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Universalism, Calvinism and Arminianism: **Some Preliminary Reflections**

by — Thomas Talbott

When I first began interpreting the New Testament along Universalist lines, I was struck by how many regarded such an interpretation as not only mistaken, but utterly unreasonable and heretical as well. I found that a good many of my Calvinist friends, who did not regard Arminianism as heretical (only mistaken), and a good many of my Arminian friends, who did not regard Calvinism as heretical (only mistaken), were united in their conviction that Universalism is both mistaken and heretical. This curious response started me thinking. Why should Calvinists regard Universalism as any more heretical than Arminianism? And why should Arminians regard it as any more heretical than Calvinism?

As I reflected upon these questions, I also began to reflect upon the following inconsistent set of propositions:

- (1) It is God's redemptive purpose for the world (and therefore His will) to reconcile all sinners to Himself;
- (2) It is within God's power to achieve His redemptive purpose for the world;
- (3) Some sinners will never be reconciled to God, and God will therefore either consign them to a place of eternal punishment, from which there will be no hope of escape, or put them out of existence altogether.



If this is indeed an inconsistent set of propositions, as I believe it is, then at least one of the propositions is false.

Calvinists reject proposition (1); Arminians reject proposition (2); and Universalists reject proposition (3). But in fact we can also find *prima facie*¹ support in the Bible for each of the three propositions. So one day I sat down and, setting aside disputes over translation and sophisticated theological arguments, began to review the obvious.

In support of proposition (1), one might cite such texts as:

The Lord ... is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9).

[God] *desires all men to be saved and to come*

1. "At first sight; before closer inspection" – *American Heritage Dictionary*;
"at first view: on the first appearance" – *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*;
"something which appears to be true when you first consider it" – *Collins Dictionary*;
"Based on the first impression; accepted as correct until proved otherwise" – *Oxford Dictionary*.

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to the knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4).

For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that He may be merciful to all (Romans 11:32).

“As I live,” says the Lord God, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn away from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11).

All of these texts seem to suggest that God sincerely *wants* to achieve the reconciliation of all sinners, and that His failure to achieve this end would therefore be, in some important sense, a tragic defeat of one of His purposes.

Similarly, in support of proposition (2), one might cite such texts as:

[God] *accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His own will* (Ephesians 1:11).

I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted (Job 42:2).

Our God is in the Heavens; He does whatever He pleases (Psalm 115:3).

My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all My purpose ... I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it (Isaiah 46:10-11).

These texts seem to imply that God is able to accomplish all of His purposes – including, therefore, all of His redemptive purposes.

In addition to these texts, a number of others seem to imply that God has both the will and the power to bring all things into subjection to Christ (I Corinthians 15:27-28), to reconcile all things in Christ (Colossians 1:20), and to bring acquittal and life to all persons through Christ (Romans 5:18).

But finally, in support of proposition (3), one might also cite such texts as:

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25:46).

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 - union in His death, burial and resurrection and ascended seated position among the celestials (Romans 6; Ephesians 2:6);

– adult sonship position (Ephesians 1:5).

This publication is the product of humble efforts of ordinary men intended to stimulate the earnest study of Scripture. We do not claim infallibility for the contents of this publication; thus they are not meant to imply finality on any subject discussed, or that further research would not add further light from the Word of God. God's storehouse of truth is inexhaustible, so draw on its wealth by prayerful study. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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For definitions of abbreviations/acronyms, see index after the [order form](#).

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They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might (II Thesalonians 1:9).

Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Ephesians 5:5).

These texts may seem to imply that at least some persons will be lost forever and thus never be reconciled to God.

After a quick review of these texts in my own mind, one point struck me as altogether obvious: Anyone who takes a position with respect to our three propositions – whether the person be a Calvinist, an Arminian, or a Universalist – will end up denying a proposition for which there is at least some *prima facie* biblical support. And in that respect Universalism is no different from either Calvinism or Arminianism.

So I found myself, at this point, wanting to put several questions to those who would simply dismiss Universalism as heretical: If it is not heretical for the Arminians to believe that God, being unlimited in love, at least wills (or sincerely desires) the salvation of all (proposition (1)), why should it be heretical for the Universalists to believe this as well? – and if it is not heretical for the Calvinists to believe that God, being almighty, will in the end accomplish all of His redemptive purposes (proposition (2)), why should it be heretical for the Universalists to believe this as

well? And finally, if it is not heretical to accept proposition (1), as the Arminians do, and not heretical to accept proposition (2), as the Calvinists do, why should it be heretical to accept both (1) and (2)?

