



British Israelism

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Introduction

British-Israelists are defined by their belief that the lost tribes of Israel are identical with the white, Protestant peoples of Northern Europe. This belief is informed by several different strands of thought and incorporates elements of Protestant apocalypticism, British nationalism, New Age belief, and racial pseudo-science. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in Britain and abroad, hundreds of different British-Israelist movements were founded. At its peak, in the first half of the twentieth century, the largest British-Israelist organisation (the British Israel World Federation) claimed to have hundreds of thousands of members in the United Kingdom alone. The doctrines of British-Israelism during this period appealed to members of the aristocracy, the political class, the military, and even the royal family. The movement held property in Trafalgar Square and Buckingham Gate. In the later twentieth century, British-Israelism grew in popularity within the Loyalist community in Ulster. Up to the present day, the British-Israelist movement in the United Kingdom perseveres, with dwindling numbers. In the United States, British-Israelism became a central plank of the Christian Identity tradition. Within the American context, British-Israelism is usually associated with more virulent expressions of antisemitism. Many Christian Identity churches—like the Shepherd's Chapel, the Worldwide Church of God, and the Church of Jesus Christ Christian—along with many Christian Identity terrorist organisations—like the Phinehas Brotherhood and the Aryan Nations—espouse some form of British-Israelist belief. British-Israelism is essentially an apocalyptic movement. The foundational claims of British-Israelism centre around interpretations of biblical [prophecy](#) regarding the eschatological restoration of Israel. As such, British-Israelists interpret British history—as well as American, Russian, European, and Commonwealth histories—through an eschatological lens.

The Origins of the British-Israelist Movement

The origins of the British-Israelist theory are much contested. Some scholars identify the eighteenth-century Huguenot Jacques Abbadie (1654–1727) as the originator of the idea that the lost tribes of Israel could be found among the 'Northern Peoples.' Abbadie proposed this theory in a 1723 work entitled *The Triumph of Providence* (Quarles 2003). Others have identified the 'Paddington prophet,' Richard Brothers (1757–1824), as the progenitor of the idea. Brothers believed that 'hidden Israel' could be found within the population of Britain but stopped short of claiming that Britons were all Israelites. In 1795, in his *Revealed*

Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times, he announced that many inhabitants of the British Isles were, unbeknownst to them, 'Hebrews' who would (under his leadership) be restored to Jerusalem 'by the year 1798.' Brothers was committed to an asylum and remained an isolated figure for the remainder of his life (Madden 2010). Echoes of Brothers' ideas nevertheless continued to resonate in the writing and preaching of successive generations of [prophets](#) including Joanna Southcott (1750–1814), Zion Ward (1781–1837), and John Wroe (1782–1863) (Lockley 2013).

The first figure to articulate the British-Israelist doctrine in its modern iteration, however, was John Wilson (1799–1870). Wilson was a Scottish autodidact historian who, in the 1830s, gave a series of lectures on the Israelite genealogy of the people of Northern Europe. Wilson originated the claim that the people of Britain were specifically descended from the tribe of Ephraim. His lectures were collated in a book, which was published in 1840 under the title *Our Israelitish Origin* (Wilson 1840). In the same year, Wilson gave a lecture which was attended by a teenager named Edward Hine (1825–1891). Hine claimed that Wilson had 'lodged a thought in [his] mind' and from that day on he studied the biblical evidence for Britain's identification with Israel. Hine adopted a slightly different position from Wilson, claiming that the English-speaking peoples alone, rather than the people of Northern Europe collectively, were 'of Israel' (Hine 1879). He established the British-Israel Identity Corporation in 1880 with the intention of promoting this theory. The popularity of Hine's message led to the establishment of other, rival organisations. The most successful of these was established in 1879 by Edward Wheeler Bird (1823–1903). Wheeler Bird's organisation, the Metropolitan Anglo-Israel Association, published a newspaper entitled *The Banner of Israel*. *The Banner* would stay in print from 1877 to 1922, when it was replaced by the *National Message* as the principal organ of British-Israelism in the United Kingdom. The latter stayed in print until the mid-1970s (Cottrell-Boyce 2021).

