

The Dispersion

by Wayne Goff

“The Dispersion” refers to those Jewish believers who were scattered throughout the world. We read of them in **John 7:35**, **James 1:1** “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,” and **1 Peter 1:1**.

Causes

There are a number of reasons why Jews found themselves across the globe. An obvious one from studying the Old Testament is that they were scattered due to invasion and defeat by foreign nations like Assyria (722 B.C.) and Babylon (605, 597, 586 B.C.). After King Cyrus of Persia gave the royal edict permitting such peoples to return to their homeland, many like Ezra, Nehemiah and others did, but not everyone. Therefore you see Jews in foreign lands who returned to Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, **Acts 2:9-11**.

Wars and famine in Palestine often caused Jews to look for more favorable dwellings elsewhere. Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt due to such conditions, even though it was part of God’s plan for the upcoming nation of Israel, **Genesis 46:2-7**.

Some found living conditions much more favorable in foreign lands and they settled and made their home there. We see a large contingency of Jews throughout Persia in the book of Esther.

In the time of Jeremiah the prophet, there were Jews in Egypt at Tahpanhes, Migdol, Memphis, and in the land of Pathros (**Jeremiah 42:14; 43:7; 44:1**).

The Seleucid kings of Syria encouraged Jewish colonies in the cities of Asia Minor as well (Machen, *The New Testament: An Introduction to Its Literature and History*, p. 28).

Commerce, such as tent making, led Jews like Aquila and Priscilla (**Acts 18:2**) to travel throughout the Roman Empire to sell their goods.

“By New Testament times it was estimated that more Jews lived outside of Palestine (perhaps as many as three to five million) than lived in the homeland” (H.L. Drumwright, Jr. “Diaspora,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. II, p. 119).

Benefit To Christianity

One needs only to read the book of Acts once to see the value of these Jewish settlements throughout the known world. They served as a “springboard” for the teaching of Christianity in their synagogues wherever they were found. The apostle Paul found such opportunities in Antioch, Pisidia (**Acts 13:14**), Iconium (**Acts 14:1**), Philippi (**Acts 16:13**), Thessalonica (**Acts 17:1**), Corinth (**Acts 18:1-4**), etc. Contrast the ease of introducing Christianity via the Jewish connection to the difficulty found in places like Athens, Greece (**Acts 17:18-21**) where there was none.

Nature Vs. Providence?

When you go back and study the various reasons that led the Jewish people to be scattered around the world, and then consider how much of God’s plan was being put in place unwittingly by these moves, it leads you to truly wonder about the greatness of God and the completeness of His work in our world. “But when **the fullness of the time** had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (**Galatians 4:4-5**). Indeed, God works often *unnoticed* by human observation to accomplish His will and His works among the sons of men. You and I should be more **spiritually observant** of His dealings in our lifetime, and appreciate more the wonderful works of God.

As Paul wrote, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (**Philippians 2:13**). Not only “in you” (by your consent), but “around you” whether you are aware or not!