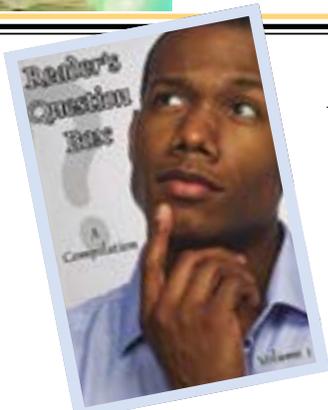
Now as a matter of logic, there is a possible answer to this last question. If the biblical warrant for proposition (3), or a doctrine of everlasting separation, were overwhelmingly greater than that for the other two propositions, then one might conclude that only (3) could not reasonably be rejected. But nothing like that seems to be true at all, and here, at least, is how I see the matter. The biblical warrant for proposition (1), that God wills the salvation of all, is simply overwhelming – so overwhelming that those who worry about heresy, as I do not, ought to regard Calvinism, not Universalism, as heretical. The biblical warrant for proposition (2), that almighty God will eventually accomplish all of His redemptive purposes, is likewise exceedingly strong, as the Calvinists have always insisted. And proposition (3) is the weakest of the three. For only (3) seems to rest upon controversial *translations* as well as controversial *interpretations*; and whereas (1) and (2) seem to rest upon systematic teachings in Paul, the texts cited on behalf of (3) are typically lifted from contexts of parable, hyperbole and great symbolism.

Others will no doubt assess matters differently, but to those who claim, as many do, that everlasting punishment is clearly and unmistakably taught in the New Testament, I would put this question: Which of our other two propositions would you then reject? Would you deny that God wills (or sincerely desires) the salvation of all human beings? – or would you deny that He has the power to accomplish His will in this matter? And finally, why do you believe that the

(see *UNIVERSALISM*, last page)



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Where Are the Ten Lost Tribes?

by — Harold J. Berry

Are ten of the Twelve Tribes of Israel really lost? Are the inhabitants of Great Britain of the Tribe of Ephraim? And are the inhabitants of America of the Tribe of Manasseh? Are the names Israel and Jew always distinctively different, or are they sometimes used interchangeably in the Scriptures?



and “Jew.”

In pinpointing the importance of the distinction between “Israel” and “Jew,” in his book, *Where Are the Ten Lost Tribes?* Herbert W. Armstrong said,

We want to impress here that Israel and Judah are not two names for the same nation. They were and still are, and shall be until the second coming of Christ, two separate nations. The house of Judah always means Jew.

This distinction is vital if we are to understand prophecy. Because most so-called Bible students are ignorant of this basic distinction, they are unable rightly to understand prophecy!

The next place where the term Jew is mentioned in the Bible, the house of Israel had been driven out in captivity, lost from view, and the term only applies to those of the house of Judah. There are no exceptions in the Bible.

Such statements raise the crucial question, What does the Bible teach about the Twelve Tribes?

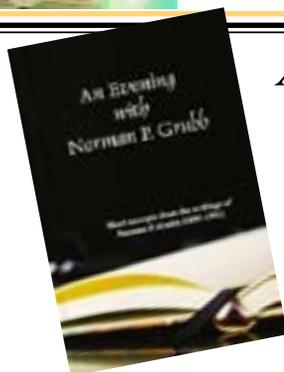
Genesis 1-11 is a record of God’s working with people on a worldwide basis. However, Genesis 12 indicates a change in God’s program – He chose one man and began to work through him and his descendants to bring spiritual blessings to the entire world. That man was Abraham. The name Hebrew was first

These questions are directly related to what is known as British-Israelism or Anglo-Israelism. British-Israelism teaches that Ten Tribes lost their national identity after they were captured by the Assyrians in the eighth century B.C., but maintains that these tribes went westward through northern Europe and became the ancestors of the Saxons, who later invaded England. Thus, the theory is that the Anglo-Saxons are the lost Ten Tribes. This means that white, English-speaking people are really the chosen people of God.

In particular, it is maintained by the exponents of British-Israelism that Ephraim is Great Britain, and that Manasseh is the United States. Although Great Britain and the United States are not specifically mentioned in the Scriptures, those who hold to the theory of British-Israelism see many prophecies directly related to these two countries.