Eventually, Hine's British-Israel Identity Corporation was marginalised by the success of the Metropolitan Anglo-Israel Association. Hine left England for America in 1884. Over the next two years, he gave numerous lectures on British-Israelism in cities and towns across the North Eastern United States and Canada. British-Israelism already had some roots in North America—due to the evangelizing efforts of a Toronto-based Methodist and Orangeman named Joseph Wild (1834–1908)—but this potential was cultivated by Edward Hine and his American sponsor, Charles Totten. Totten was a general, a veteran of the Apache wars, and a professor of military strategy at Yale. Totten and Hine's mission in the late 1880s won many disciples who themselves would go on to found British-Israelist movements in the United States (Barkun 1997). One of their most noted converts was Frank Sandford (1862–1948). Sandford was the founder of a millenarian community in Durham, Maine, called The Kingdom. In the late 1880s, he became convinced of the validity of British-Israelist doctrine. He shared these convictions with his followers, among them Joseph Allen (1847–1930) and Charles Fox Parham (1873–1929). Allen and Fox became the most powerful voices in the emergent Pentecostalist movement, on the West Coast of the United States, in the early decades of the twentieth century. They used their platforms to popularise a range of doctrines associated with British-Israelism (Barkun 1997).

Whilst the seeds of British-Israelist belief were being scattered across the United States, spanning the entire continent within two decades of Hine's arrival on her shores, other agents were helping to spread the message across the British imperial hemisphere. Colonial outposts of the British-Israelist tradition flourished in the early twentieth century. British-Israelist reading rooms were established in cities and towns from Johannesburg to Ottawa and from Tasmania to Dublin (Reisenauer 1999). British-Israelists were

elevated to the upper echelons of colonial government. William Massey (1856–1925) remains the second longest serving prime minister in the history of New Zealand. He was also an open and avowed British-Israelist (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). Sir Francis Newdegate, the Governor of Western Australia after whom the town of Newdegate is named, expressed his belief that the success of Britain's imperial project remained 'mysterious' only if the tenets of British-Israelism were false (Cottrell-Boyce 2021).

By the start of the twentieth century, therefore, the ideas formulated by John Wilson had reached across a significant portion of the globe. These ideas attracted many adherents who would go on to form their own churches and organisations.

The Theory of Britain's Israelitish Origins

Central to all British-Israelist belief is the claim that the so-called Anglo-Saxon peoples of Britain are descended from the people of Israel. In addition to this, British-Israelists break from the mainstream of Christian tradition by rejecting wholesale the doctrine of supersession. British-Israelists do not believe that the covenant made between God and Moses has ever been superseded, compromised, abrogated, or suspended. Indeed, they argue that the Mosaic covenant has been confirmed through a series of historical events in which God has shown his peculiar favour for the true people of Israel: Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

The counter-intuitive claim that the descendants of the inhabitants of an Ancient Near Eastern polity could be found in an archipelago on the shores of Northern Europe is explained by British-Israelists with reference to the mythology of the lost tribes of Israel. According to the Hebrew Bible, in the eighth century bce an Assyrian assault on the Northern Kingdom led to the destruction of the Kingdom and the dispersion of the northern tribes (2 Kings 17). [Prophetic](#) texts from the period following the conquest make oblique reference to a hoped-for eschatological event, during which the dispersed tribes will be gathered and restored to Israel (Isaiah 11). References to the lost tribes can also be found in the books of the apocrypha. Esdras envisions the people of the lost tribes, now exiled in the mythical region of Arzareth, returning to Zion in the messianic period (2 Esdras 13). This tradition, initiated around the first century in Palestine, continued to win assent amongst Jewish and early Christian communities. The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan contains the first reference to the river of Sambation, beyond which the land of Arzareth was fabled to be. The ninth-century traveller and philologist Eldad Ha-Dani claimed to have encountered the lost tribes in the land beyond the Kush (Ben-Dor Benite 2009). Subsequent chronicles and rabbinic texts referred to the lost tribes, with some Jews maintaining the association between a future restoration of the descendants of Jacob and the dawning of the messianic era. When these writings were translated and popularised by English Hebraists in the seventeenth century, Christian interest in the lost tribes mythology was renewed (Parfitt 2003). These eschatological themes, intrinsic to the lost tribes mythology, were rehearsed in the writings of the early British-Israelist theorists.

