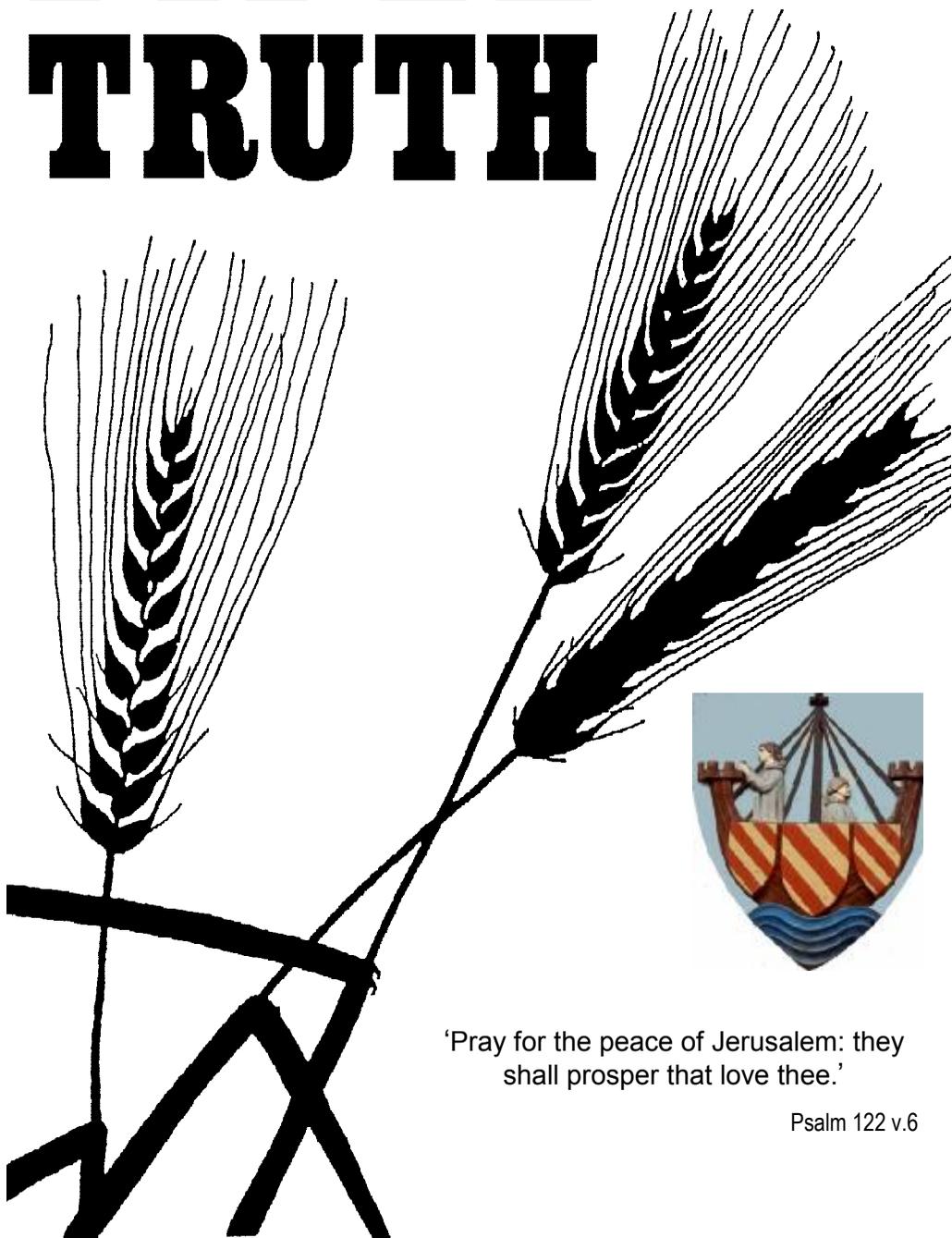


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'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.'

Psalms 122 v.6



A Great

End-Time

Mystery

by Pastor Jory Steven Brooks, CBIA

One of the foremost religious mysteries of our day is the question of 'Who is a Jew?'

Such a question really ought to be considered exceedingly surprising since there presently exists a Jewish national home, the Israeli state, which calls itself the homeland of the Jewish people. But who or what constitutes the Jewish people? Are they a race, a religion, a political state, a culture group, or something else? Surprisingly, this mystery has not been solved by the Jewish people themselves. A simple internet search finds at least twenty full-length books discussing the question of who is a Jew, most of them written, in fact, by Jewish authors.

Some of the book titles on this issue are quite instructive. Author Meryl Hyman's book is titled, *Who Is A Jew? Conversations, Not Conclusions*. Indeed, this subject has been an on going conversation with no conclusion in sight. Alys Knight's book is, *Who Is A Jew? A View Of Many*, but of course as the author implies, not nearly all are in agreement with her! Oscar Kraines' book title is perhaps close to the true situation: *The Impossible Dilemma: Who Is A Jew In The State Of Israel?* Yes, the great mystery of who is a Jew might well be defined as 'an impossible dilemma.' Much more sure of himself is Karl Lueger, who wrote a book titled, *I Decide Who Is A Jew!*

The mystery of who is a Jew is indeed not only a dilemma, but a divisive issue within Judaism itself, as Jacob Immanuel Schochet reveals in his book titled, *Who Is A Jew? Thirty Questions And Answers About This Controversial and Divisive Issue*. The Rabbi Dr Meyer Minkowich decided to attempt an answer from another angle: *The Issue Of Who Is A Jew In A Historical Legal Perspective*.