A key matter to those teaching British-Israelism is the sharp distinction between the terms “Israel”

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☞ *Since we're called to peace, when it comes to contention and strife, we don't even have to "get into the ring." – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.*

used in reference to Abraham, then known as Abram (Genesis 14:13). Inasmuch as this title was applied to Abraham, it could also be applied to all of his physical descendants.

A new term was introduced in connection with Abraham's grandson Jacob. Genesis 32 records the change of Jacob's name to Israel (:28). Thus, the Israelites, or children of Israel, were the descendants of Jacob. However, since they were also the descendants of Abraham, it would be legitimate to refer to them both as Hebrews and Israelites.

A third term was used in relation to one of Jacob's sons, Judah (Genesis 29:35). Genesis 49 records the blessing Jacob conferred on his twelve sons, and :28 says,

All these are the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Each son was the head of a tribe. The descendants of Judah were part of the Tribe of Judah. The name "Jew" was derived from the name "Judah" and was first used in II Kings 16:6. A member of the Tribe of Judah was called a "Jew"; as a descendant of Jacob he was also an Israelite; as a descendant of Abraham he was also a Hebrew.

Part of the distinction between the names of Israel and Judah (or Israelite and Jew) resulted from the division of the kingdom. The books of I and II Samuel and the first eleven chapters of I Kings tell of the united kingdom that was ruled first by Saul, then David, then Solomon.

After Solomon's death, however, his son Rehoboam indicated to the distressed nation that he would be even harder on the people than his father had been.

For this reason, Ten Tribes, under the leadership of Jeroboam, separated from the Tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Following this division it was common to use the name "Israel" in referring to the Ten Northern Tribes and to use the name "Judah" in referring to the Two Southern Tribes, for the Tribe of Judah was much larger than the Tribe of Benjamin.

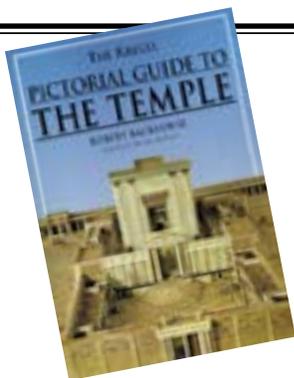
In 722 B.C. God allowed the kingdom of Assyria to take the Ten Northern Tribes captive because of their disobedience and idol worship (II Kings 17). Following their usual custom, the Assyrians deported most of the captured people and brought in others to mix with those who remained so they could not regain power.

And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof (II Kings 17:24).

The Samaritans of Christ's time were the products of the mixed Gentile and Jewish marriages which took place during the exile. Thus, in New Testament times, the full-blooded Jews avoided all dealings with the Samaritans, who were only part Jewish.

The question arises at this point, did the Ten Northern Tribes completely disappear from the scene, or are they mentioned elsewhere in the Scriptures at a later time?

A passage of Scripture frequently used by those who teach that the Ten Tribes are lost is II Kings 17:18-23, and they particularly emphasize :18 –



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Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight: there was none left but the Tribe of Judah only.

The words “out of His sight” are said to indicate that the Ten Northern Tribes disappeared into oblivion. The words “there was none left but the tribe of Judah only” are used to show that only the descendants of this tribe are in existence today.

But let’s examine the Scriptures more closely. The special place where God dealt with His chosen nation was the land of Palestine. The temple was there as the center of worship. When God’s people walked in obedience, they were allowed to live in the land; when they disobeyed, they were taken from the land. God’s presence in the land was viewed as being very special, even though the Old Testament Scriptures indicate that the people knew that God was omnipresent and thus was present outside the land as well.

Jonah was in the land when he received God’s call. After he heard the call, however, the Bible indicates that he tried to escape God’s presence by leaving the land (Jonah 1:3). To leave the land was, in a [relative] sense, to leave God’s presence, even though God is everywhere.

The phrase “out of His sight” in II Kings 17:18 means only that the Ten Tribes were driven from the land. That this is the evident meaning is indicated by the words “there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.” Left where? Left in the world? No. They were the only one left in the land of Palestine. That the Ten Tribes continued to exist after they were driven away from Palestine is clear from :23,

So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.

They had not ceased to exist; they were only relocated in Assyria.