Exegesis of biblical texts provides much of the basis for British-Israelist belief. Edward Hine offered 'forty-seven' identifications which, he claimed, demonstrated beyond doubt that Britain's history was a fulfilment of biblical [prophecies](#) concerning the destiny of the people of Israel (Hine 1879). Just as Jeremiah 31 seemed to predict, the people of Israel had been scattered to 'the far isles.' Just as Isaiah 65 seemed to predict, Israel was 'bearing another name in exile.' As God had promised Jacob, Israel had become a 'company of nations' through her imperial conquests. In Numbers 33, God told the people of Israel that the

Canaanites would always be with them, as thorns in their sides and pricks in their eyes. This aspect of Israel's destiny was fulfilled in the relationship between Britain-Israel and the Canaanite peoples of Ireland (Hine 1879).

Speculative linguistic theory provides another perennial feature of British-Israelist literature. In tracing the origins of proper nouns with supposedly Israelitish origins, British-Israelists traced the ancient journey of the lost tribes of Israel from the Middle East, across Europe, to their ultimate destination in Britain. Conventional British-Israelist accounts of the journey taken by the Israelites from Assyria to Britain include the following details. The Israelites fled northwards to the Black Sea, settling in the region surrounding Sinope. In 600 bce they moved to the Carpathian region, which was identified with the country which the author of Esdras dubbed Arzareth. Some stayed in the Carpathians, where they gradually became known as the Scythians. This name was a derivation of the word Sacae—the name with which this group was referred to by Persians according to Herodotus. British-Israelist lore suggests that the word Sacae was itself derived from the name Isaac. Some of the Carpathian Israelites migrated up the Danube into Southern Germany in the period between 600 to 500 bce. Here, these people used a Greek version of their original name. While they had once been known as Ghomri—the Assyrian word for Israel—they now became known by the Greek name 'Kimmerioi.' They would later become known to English-speaking historians as Cimmerians. The Cimmerians settled in Central Europe in 500 bce. Around 200 bce, they were pushed westwards out of Germany by invading Scythians towards Holland and Britain. Around this time, therefore, the Scythians and the Cimmerians both reached North-Western Europe, and were reunited as the nations of Israel. Those who were descended from the tribe of Dan named themselves and their land after Dan: the *Danube*, the *Dardanelles*, and the tribe of *De Dannan* in Ireland. They retained their identification with Isaac even after the invasion of Britain, referring to themselves as Saxons. Those who retained their Cimmerian identity called their land Cymru (Cottrell-Boyce 2021).

British-Israelism and Protestantism

In the intervening period between the arrival of the Israelites and the arrival of Christianity on British shores, the Israelites of Britain all but forgot their Israelitish origins. However, they retained some elements of Israelitish ritual in their own religion: Druidism. Druidism was identified by British-Israelists as 'the faith of all our ancestors who arrived on these shores in pre-Christian time' (*National Message*, 185). In fact, some British-Israelists claim that 'Israelites and Druids all adored the same God and the rites of all were similar' (Moore 1861). Both the Druids and the patriarchs believed in the immortality of the soul and in the resurrection of the dead. Both 'worshipped under the oak' and both used a 'staff of office' (Moore 1861).

British-Israelists claim that the gospel reached British shores and was accepted there at a very early stage in the history of Christianity. This is not an entirely discrete contention. British-Israelist doctrine avers that God ordained his people Israel as his primary concern, and that he never rescinded this promise. Thus, at the advent of Christianity, the people of the twelve tribes were among the first to encounter the truth of the Gospels. British-Israelists often espouse belief in the conversion of Britain by Joseph of Arimathea and Saint Paul (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). This pseudo-historical claim was relatively widely disseminated in late nineteenth-century Britain through the writings of Bishop Thomas Burgess and Richard Williams Morgan (Burgess 1815; Morgan 1861). It helped to sustain the belief that Christianity in Britain pre-existed the

arrival of Roman missionaries. This belief is essential to the British-Israelist assertion that the aboriginal Christianity of Britain was a true, non-Papal Christianity. From a British-Israelist perspective, these supposed historical events serve to cast light on other aspects of scripture. Conventional British-Israelist exegesis takes the words of Jesus, who commissioned his disciples to deliver the gospel 'to the Lost Sheep of Israel,' to refer directly to the tribes which had been scattered to the North (Matthew 15). Because of their ancient attachment to the religion of Israel, Britons never fully took to the religion of Babylon—that is, Roman Christianity—when it arrived on British shores. At various points in the history of Christianity in Britain, many groups sought to throw off the yoke of Popery. The phenomenon of Lollardism and the advances of Protestantism in the early modern period are explained by British-Israelists as late expressions of Israelite repudiation of Babylon. For this reason, British-Israelists understand Protestant Christianity to be the true religion of the people of Israel.

