

The Zionist claim to the land of Palestine is rooted in the claim that Jews were forcibly expelled from their lands and are therefore entitled to return to them. Since Zionism was originally a secular, socialist utopian ideology it was only after 1967 that the element of 'biblical promise' element gained traction. The indigenous Palestinians, affected by events of the last 100 years, have no right of return, whereas any Jew anywhere in the world is granted a 'right of return' based on events claimed to have happened 2000 years ago.

Even were the claims of a 2000 year exile true would that justify privileging the rights of one group over another? Many of us find that position immoral. But the claim is not true: what are the facts?

History and the Bible agree on the exile of the northern kingdom of Samara-Palestina (Israel) in 722 BC and the exiles of the southern kingdom, Judah, beginning in 597 BC. and culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 585 BC. However, a careful reading of both history and the Bible demonstrates that none of these (four) exiles was total. For the exile of Judah the text is explicit: it was the Princes, priests and soldiers who are taken away 2 Kings 24:14-17. The majority, the 85-90% of servants, slaves and tenants were left to look after the land. A few from the 'middle-class' - presumably the bottom of the top 10+% - were promoted to leadership, for example Mattaniah, in the reference above, and Gedaliah, 2 Kings 25:22. The figures are actually given in Jeremiah, a fairly precise four thousand six hundred persons. Even allowing for substantial deaths in battle or through siege and famine the number exiled can be barely 1-2% of the total population.

It has been assumed that the exchange of population from the northern kingdom was total (2 Kings 17:6, 18, 23-41), but this must also be questioned on historical and biblical, (not to mention logistical) grounds. Sargon II, conqueror of *Sa-me-ri-na* (Samaria-Israel) in 722 BC claims to have taken captive 27,290 (or 27,270 on a different stele), which may have been the equivalent of the surviving population of the city of Samaria, but can hardly have been more than 10% of the whole, (ANET anthology. 2011. p.266). In other words the reality of exile applied only to the ruling classes and their protectors. Further evidence that substantial elements of the northern kingdom remained can be found biblically in an invitation, some 60 years later, from Hezekiah to attend a Passover. 2 Chronicles 30 records that he invited the Israelites, including Ephraim and Manasseh. Hezekiah's decree went from 'Beer-Sheba to Dan' ('all Israel', but usually in reverse order), *'through the country of Ephraim...'* and some from Ephraim, Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Issachar, humbled themselves and came. Since Judah is understood, and included Benjamin as well as the Levites, representatives of eight of the twelve tribes were present.

Moreover the biblical record is clear (Ezra-Nehemiah), that the exile was ended in 538 BC. Thereafter, Jews could choose to return to Palestine/Judea or remain in the lands where they were settled.

When confronted with such evidence Zionists shift position and refer to an exile in 70 AD following the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Rather than there being any evidence for such an exile, subsequent events demonstrate the presence in Palestine of large numbers, almost certainly a majority, of Jewish people. We know that Jewish Christians refused to participate in the war, heeding Jesus' warning, getting out of the way and returning when peace was established. The most substantial evidence of presence is of course the frequent rumblings of rebellion in the region culminating in the second Jewish War, the Bar-Kokhba rebellion of AD 132-135.

To which Zionist's respond, well that's when the Jews were exiled. This kind of 'movable history" does no credit to their case. And once again they are wrong. The fact of Hadrian's Edict banning Jews from being within 6 miles of Jerusalem on pain of death shows that Jews were present, and in numbers, in Judaea/Syria-Palestina. Judah haNasi, Judah the Prince, (135-219 AD) was born & lived in Judah & the Galilee. The subsequent claim of expulsion by Islam is also untenable. Jewish communities initially cooperated with Mohammed and subsequently, as 'people of the book', enjoyed protected status. It is probable that many Jews converted to Islam for pragmatic reasons, as did many Christians, but there is no evidence of forced expulsion.

The exiles of 722 and 585 BC were real, and the fact that they were of only a small proportion doesn't make them less significant. The release from exile by the declaration of Cyrus, repeated subsequently by Darius, ended the physical exile, but the spiritual exile was not ended. That, too, became a matter of choice when their Messiah came. Were the ancestors of present-day Jews ever there in Palestine? That is a different, and quite complex, question.