Why this great mystery? Most Christian pulpits are quite content to state that Jews are those who follow the Jewish religion. Yet many Jewish scholars disagree. This is an important issue because the Biblical covenant promises were given to Abraham and his descendants, the Hebrews or Israelites. What Jewish scholars know, and most Christians fail to realise, is that a large number of Jews today are descended from non-Hebrew peoples who through the centuries converted to Judaism.

The early Christian centuries have been called, 'the period of Jewish propaganda', which Jewish historian V. Aptowitzer described as seeing 'mass conversions to the faith of Israel, when the heathen population flocked to Judaism in great numbers' (HUCA 1: 299). The well-known third century theologian, Philo, famously said, 'They [the Jews] attract everybody and win them over easily, barbarians, Hellenists, inhabitants of the mainland, inhabitants of the islands, the population of the Orient and of the Occident, Europe, Asia, the entire inhabited world, from one end to the other' (DeVita Mos., II.4, Op.II.137). Later, in the ninth century, a large Turkic tribe called the Khazars (or Chazars) largely converted to the Jewish religion. Many modern Jewish customs are actually of Khazar origin rather than biblical, including the yarmulke or kepa (skull cap), Star of David, gefilte fish, and other items of today's Jewish culture, according to Jewish historian Arthur Koestler in his book, *The Thirteenth Tribe*.

Historians record that these non-Jewish proselytes were welcomed in large numbers and became an inseparable part of the Jewish people. The Jewish Midrash Kohen states, 'The proselytes who rest in the shadow of God become roots like Israel, which means, they become a part of Israel, just like those who are born Jews' (Jellinek's Beth Ha-Midrash, No. 21). This would indicate that being Jewish is not a matter of racial descent, but of religion. Yet studies show that the vast majority of Jews do not practice Orthodox Judaism or even attend Synagogue worship services. It is a great mystery of what to call them!

The Jewish people therefore are partly a political state (Israeli) and partly a religious system (Judaism), but not completely one or the other; in truth, a mystery people. Does Bible prophecy speak to this issue? Is there a people or system in end-time prophecy that is described as a political and religious mystery?

The word, 'mystery' is used in the Bible in Revelation chapters 17 and 18 in describing a mystifying political-religious system known as 'Mystery Babylon'.

'And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.'

Revelation ch.17 v.5

The *Inter-Varsity Bible Background Commentary* on this verse states, 'the Old Testament usually reserved the designation 'harlot' for God's faithless people (e.g. Leviticus ch.17 v.7; Isaiah ch.1 v.21; Jeremiah ch.3 vv 1-14; Ezekiel ch.16 vv 1-63, Ezekiel ch.23 vv 1-49; Hosea ch.4 v.15)'. The term, 'God's faithless people' of course refers to the Jewish people who anciently went 'whoring' after other gods and still reject Christ today.

Although space will not allow us to discourse on each of the above Scripture passages, this leading Bible commentary has perhaps given us the key to solving this great mystery. Suffice it to point out that in each verse the Jews are clearly labelled with the prophetic alias of 'harlot'.

It is highly unlikely that the meaning of the Biblical emblem of an harlot suddenly changed in the Book of Revelation. Prophetic symbols are in a sense much like heraldry; they are very specific graphical imagery or written pictograms representing a particular person or nation. Further, theologians agree that the symbolism in the Book of Revelation is not innovative, but points back to definite existing Old Testament prophecies.

During the Protestant Reformation it was the popular view that Mystery Babylon represented the Roman Papacy. At the time it made some sense since the Holy Roman Empire fits the nationhood aspect of Mystery Babylon, while the Jewish people had no such nation. However, the Holy Roman Empire has long ago passed away, and in this end of the age time-period of the prophecy we have instead seen the re-establishment of the Israeli state. Yet it is a great mystery that almost no one sees its true prophetic significance! In addition, the Rome-Babylon teaching was never a mystery since nearly all Protestants at one time taught and believed this.

Here then is the real mystery: Are the political-religious Jewish people instead in view in Revelation chs 17 and 18? If so, what is the connection between the Jews and Babylon? Of course, the Jews once dwelt in Babylon, having been removed from the land of Canaan by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 604-587 BC in a seventy-year exile. Yet to this day, the great Babylonian influence upon Judaism remains. One of the leading Jewish scholars of the twentieth century, Professor Julian Morgenstern, stated, 'the influence of Babylonian Jewish theory and practice in the development of post-exilic Judaism was far larger than is usually imagined' (HUCA ch.3 v.84). No doubt the author of the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John, was well aware of this important Babylonian connection, although it remains a mystery to most readers of Revelation today.

The clues are there before our eyes. But if the Jewish people spiritually represent Babylon, who then are God's covenant people today? The New Testament is clear that modern covenant Israel must be found in a believing Christian people. The Apostle Paul proclaimed,

'Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham'.

Galatians ch.3 vv 6-7

Similarly, Christ told his unbelieving Jewish hearers,

'Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof'.

Matthew ch.21 v.43
