A. S. Geyser: Israel in the fourth gospel.

ABSTRACT
Shorn of its pro- and epilogue, the fourth gospel starts with the confession, “You are the King of Israel” and ends with the indictment, Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum, and half-way between Cana and Calvary stands the Jerusalem crowd to acclaim Jesus “King of Israel”. So much the more remarkable is the almost complete absence of “kingdom” in this gospel and, barring the above, of “Israel”. By contrast, “the Jews” hardly mentioned in the synoptics, abound here and almost invariably in a pejorative context. The traditional “Jew” for Ἰουδαῖος, should read “Judeans” in the geographical sense of the word. The gospel is not anti-Jewish, it is anti-Judean, being against the inhabitants of Judea as represented by their religious leaders. John, next to Revelation, is the most Jewish book in the New Testament. It reaches out to the remnants of the lost tribes in the persons of those marginal Jews, the Samaritans, the Galileans and the diaspora Jews, rejected, or at best, tolerated by the “pure” Judean Jews. It proclaimed to these that with Jesus’ coming had started the ingathering of the tribes into the restored kingdom of David as promised by the prophets since Moses.

In previous papers I have tried to show how from I Enoch and Daniel down to Revelation and 4 Ezra as apocalyptic literature fanned the expectation of the restoration of the twelve tribe kingdom of David. With a slight change to Käsemann’s famous dictum, one can say that apocalypticism was the mother of all the New Testament, or at least most of it. James (1:1), Peter (1:1), Matthew (e.g. 10:1-8; 19:28), Luke (e.g. 22:29-30; Ac. 1:6-8) and Paul in his missionary zeal (Rm. 11:1-27) and in his defences before the Sanhedrin, Felix, Festus and Agrippa, and the Jewish community leaders in Rome (Ac. 23:6; 24:15-21; 26:6-8; 28:20), all reveal this expectation of the restored kingdom of Israel’s tribes.

Would it be possible to trace it in the fourth gospel as well? Could it have survived this evangelist’s enmity towards the Jews? Most of his seventy references to them are derogatory: They, the Jews were forever planning Jesus’ downfall and ultimately succeeded in bringing about his death. Apart from this consideration the literary quality of the text discourages such a quest. If it was there originally, how much of the expectation still survives the numerous aporiae, dislocations, literary stratification and redactional mixing of the sources? An instructive overview of these problems was prepared by Schnackenburg (1968:19-43). And then the formidable and still increasing volume of published and spoken material on the subject of this gospel! If everything said and written about John were to be edited, the world, I think, would have difficulty to contain it all.

I have only been emboldened to embark on this effort by the consideration that where there is talk of kingship, there must have been kingdom. Shorn of its pro- and epilogue which were only added, according to the experts, by the final redactor(s), this gospel begins and ends with a kingdom statement: the confession by a guileless Israelite, “You are the King of Israel” and Pilate’s titulus on the cross, IESUS NAZARENUS REX IUDAEORUM. Just about half-way, this course from Cana to Calvary is interrupted by a further testimony to the kingdom: the Jerusalem crowd’s welcoming hosanna, “Blessed is
he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel." (1:40; 19:19; 12:13, 15). Furthermore, after the multiplication of the loaves and the fish, Transjordanian and Galilean pilgrims wanted to make him king, forcibly if need be (6:15). Something of this kingship of Christ should be seen in the Baptist's explanation of his activity, "that he might be revealed to Israel" (1:31). His reference to Jesus as "Lamb of God" is, according to Dodd (1954:236-8) "virtually equivalent to ὁ βασιλεύς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ," and the title relates to his rule, not his sacrifice. Barker (1970: 44-6), on the strength of I Enoch 90, reads in Caiaphas's advice a caustic reminder of the Galilean expectation of a Messiah ben-Joseph who, it was taught, would die in battle and would lead the ten Northern tribes back from the dispersion (cf. also Mowinckel 1956: 290).

With all these pointers towards its expected coming it is remarkable that the actual expression, "kingdom of God", hardly figures in the fourth gospel. It appears only once, in the course of Nicodemus's hush-hush interview with Jesus (3:3,5). Kingdom parables, kingdom miracles and kingdom promises, typical of the synoptics, are glaringly absent here. Concerning his kingdom Jesus tells Pilate that it does not belong to this world (18:36). Perhaps the political scene prevalent at the time of the final redaction (it coincided quite probably with the rule of Domitian) was responsible for this caution or even suppression. The "twelve", an integral part of the synoptic kingdom teaching, had also receded into the background by this time. They were already bowing out during Paul's term.