It is also important to trace the history of the Southern Kingdom, Judah and Benjamin. God also allowed the Southern Kingdom to be taken captive because of its refusal to put Him in first place in their lives. The Babylonian Empire, under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, took these Two Tribes captive.

The Babylonians made their first siege of Jerusalem in 605 B.C.. and another in 597 B.C.. Finally, in 586 B.C., the Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians (II Kings 24:10-16, 25:1-17; II Chronicles 36:15-21).

For 70 years, the Southern Kingdom was in captivity in Babylon, and most of the descendants of Judah and Benjamin lived in Babylon during this time. At the end of the 70 years, after the Medes and Persians had conquered the Babylonians, the people of Judah and Benjamin were allowed to return to Jerusalem, first to rebuild the Temple and then to rebuild the walls of the city. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell of those who returned to Jerusalem, and the book of Esther tells of those who remained at Babylon.

If the Ten Northern Tribes completely disappeared during their Assyrian captivity, one would not expect to find people of these tribes mentioned in the remainder of the Scriptures which refer to the history of God’s chosen people.

It is maintained by those who believe in British-Israelism that the people who returned to rebuild the Temple and walls of Jerusalem were only those of the House of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried to Babylon. If this were the case, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which record the return of God’s people, should refer only to the Jews or Judah and not to the Israelites or Israel.

However, Ezra refers to God’s people as “Israelites” forty times and as “Jews” eight times. Nehemiah refers to God’s people as “Israelites” twenty-two times and as “Jews” eleven times. If “Jew” refers to a person of only the Tribe of Judah and never to all Israelites, then the return of the “Jews” from Babylon would not be considered a return of “all Israel.” Yet, in referring to the people who had returned, the words “all Israel” are used in Ezra 2:70; 6:17; 8:25, 35, 10:5; Nehemiah 7:73; 12:47. From this it is evident that the terms “Jew” and “Israel” were used interchangeably at this time.

The New Testament says that the Ten Tribes were not obliterated from the face of the earth. Anna the prophetess was said to be of the Tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36). The Apostle Paul did not consider the tribes to have disappeared. He told King Agrippa,

And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our Twelve Tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come (Acts 26:6-7).

The Apostle Peter addressed many of God's people as,

Strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (I Peter 1:1).

Similarly, James addressed his letter to

The Twelve Tribes which are scattered abroad (1:1).

If descendants of Ten of the Tribes no longer existed at the time, it would have been inaccurate for James to address his letter to *all* "Twelve Tribes."

The book of the Revelation also tells of the saving of 12,000 from each of the Twelve Tribes of Israel (Revelation 7:4-8). There is no indication that these people are different from the Twelve Tribes mentioned in the Old Testament.

All of the Twelve Tribes are now "lost" in the sense that there are no genealogical records to trace a given individual's background. But it is not proper to consider Two Tribes to be in existence today and the other Ten Tribes to be completely lost. Although God's chosen nation has been temporarily set aside, the nation will eventually turn to Him as its true Messiah "and so all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26).

All three terms – Hebrew, Israelite and Jew – were applied to the Apostle Paul, proving that they are interchangeable. Paul referred to himself as being "of the Tribe of Benjamin," yet he called himself "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5). Yet, elsewhere, Paul made these statements: "I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus," and "I am verily a man which am a Jew." Then he referred to himself as an Israelite: "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I" (Acts 21:39; 22:33; II Corinthians 11:22).

If the term "Jew" refers only to the House of Judah,

as the teachers of British-Israelism claim, then Christ was not the Messiah or King of the nation of Israel but only of the Tribe of Judah, for the Bible refers to Christ as "the King of the Jews" (Luke 23:3).

Yet the Scriptures indicate that Christ was the Messiah of all Israel. The disciples understood this to be true, for they asked before His ascension,

Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? (Acts 1:6).

Notice that they did not ask if He would restore the kingdom to Judah, but if He would restore it to "Israel."

That Christ was "the King of the Jews" and the Messiah of "Israel" reveals that the terms "Jew" and "Israel" were used interchangeably.

The sign on the cross said,

This is Jesus the King of the Jews (Matthew 27:37).

But as the chief priests, scribes and elders surrounding the cross mocked Him, they said,

If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross (:42).

This shows that they understood the titles "King of the Jews" and "King of Israel" to be interchangeable.