British-Israelism and Racial Theory

British-Israelist belief, from its earliest inception, was informed by a theory of racial classification which is itself based on an amalgam of racist pseudoscience, phrenology, and biblical exegesis. John Wilson subscribed to the Noachide theory of racial difference. He believed that the descendants of Ham were 'the negro race' (Wilson 1840). They were characterised as having 'little forethought or power of planning,' of having 'gentleness and affection' and as requiring 'to be cared for like children' (Wilson 1840). The descendants of Japhet were identified with the Tartars. They were believed to have 'much breadth of face, and great width between the eyes' (Wilson 1840). They were 'restless and roving, and in many cases addicted to violence and war; impatient of restraint, and ambitious of a proud independence' (Wilson 1840). Meanwhile, the Shemitic people '[were] generally called the Caucasian race, occupy the central position; and chiefly inhabit Southern Asia' (Wilson 1840). For Wilson, the people of Israel, descendants of Shem, could now be found in the Northern European race, where they continued to exhibit all of the racial characteristics of God's chosen people:

They have evidently been given a principle of life—an onward tendency—which is not merely of use to themselves, but it, in general, gives an impetus to all with whom they come into contact; who must either yield themselves to its influence, or be broken down by it. Theirs is not merely a retentive capacity, but an inventive genius. (Wilson 1840)

British-Israelist Antisemitism

In each of the above claims, British-Israelists make explicit the contradistinction between Britain-Israel and the Jews. Mainstream Christian theologians, from the patristic era onwards, have contrasted 'carnal Israel,' represented by the Jewish people, with 'spiritual Israel,' represented by the Church (Ruether 1995). In British-Israelist literature, this distinction is made in genealogical terms as well as in ethical terms. Differing perspectives on the genealogical origins of the Jewish people are entertained within the British-Israelist milieu. Mainstream British-Israelist doctrine suggests that the Jewish people are partly identifiable with the tribe of Judah. However, the modern Jewish ethnic group is—according to many British-

Israelists—the product of miscegenation. The tribe of Judah is believed to have been contaminated by intermarriage with Edomites during the period of the Hasmonean dynasty (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). British-Israelists also, typically, subscribe to the Khazar hypothesis, which suggests that Ashkenazi Jews are Turkic rather than Israelitish in origin (Koestler 1976). Furthermore, British-Israelists interpret a passage from the third chapter of Isaiah—in which the Lord promises that the ‘faces’ of the people of Judah will testify to their sinfulness—as evidence that the physiognomic characteristics of the Judahite ethnic group were altered by divine intervention as punishment for their rejection of Christ. All of these theories are offered in support of the claim that Britain-Israel is more authentic a claimant of Israelite descent than Jewry.

In the American context, a more explicitly antisemitic account of the genealogy of the Jewish people is often preferred by British-Israelists. Many American British-Israelists adhere to the two-seedline theory of anthropogenesis. According to this theory, the children of Eve—Cain and Abel—had different fathers. While Abel was fathered by Adam, Cain was fathered by ‘the serpent.’ As such, the human race is divided into two distinct genealogical groups. The descendants of Abel are identifiable with white Europeans and—by extension—with true Israel. The descendants of Cain (and of Satan) are identifiable with non-white races, including the Jewish people. This position was, and is, upheld by prominent American British-Israelists including Wesley Swift and Dan Gayman (Barkun 1997).

British-Israelist Apocalypticism

British-Israelist doctrine is fundamentally eschatological in nature. British-Israelist theory is primarily focused on the task of elucidating a providential plan of history which will ultimately culminate in the *eschaton*. As such, exegesis of the apocalyptic texts of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament feature prominently in British-Israelist literature.

At the heart of most British-Israelist eschatological schemata is the tropological figure of Babylon. In the book of Daniel, Babylon represents imperial domination and—by extension—the erasure of Israel’s singular and authentic identity among the nations. In the book of Revelation, Babylon is portrayed as a whore, representing the city which ‘reigns over the kings of the earth’ (Revelation 17). In Protestant tradition, this figure is associated with Rome and with the Papacy.