Their absence from the fourth gospel does not detract from its expectation of the kingdom. Together with the twelve, Peter their "first" in the synoptic tradition, moves to a second place. He was not the first to be called by Jesus, and from the (implied) institution of the eucharist to the final resurrection appearance he is superceded by the beloved disciple. Perhaps he and the twelve, the sons of Zebedee excepted, left Jerusalem at a too early stage to have witnessed as much as the beloved disciple had (cf. Ac. 12:17).

By contrast, the "Jews", hardly present in the synoptics, flood the Johannine account. They have taken over all the disputes and scheming against Jesus which the synoptists ascribed to the Sadducees, Pharisees and scribes. John calls them on to the scene some seventy times, almost five times as often as the synoptics combined, and just as often as Acts. They play their rôle almost invariably in pejorative contexts. They are the enemies of Jesus, seeking his downfall, and are ultimately responsible for his death. They are not children of Abraham, but of Satan.

Lowe (1976:101-30) made a penetrating historical and semantic analysis of the term, "the Jews". Permit me to borrow from his work some of the most pertinent conclusions. Its predominant use in the fourth gospel intends inhabitants of Judea proper as distinct from Samaria and the Galilee. This meaning of the word dates from 2 Kings 16:6 to distinguish men of the Samaritan kingdom from those of Judea. Matthew 2:21 preserved the distinction, and so does Flavius Josephus. The only comparable material in the New Testament, the synoptic gospels, use Ἰουδαῖος in the same geographical sense: they are the inhabitants of Ἰουδαία. Even Pilate's titulus on the cross, as a legal document, to respect the boundaries of his jurisdiction, and he meant what he had written: Jesus the Nazarene, king of the Judeans.

Sometimes John narrows the term down to the religious leaders in Jerusalem: the Sanhedrin and its minions, which the synoptists detail by their respective affiliations and functions. An exception is Luke 7:3, which is understandable in view of the fact that Luke was a gentile. Even Paul in 1 Thessalonians 12:14-16 means Judeans and not Jews. The
scrolls from the Judean desert support Lowe’s conclusion. They never use the word ἡγεῖθαι. They call both the land and its people ἡγεῖθαι just as John the Baptist did, as far as one can determine. Jesus seems to have followed John’s example and uses ἡγεῖθαι only once, and then it was not spontaneously but prompted by the Samaritan woman’s question, “How come you, a ἱεροτάξος ask me, a σαμαριτής, to give you to drink?” Jesus does not deny that he is a Judean for two reasons: firstly, he wanted to retain the distinction to focus on Genesis 49:10, accepted by Jews and Samaritans alike, that “the scepter shall not depart from Juda . . .”, a passage which he explains to mean that Judea will supply the leader who will free the people for the kingdom; his second motive was to accept that land as his fatherland. There was the house of his father which he cleansed, according to John, not because it was abused for trade, but because “zeal for his Father’s house consumed him” (2:16, 17). Strictly speaking he was a Judean. John knows of the birth at Bethlehem in Judea (7:2), and chapter 4:43-4 also calls the South his πατρίς, for when heading for Galilee via Samaria he did so because a prophet is not honoured in his own fatherland, which here, other than in the synoptic gospels, means Judea.

Nevertheless, one wonders why these Judeans figure so profusely in this gospel. Perhaps the answer is to be sought in the personal history of the beloved disciple. He was, of course, a Judean. He knows Jerusalem in detail as Brown (1978:XLII) notices. He identifies place names correctly, knows the peculiarities of local rituals, and is familiar with the household of the High Priest. Furthermore, not being one of the twelve, nor a Galilean, he escaped the Sanhedrin’s rude repressions and persecutions: he witnessed all or most of the measures the Jerusalem hierarchy, the Judeans par excellence, took against the church. His reproachful attitude towards the ἱεροτάξον reflects his personal observations of the Jerusalem scene, and the experiences of his community, over an exceptionally long lifetime: from the time the Lord Jesus went in and out among them, beginning from the baptism of John and continuing, quite probably, at least up to the martyrdom of James, the Lord’s brother in 62 C.E. Of the four evangelists he says most about the Judeans, because he knew most about them.