By the first century, sharp distinctions between the terms "Jew" and "Israel" were no longer made, as they are by the exponents of British-Israelism.

A basic fallacy which exists in British-Israelism is that it tries too hard to fit Great Britain and the United States into the pages of the Bible. As a result, any similarities between these countries and what the Bible says are often taken as a direct connection, even though no relationship of real substance exists.

For instance, Herbert W. Armstrong taught that the "isles" (islands) of the Bible refer to the British Isles. Yet there are many other islands in the world, such as the Philippine Islands and the West Indies, and

one might, by using the same logic, make fit into the Scriptures. The throne of David is also made equivalent to the throne of England. It must always be remembered that similar things are not necessarily identical. Thus, British-Israelism uses methods of interpretation which can lead into error. **BSN**

— *Presbyterian Journal*
Volume 37, Number 1 (May 3, 1978)

(edited)

Dr. Berry is a former professor of Bible and Greek at Grace University of Omaha. He served for many years as personal

assistant to Theodore H. Epp, founder of Back to the Bible. He holds degrees from Dallas Theological Seminary and Grace University.

NOTE: For more information on Anglo-Israelism see:

- [Anglo-Israelism: Refuse the Refuse](#), A.E. Knoch, see on the [order form](#) under “Knoch”;
- *Israel and the Supposed Lost Tribes*, Charles H. Welch, (Part 1, [Bible Student's Notebook #538](#); Part 2, [#539](#));
- *True Israel – Considering the Terms “Spiritual Israel” and “The Ten Lost Tribes,”* A.E. Knoch, [Bible Student's Notebook #544](#).

TOPICS:

Major: Anglo-Israelism; Lost Tribes
Minor: Hebrew; Israel; Jew; Judah

UNIVERSALISM (continued from page 7443)

biblical warrant for proposition (3) is stronger than that for propositions (1) and (2)? It is not enough, in other words, merely to cite the standard proof-texts in support of (3). For if (3) is true, then either (1) or (2) is false.

To provide a full biblical defense for a doctrine of everlasting punishment, therefore, one must show that the biblical warrant for (3) is stronger than that for (1) or stronger than that for (2) – a daunting task indeed! I know of no one who has even tried to build any such comparative case as that. So why do so many regard it as heretical to reject a doctrine of everlasting punishment, but not heretical to limit God's

love or to limit His power? Which view does more, in the end, to undermine the glory and the majesty of God? **BSN**

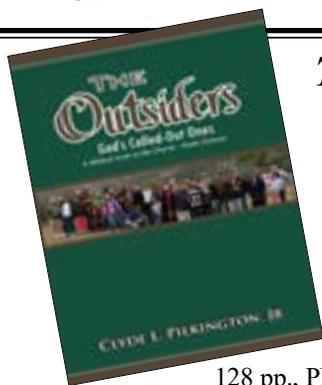
(edited)

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See also Talbott's article, *The Question of Hitler*, in [Bible Student's Notebook #163](#).

TOPICS:

Major: Arminianism; Calvinism; Universalism
Minor: Interpretation; Reconciliation; Redemption; Salvation; Sovereignty; Translations



The Outsiders: God's Called-Out Ones *A Biblical Look at the Church – God's Ecclesia*

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

In 1995, after sixteen years of being in the “pastorate” the author walked away. He left the “religious system” by resigning from the very “church” and “ministry” he had formed. In many ways this work is a testament to these actions. This testimony was thirty years in the making – the results of a spiritual journey that the author found to be common to other saints scattered throughout the world and across history. This is an opportunity to explain why some who love the Lord no longer “go to church.” It does not seek to persuade others to do something different, but rather to be simply who and what they already are “in Him.” This is an uncovering of the truth of the church, and an encouragement for the members of His

Body to enjoy the position and standing “in Christ” that they already possess, realizing that they are truly “complete in Him” (Colossians 2:10), that He alone is their Life (Colossians 3:4), and that His Life is full of freedom (Galatians 5:1).

The Outsiders was very encouraging. Thanks for your thoughts and study on the true Body of Christ and the lonely road we travel at times. – **MO**

I thank God for *The Outsiders*. I couldn't put it down. Read it all in one sitting. – **PA**

The Outsiders has something different about it. Upon finishing it an awareness has taken hold of my mind and spirit – a “knowing” that I have been afforded a special measure of His grace in just being allowed to be exposed to the truth contained within. – **KS**