Most British-Israelists subscribe to the belief that the biblical topos of Babylon is identifiable with the Roman Catholic Church. This premise has had significant implications for British-Israelist understanding of world events. British-Israelists believe that the destruction of Israel and her singular identity is the foremost ambition of Babylon. As such, British-Israelists tend to perceive the hand of the Papacy in events which appear to threaten Britain-Israel’s sovereignty. The Pope is perceived to have many ‘vehicles of his strategy’ including ‘the UN, the World Bank, The World Trade Organisation, NATO,’ who are ‘all working tirelessly to establish their One-World Government’ (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). In more recent times, especially, British-Israelists have come to understand the European Union as Babylonian in nature. The European Union threatens to undermine the sovereignty of Britain-Israel, just as Babylon undermined the sovereignty of biblical Israel. In the 1970s and 1980s, any number of ‘European’ innovations, from ‘decimal currency’ to ‘the Europeanization of road signs’ to ‘the adoption of the breathalyser,’ were described by British-Israelists as Babylonian (Cottrell-Boyce 2021).

British-Israelist apocalypticism also echoes premillennialist tradition in the belief that the Second Coming of Christ will be preceded by a great battle at Megiddo. British-Israelist interest in the [prophecies of Armageddon](#) were stirred, particularly, in 1917. In that year, the forces of the British army first occupied the city of Jerusalem, beginning the process which would lead to the establishment of British Mandatory Palestine. Many British-Israelists saw this as a portent of the imminence of the last battle. This expectation was disappointed, however, in 1947, when the United Nations passed Resolution 181 (II) requiring that Britain terminate their mandate in Palestine (Cottrell-Boyce 2021).

During the twentieth century, many British-Israelists subscribed to the view that the final assault on Jerusalem by the forces of Satan would be led by the Soviet Union. This view was shared by many premillennialists of the period. The basis for this belief can be found in writings of nineteenth-century premillennialists like John Cumming and Henry Cowles (Cumming 1855; Cowles 1870). They sought to demonstrate that Russia was fulfilling [prophecies](#) found in Ezekiel 38 concerning the nations of Gog and Magog. Gog and Magog were expected to launch an attack on the people of God at Jerusalem which would ultimately be repelled by divine intervention. This theory became more attractive to British-Israelists during the period of the Cold War. Many British-Israelists—along with other premillennialists—believed that the [prophecies](#) concerning Gog and Magog would be fulfilled in a nuclear standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). Indeed, some British-Israelists began to describe the Soviet Union as an instrument of divine justice, through which the almighty would destroy Babylon. Only after the destruction of Babylon and the establishment of worldwide, hegemonic Communism would Soviet Russia herself be destroyed by the hand of the Almighty. Others were less quietist in their attitude towards the Communist threat. General Sir Walter Walker (1912-2001) had been commander-in-chief of NATO forces in Northern Europe during the 1960s. In his later years, he became a prominent voice in the anti-Communist movement. He helped found the Civil Assistance organisation in 1974 with the express intention of violently disrupting trade union activity in Britain. He was later appointed a patron of the Western Goals Institute, an affiliate of the World Anti-Communist League. Throughout this period, Walker continued to write opinion pieces for *The National Message* and *Wake Up* magazine on the subject of the Russian threat. Walker was particularly concerned with the influence of Gog and Magog which he perceived in the activities of revolutionary socialist organisations on the island of Ireland (Cottrell-Boyce 2021).

British-Israelists depart from most premillennialists in their understanding of the ultimate destiny of the Jewish people. Particularly in the dispensationalist tradition, great emphasis is placed on the ultimate conversion of the Jewish people to Christianity as a precursor to the establishment of the millennial reign of Christ on earth. Since British-Israelists believe that the corporate people of Israel is not identical with the Jewish people, their narrative of these events is different. British-Israelists believe that the hearts of the people of Israel will be converted in the millennium. This number includes the British and European descendants of Israel but only includes that small minority of Jewish people who can legitimately claim ancestry in the line of Judah. Indeed, many British-Israelist texts predict that the majority of the Jewish people will side with the forces of Gog and Magog in the final confrontation between the people of God and their enemies. Other, more avowedly antisemitic, branches of the British-Israelist tradition go even further. In denying *any* connection between the Jews and the biblical polity of Israel, groups like the Aryan Nations anticipate that the Jewish people—as direct descendants of Satan—will be entirely destroyed in the battle of [Armageddon](#) (Quarles 2003).