Anti-Judean the fourth Gospel is, but not anti-Jewish. Lightfoot (1893:133) almost a century ago stated that this gospel was the most Jewish book in the New Testament, except perhaps the Apocalypse. More than any other it qualifies for the title εὐαγγελίων τῆς περιτομῆς, the proclamation of which the apostolic conference in Jerusalem in about 48 C.E. reserved for Peter, James and John (Gl. 2:7-9). It reveals a remarkable tenderness for marginal Jews: diaspora Jews, Galileans and Samaritans. It is also in this respect that John proves to be one more New Testament expression of the apocalyptic expectation of the ingathering of the tribes in the dispersion, and the restoration of the kingdom of David or, for short, the kingdom.

I will substantiate this statement beginning with the Samaritans who, prima facie, hold out the least promise. My point of departure is Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman and her townsfolk at Sychar. They were, strictly speaking, half-Jews, descendants of the remnants of the Northern tribes which the Assyrians left behind in 722 B.C.E., and the five Assyrian and Babilonian tribes transplanted into the cities of Samaria shortly afterwards. Instructed, on the king’s orders, by a Samaritan priest from the exiles, these colonists adopted Jahwism while continuing their native idolatry. Apparently the cult of the Cuthian god Nergal was particularly obnoxious, for the Mishna often refers to the Samaritans as Cuthians (2 Ki. 17:24-41; jYeb. VIII, 8b; Sanh. 90b; cf. also Strack &
Billerbeck 1924:524-5). The Samaritans, immediately after the return of Juda and Benjamin, tried to identify themselves with the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem, but their offer was refused (Ezra 4:1ff.). Apparently they persisted in their efforts to be accepted as Jews, for Flavius Josephus writes that when it suited them the Samaritans claimed to be Hebrews and related to the Jews by virtue of their descent from Ephraim and Manasseh (Ant. IX. 219; XI. 340-5). They could, and probably did, claim religious affinity to the Jews on the basis of Deuteronomy 27:4, Moses' instruction to build an altar on Mount Gerizim and to inscribe Torah on its stones.

The Samaritan woman from Sychar clearly regarded her people as related to the Judeans via Jacob, their common ancestor (4:12), and Jesus did not dispute the claim. The fourth gospel emphasizes that he ignored the social barriers separating them by travelling through their land, drinking water from the woman's vessel and sending his disciples to buy food from a nearby Samaritan shop. Luke, also remarkably sympathetic towards Samaritans, contributes two further proofs of disregard for Judean foibles against the Samaritans: the healing of a Samaritan leper and the parable of the good Samaritan (17:18; 10:33). Tension and enmity between Jews and Samaritans are well attested in Jesus’ day, particularly between Samaritans and Judeans. There was the ugly scene during the term of office of Coponius (6-9 C.E.) when Samaritans defiled the temple by throwing human bones into it, and Sirach (50:25-6) states, “Two nations I detest, and the third is not even a nation: the inhabitants of Mount Seir (the mountain of Samaria), the Philistines, and the stupid folk who live at Schechem.” Apparently it was a serious insult for a Judean to be called a Samaritan (cf. 8:48). Jesus’ own circle did not escape from this prejudice against Samaritans. While appreciating the gratitude of the Samaritan leper, he still calls him an ἄνθρωπος ἃνοικτόν (Lk. 17:18), and two of his inner circle, the Sons of Thunder, wanted to call lightning from heaven to strike a Samaritan village for refusing them hospitality (Lk. 9:52-4). Jesus had to rebuke them. His attitude was quite the opposite. He foresees a time, and soon, when they will worship together again, this time in spirit and truth.

According to 4:25 the Samaritan woman sets her hope on Messiah to explain the impossible statement Jesus had just made. The Samaritan version of Messiah is Ta'eb or Taheb. Material on this figure is scarce. He will be a priest-king who will restore the true doctrine (Schürer 1907:608). The origin of the title is uncertain. The consensus is that it derives from izona which is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew צִּיּוֹן, and must mean, “he who returns, or brings back”. Schürer suggested it means that he would bring back the truth, or the true doctrine. Jeremias (1964:90 n 6) thinks he will restore the cult on Gerizim. He finds support in Joseph’s story of the man who in the last year of Pilate’s office invited people to join him in a climb to the top of Mount Gerizim where, he promised, he would show them the sacred vessels which Moses had buried there (Jos. Ant. 18.4.1). Those who assembled carried arms, most probably because they were led to believe that this man was the expected Taheb, the one who will return the vessels. The Samaritans moulded their image of Taheb on Deuteronomy 18:15-18, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like Moses. Him you must obey.” Taheb will therefore be a Moses redivivus (cf. Meeks 1967:250; Nicol 1972:61).

