecostal Movement*, ed. Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 239-284.

[70] The current distributor of Hawtin’s writings, Dimensions of Truth, claims, and a search of the WorldCat database confirms, 34 books published under Hawtin’s name. <http://www.dimensionsoftruth.org/other-writings/george-r-hawtin/> (accessed June 25, 2012); <http://firstsearch.oclc.org/WebZ/FSFETCH?fetchtype=searchresults:next=html/records.html:bad=error/badfetch.html:resultset=3:format=BI:recno=31:numrecs=10:entitylibrarycount=4:sessionid=fsapp6-54266-h3vt3c8s-tu0ri9:entitypagenum=14:0> (accessed June 25, 2012).

[71] Jennings, *Who Hath Believed Our Report?*, 201-226.

[72] *Ibid.*, 227-244.

[73] Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 50-51. Barkun also suggests that the Canadian and Pacific Northwest brand of British-Israelism was pivotal in the shift toward a more anti-Semitic teaching.