British-Israelism in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth

By the time of John Wilson's death in 1870, his ideas had been disseminated across Britain and the Empire. The proceeding decades saw the foundation of numerous British-Israelist clubs, reading groups, and churches, and the publication of many more books, newspapers, and magazines. In 1919, an effort was made to co-ordinate these efforts and to form a united front. Over ninety British-Israelist organisations agreed to federate and to form the BIWF (the British Israel World Federation). An inaugural congress of the BIWF was held in London in July 1919 and it drew twenty-thousand attendees. The BIWF list of patrons for that year evidences the prominent role that the aristocracy played in its foundation and maintenance. The Marchioness Dowager of Headfort, Lady Folkestone, the Countess Dowager of Radnor, the Earl of Radnor, the Duke of Buccleuch, the Earl of Meath, and the Earl of Dysart all supported the establishment of the BIWF (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). They were joined at the inaugural congress by Princess Alice of Athlone, granddaughter of Queen Victoria. Princess Alice was patron-in-chief of the Federation until her death in 1981. She was the most enthusiastic British-Israelist in the royal family but was not the most prominent. In 1922, the future King George VI wrote to a friend expressing his personal commitment to the fundamental tenets of British-Israelism, stating:

I am sure that this British Israelite business is true. I have read a lot about it lately and everything no matter how large or small points to our being 'the Chosen Race.' (Cottrell-Boyce 2021)

At the time of its foundation, the BIWF took ownership of a new headquarters at Buckingham Gate. These handsome premises were located within a short walk of Buckingham Palace. In the early 1930s, the building was targeted by an antisemitic terrorist, Charles Ashton, who threw a firebomb through the front window (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). The British-Israelists also adopted the Orange Street chapel, which stands behind the National Gallery on Trafalgar Square, as an official place of worship. The chapel retains this status to the present day. In the 1920s, a British-Israel Bible College was established in the opulent surroundings of Harrow Weald Park mansion.

British-Israelism continued to flourish in the United Kingdom throughout the first half of the twentieth century. By 1950, the *National Message* boasted a circulation of a hundred thousand and maintained offices on Fleet Street, while the BIWF held weekly branch meetings at over three-hundred locations around the country (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). The movement was forced, however, to weather some schisms. Shortly after the end of the Second World War, a number of BIWF chapters broke away, forming the SPBI (the Society for the Proclamation that Britain is Israel). This organisation was led by a charismatic preacher named Charles McKelvey, who retained influence over the movement until his death in 1976 (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). It would be the first of many schisms and, by the 1980s, there were six different, competing British-Israelist organisations operating in the United Kingdom (Cottrell-Boyce 2021).

More and more, during the 1950s and 1960s, British-Israelist publications served as a forum for ultra-conservatism and British nationalism. Prominent figures in the movement, during this era, were often drawn from the ranks of the military. Lieutenant Commander Donald Macmillan served as president of the BIWF throughout this period, while other prominent members included Squadron Leader Leslie Pine (longstanding editor of *Burke's peerage*) and Lieutenant Commander Michael Hart (Cottrell-Boyce 2021).

During the period of decolonisation, British-Israelists became increasingly interested in the fortunes of British expatriate communities in the former colonies. In particular, the white population of South Africa and Rhodesia were identified by British-Israelists as the pre-eminent exemplars of their Israelite heritage. British-Israelists in the United Kingdom described the experience of British people living in Africa in terms which drew upon the imagery of the exilic literature of the Hebrew Bible (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). Their sympathies were reciprocated. British-Israelism continued to flourish in these regions, with members of Ian Smith's government, in the newly independent Republic of Rhodesia, declaring their commitment to British-Israelist doctrine (Cottrell-Boyce 2021).

At the same time, British-Israelists positioned themselves as staunch opponents of measures which allowed for the increase of Commonwealth immigration to the United Kingdom. They provided support for the anti-immigration campaigns spearheaded by Enoch Powell (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). British-Israelists, like G. H. Nicholson and Stephen Pulford, also served as unofficial chaplains to the emergent National Front (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). British-Israelists adopted a more biblically attuned mode of anti-immigrationism. They argued that immigration would lead to miscegenation, a sin which (they believed) had been the cardinal misdemeanour of antediluvian man, of the tribe of Judah, and of the Israelites who had been cut off by Ezra following the return from exile in Babylon (Cottrell-Boyce 2021).