Of Moses’ many mighty deeds the greatest was that he brought the twelve tribes back from the Egyptian captivity. Should it not have belonged to the task of Taheb, the Moses redivivus, to bring back the tribes from the Assyrian captivity? The yearning for the
restoration of the twelve tribe kingdom of David seems to have been as live in Samaria as it was in Judea, the Galilee and in the diaspora.

From the conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-30, it becomes clear that Jesus drew no distinction between Judeans and Samaritans, but a problem arises from the next pericope, 4:31-8: Jesus' command to his disciples to harvest this ripe Samaritan crop forthwith. They will reap where others had sown. Who the sowers were, whether the disciples of John the Baptist or the Hellenists (cf. Cullmann 1976:46ff.), is not under discussion in this paper, but very much so is how to reconcile the Samaritan mission command with the explicit exclusion of the Samaritans in Matthew 10:5. A solution would be to find either the one or the other spurious (cf. Bailey 1963:106). True, Paul does not mention the Samaritans in his retrospect of his work amongst the gentiles either (Rm. 15:19), for the simple reason that from the beginning the primitive church under the twelve and then under James regarded the Samaritans as part of "all Israel", and so did Paul and Barnabas who, loyal to the Jerusalem agreement, did not go to the "circumcision", and therefore not to the Jews in the diaspora nor to the Samaritans. However, on their way to the Jerusalem conference, they did stop over in Samaria in order to tell the Samaritans, as they did in Jerusalem, of their successes amongst the gentiles (Ac. 15:3). The church inherited this sympathetic attitude towards the Samaritans from Jesus who healed a Samaritan leper, held up the good Samaritan to them as an example of kinship to super pure Levites and Aaronites, and accepted without demur to be called a Samaritan, the greatest insult that could be hurled at a Judean (Jh. 8:48). These and other examples, especially from John and Luke, demonstrating Jesus' consistently favourable attitude towards Samaritans, make the contradictory Matthew 10:5 stand out even more. The solution to the problem, it seems must be sought in this text itself, and notably in the word μὴ ἐγγυτερίαν, in verse 6. In this context it can simply not express a prohibition or a reserve; it sounds synonymous to the πρῶτον of Matthew 5:24, and intends a softening of the stark prohibition of "do not go to the Samaritans . . ." to a sequence in preference, a preference for the Jew first.

This preference for the Jew is expressed in the conversation with the Samaritan woman, "salvation is from the Judeans", and by Paul with the thrice repeated, "the Jew first" (Rm. 1:16; 2:9, 10). The post-Easter missionary command observes the same sequence of preference, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all of Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." That order of preference is all that Matthew 10:5 and 6, implies.

The Samaritans belonged to the circumcision. Jesus regarded them and the Galileans and the diaspora Jews as part of the eschatological Israel, and of his messianic ingathering task. They are the other sheep, "not of this kraal". Bultmann (1971:365ff.) traces the image of the shepherd and the flock before and since the exile, and determines that the fold is a new addition to the image. Jesus introduced it, I think, to cover the factual condition of the objects of his messianic ingathering task: They were sharply divided into different kraals: "pure" Judeans, Galileans, Samaritans and diaspora Jews. History and geography caused these divisions. They belonged to different kraals, and the task of Messiah is to bring them back from division and dispersion to form one flock under one shepherd, when they will all be each other's πληγείων.

Jesus borrowed this idea of πληγείων straight from Leviticus 19:11-18 which enjoins, "You must love your neighbour as yourself." The word expresses membership of the same people, not just neighbour or fellowman, but next of kin. The motif of ingathering of the
fragmented runs through the story of the multiplication as well. Brown (1978:236f.) rightly remarks that this is the only miracle reported by all four gospels. They all mention the twelve baskets of left-overs, but only John 6:12 adds the precision to the command to collect the left-overs, “that nothing may be lost”. The ingathering will brook no negligence. The same thoroughness is expressed in the highpriestly prayer (17:12), and in Paul’s letter to the Romans (11:26), that “all Israel” will be saved, in the parable of the lost sheep (Mt. 18:12), and in Jesus’ request in Gethsemane (18:8, 9), “... let these men go”. This was spoken to fulfil the words, “of those thou gavest me I lost not one”.

Strack & Billerbeck (1924:481) on John 6:31 relates the scene of the multiplication to the expectation that Messiah would order manna from heaven to feed his people, (cf. also Mowinckel 1956:320). The motley crowd of pilgrims, consisting of Galileans and “Greeks” from the cities across the Jordan, felt the undercurrent of messianic ingathering, and wanted to make him king there and then, per force if need be (6:15).