The 1970s and 1980s saw significant decline in the attendance of British-Israelist meetings in England. As a result, the centre of British-Israelist life in the United Kingdom shifted from England to the troubled province of Ulster. British-Israelism continued to flourish in the north of Ireland during this period, and its success was sponsored by prominent political and community leaders. Robert Bradford MP was elected to parliament for South Belfast as a Vanguard Unionist in 1974 and he retained his seat until his assassination by the IRA in 1981. Bradford was a prominent British-Israelist who spoke regularly at BIWF rallies (Bradford 1984). Other prominent community leaders—including Clifford Smyth (the former secretary of the United Unionist Council) and Pastor Alan Campbell (leader of the Open Bible movement)—openly espoused British-Israelist beliefs and spoke at BIWF events (Cottrell-Boyce 2021). British-Israelism was also widespread within the leadership of the Loyal Orange Lodge at this time (Buckley 1989; Dudley Edwards 1999). The influence of British-Israelism within the Loyalist community remains to this day. Nelson McCausland, a leading figure in the BIWF in Northern Ireland, served as a DUP MLA until 2014, as Culture Minister in the Stormont Assembly from 2009 to 2011, and as a member of the Education Authority of Northern Ireland until his resignation in January 2021.

British-Israelism in the United States of America

The history of the British-Israelist doctrine and its attendant movements in the United States is very different to the history of British-Israelism in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. British-Israelism is mainly associated, in the American context, with the Christian Identity tradition. Beneath this umbrella are included the Lord's Covenant Church, the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America, the Aryan Nations, the Phineas Priesthood, and the Church of Jesus Christ Christian. Of these, the most long-lived is the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America, which was founded in 1928 by Howard Rand. The group flourished in the 1930s and 1940s with the sponsorship of William J. Cameron, the editor of the *Dearborn Independent* (Barkun 1997). Since that time, the most prominent standard-bearer of British-Israelism in the United States is the Aryan Nations organisation. Aryan Nations was established in the 1970s and its religious

beliefs are based on the teachings of Wesley Swift. Swift popularised the two-seedline theory amongst white supremacist groups in the United States and promoted British-Israelist ideas within the ranks of the Ku Klux Klan (Barkun 1997).

British-Israelist themes can also be found within the fold of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS). The founder of the church, Joseph Smith, claimed that the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel could be found on the American continent. These claims diverge from British-Israelist tradition insofar as Smith originally argued that the lost tribes were identifiable with the native American population. Some sects within the LDS Church have, in more recent times, promoted specifically British-Israelist doctrines. These include the Church of Israel, which was founded in 1972 by Pastor Dan Gayman. The church has been identified by the Anti-Defamation League as an extremist, antisemitic group (Barkun 1997).

Elements of British-Israelist belief can also be found in more mainstream Protestant denominations. Most prominent among these is the Worldwide Church of God. The WCG was founded in 1934 by Herbert Armstrong, a radio evangelist. Armstrong cautioned that the world would end in 1975 and exhorted his listeners to avoid materialism, to practice Sabbatarianism, and to avoid using conventional medicine. Armstrong's message was disseminated via his radio programme and via the publication of a free magazine entitled *Plain Truth*. In 1954, Armstrong published a book entitled *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*. Six million copies of the book were sold. The book expressed Armstrong's belief in the principles of British-Israelism. Armstrong was chiefly influenced in this area by the writings of John Allen. During the 1960s, membership of Armstrong's church expanded rapidly, and the church established nine hundred congregations across the United States. Armstrong's death in 1977 preceded an official doctrinal shift within the church—which was renamed Grace Communion International in 2009—and an official repudiation of British-Israelism (Quarles 2003).

Conclusion

British-Israelists rely on key apocalyptic texts in their premillennialist account of British, American, and Commonwealth history. Their simple contention that the 'carnal covenant' was never superseded by the 'spiritual covenant' provides the groundwork for a heterodox understanding of the nature of providence and the nature of the expected, imminent *eschaton*. British-Israelism is sometimes referred to as a form of 'jingoism with Biblical sanction' (Kidd 2006). It is important to note, however, that the premillennialist roots of British-Israelist belief allowed many British-Israelists—in Ulster, South Africa, and Britain itself—to weather the reversals of the twentieth century and to explain the foundering of the imperial project. The expectation that Britain-Israel would be revealed, at some future point, as God's chosen people provided (and continues to provide) British-Israelists with the resources to explain not only the apparent successes of the Israel nations but also their defeats at the hands of Babylon, Gog, and Magog. For this reason, British-Israelism is best understood as an apocalyptic movement rather than—as is sometimes suggested—a political movement with a scriptural gloss.

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