Next to Samaritans and Galileans, the fourth gospel shows concern for the “Greeks”. These “Greeks” of 7:35 and 12:20 are not Greeks proper, for they are qualified as “of the diaspora”. There was no such thing as a Greek “diaspora”, for since Alexander all the world was Greek. The taunt of the Judeans was sarcastic commentary on the belief that Messiah would bring back the lost tribes from the diaspora. In the same way the Greeks of 12:20 were not Greeks proper, but Greek-speaking Jews from the Greek-speaking diaspora, for they are qualified as pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for Pesach (pace Cullmann 1951:187).

It is also noteworthy that next to John 7:35 only James 1:1 and 1 Peter 1:1 employ the word “diaspora”, and both these manifestly in the meaning of Greek-speaking Jews. Perhaps it is incidental, but to these three, John, James and Peter: the Jerusalem conference entrusted the gospel of the circumcision (Gal. 2:7-9).

Like the Galileans and the Samaritans these Jews from the dispersion were held in greater or lesser contempt by the Judeans, even by the church Judeans (cf. Ac. 6:1). The first razzia in Jerusalem against Jesus believers focussed on “the Greeks”. On hearing that “Greeks” were asking for an interview with him, Jesus reacted dramatically, and understandably so: He appreciated that the eschatological return from the diaspora as foretold by the prophets had started, and with it the eschatological woes in which he will lose his life. The Lamb of God was now to take upon him the sin of the world. Gentiles these Greeks were certainly not. Robinson (1960:118f.), in his article on the destination and purpose of St. John’s gospel, proves by numerous references that in contrast with the synoptic gospels, the fourth gospel was totally unconcerned about gentiles: it has no magi from the East, no gentle centurion held up as an example of faith to Israel, no healings of gentiles whatsoever and no command to proclaim the gospel to anybody outside the circumcision. In fact, the only gentile it mentions is Pilate, and he asks with contempt, “Am I a Jew?”

To return now to the title of this paper: “Israel” appears in John’s gospel only four times. That is scant mention compared with the seventy times of the “Jews”. Few as are these occasions, they are nevertheless most significant, inasmuch as they always appear in a “kingdom” and restoration context. Except for the conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus on the other hand never uses Ἰουδαῖος (cf. also Pancaro 1970:123). Jesus and Nathanael both speak in the framework of Israel’s eschatological hope when they employ the words, “an Israelite in whom there is no guile,” and “Son of God, King of
Israel" (1:47, 49). Jesus addresses Nicodemus who came to see him about the kingdom, as "a teacher of Israel", that is, as one who should know how to qualify for entry into the kingdom. John interprets the High Priest's advice as a prophecy that Christ would die not only for the nation, as foretold by the prophets, but also, "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (11:52). "Children of God" is a regular synonym for Israel and "scattered abroad" for diaspora Jews. The crowd's hosanna for the King of Israel is so clearly kingdom language that it needs no comment. John the Baptist explains that he baptizes so that Jesus would be revealed to Israel (1:31), with the clear implication, as King of Israel. Again, he points Jesus out to his disciples as "the Lamb of God who will bear the sins of the world" (1:36). His answer to Pilate, "my kingship is not of this world", is another way of saying, "mine is the kingdom of Israel".

This use of Israel in John is not exceptional, however significant. The same usage can be observed in Matthew and Luke. I will draw attention to only a few examples from each. Jesus says on two occasions that he came only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel (10:6; 15:24); He promises his disciples that they will govern the twelve tribes of Israel (19:28). The infancy story of Luke is steeped in kingdom expectation and kingdom language. Luke 1:68 blesses the Lord for he has redeemed Israel, and John the Baptist remains in the desert until his manifestation to Israel; the travellers to Emmaus believed that he would redeem Israel, and after the resurrection his disciples ask whether he was now going to establish the kingdom for Israel. One could trace the same use throughout the New Testament, but it is worthwhile to point out that the same use of "Israel" can also be established in the pseudepigrapha and at Qumran. Qumran never used the word ד"לט, but ד"נ, most often, particularly in the War Scroll and in the Temple Scroll. Israel appears in the pseudepigrapha always in a messianic context.

For John Israel is the community of the Christ believing Jews assembled from all parts of a world-wide dispersion into the one everlasting kingdom of God.

WORKS CONSULTED

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