

MORE SEED & BREAD, ISSUE NO. 303

SPIRITUAL ISRAEL

By Robert Juneau

A major tenet of Catholic and Reformed theology states that in order to be in a relationship with God we must be under a covenant.

Matthew 26:28: For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

It is not tenable to teach that we today live in the new covenant. First, because we must overlook the description found in Jeremiah 31:31-34 describing the wonderful promises that will be present on the Earth in the new covenant. Secondly, because all covenants, including the new covenant, are between God and the nation of Israel. No nation today has the place of prominence required to be in a covenant relationship with God, including Israel. This is a key component of the Dispensation of Grace in which we live.

Ephesians 3:4-6: By which you, reading, are able to apprehend my understanding in the secret of the Christ, which secret, in other generations is not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets: In Spirit the nations are to be joint-enjoyers of a portion, joint-bodies and joint-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the good message... (The Resultant Version).

If all nations are joint-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, and if all covenants in the Bible were made with a nation of people (Israel), there is no "special" nation today to be part of the new covenant. Certainly no religion, no organization, and no individual can claim to be under the new covenant.

Covenant theologians acknowledge the fact that the nation of Israel was the recipient of God's covenants in the Old Testament, but through the erroneous doctrine of "spiritual Israel," it is taught that Israel's heritage, their special relationship with God, and their covenant promises have somehow all been transferred to "the church." Even though the phrase "spiritual Israel" cannot be found in Scripture, and every passage in the New Testament concerning Israel

pertains to the nation of people who were the ancestors of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this doctrine has persisted allowing men to evade the many difficulties that relate to Israel being God's holy (set apart) nation for His purposes.

Nothing could be more nebulous or mystical than the arbitrary "spiritualizing" of the nation of Israel. When men claim something is "spiritual," it is thought to be ethereal, mystical, or the opposite of physical. This is a Pauline term, and when used in Scripture, it means something that comes straight from God or something that is the result of His intervening to bypass the process by which something would normally come about. E.W. Bullinger suggests that the word "supernatural" often fits the use of the Greek adjective *pneumatikos*, always translated "spiritual." I can find very few instances of *pneumatikos* where "supernatural" does not describe what God is calling "spiritual."

The law is called "spiritual" in Romans 7:14. Israel's law was not a result of man-made policies; it came supernaturally, written with the finger of God (Exodus 32:12). Manna from heaven and the rock that produced water as Israel wandered the desert are both called "spiritual" in 1 Corinthians 10:3-4. The food was not farmed, no tending was necessary, neither was the water gathered from a river or drawn from a well. Both came straight from the hand of God. The gifts are called "spiritual" in 1 Corinthians 12:1-14:12. These are not talents and skills gained through study or practice; they were supernatural abilities that the *ekklesia* of the Acts Period were given to bring in the Kingdom of God. Prophets are called "spiritual" in Hosea 9:7 and 1 Corinthians 14:37. The words of a prophet are the supernatural words of God. Our resurrection bodies are called "spiritual" in 1 Corinthians 15:44. They will not be the result of conception and nine months of gestation and birth, but will be a supernatural creation of God. Songs are called "spiritual" in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. These are thought to be the Psalms set to music. They were not the result of men coming up with a catchy tune, but by God supernaturally giving the music to the psalmists.

To defend how the new covenant now applies to something called "spiritual Israel" when it was originally promised to the "physical" nation of Israel, the grafting in of the Gentiles into Israel's tree in Romans 11 is often cited. This is a weak assertion: first, due to the fact that a graft is totally dependent on the tree for its existence, and secondly, because the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. is mistakenly viewed as God's final judgment on Israel. While it is true that this

did bring the end of "national" Israel, there is no justification for attributing to God the acts of a Roman conqueror. The point is that these two foundational principles of covenant theology fall apart when the Word of God is allowed to be the standard for all we believe. If the tree that the Gentiles were grafted into in Romans 11 died in 70 A.D., how does the graft continue to live after the death of the tree?

Romans 9:6-7: But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called" (NKJV unless otherwise noted).

This passage used to support the doctrine of "spiritual Israel" seems to say that someone other than Israel could be called "Israel." In covenant theology, that "someone else" is "the church." It is clear in this passage, however, that the ones referred to who might not be "of Israel," the ones who might not be considered "children," must in the first place be "of Israel."

Galatians 6:16...peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

The "Israel of God" is a term that is used synonymously with "spiritual Israel" to promote that believers are the "true" Israel, the "Israel of God," as opposed to the people that were born into the nation of Israel.

Romans 11:25-26...that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved...

This verse is promoted to teach that all Israel will be saved, and if all Israel will be saved, then all believers comprise something called "Israel." This is an example of picking when we will acknowledge Israel as the real nation she was, and when Israel is "spiritual." If the Israel in verse 25 to which blindness has happened is "physical Israel," how does the leap to something called "spiritual Israel" occur one sentence later? When the whole passage is read, it becomes clear to whom it is the covenants were given, and who the Israel is that will "all" be saved. See Isaiah 59.

Romans 11:26-27: And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." The audience in Romans 9, 10, and 11 is those who, by ancestry, are considered to be Israelites. What is taught in these passages is that now that Christ has been offered to Israel, being born an Israelite is no longer enough; God now expects them to show faith in the One

whom He has sent. It was no longer sufficient to rest on their position as an Israelite under Judaism for a right standing with God. God was moving forward in His plans for Israel and Judaism and now required more from them. The Israelites that had become believers in Christ and had become responsible for and partakers of the Kingdom of God would be the ones considered to be true Israelites, the "Israel of God." While I would not use the term to describe them because it is not found in Scripture, these Israelites would be "spiritual Israel."

To say that believers today are "spiritual Israel," is like saying that a German citizen could be a World War II American war hero. In order to fit this paradigm, one must first be an American citizen. Secondly, he would have to have fought in World War II. Just like this, during the Acts Period, to be considered the Israel of God (or "spiritual Israel," if you must), you needed to have been an Israelite in the first place. Secondly, you also would have needed to be a believer and a participant of all God was doing to usher in the Kingdom of God. No one would ever read about a true American hero without acknowledging the fact that he or she was an American in the first place. The same is true in that we should not consider the Biblical "Israel of God" to be any other than those who were Israelites in the first place. We should never lose sight of common sense and grammatical principles just to bolster our own doctrinal ideas.

To say that we are under a covenant for all we possess in Christ flies in the face of God's grace, the wonderful means by which we enter into a relationship with God today (Ephesians 2:8-9). Remember, a covenant is an agreement between two parties, but with regard to our salvation, we agreed to nothing. A covenant does not offer a free gift to one party; agreements involve both parties bringing something to the table. What did we bring to the table when, by faith, we received His free gift of salvation? God has done everything that was needed to restore us back to Himself; it was a one-sided deal.

No covenant can produce what God is doing today among believers. Covenants do not set anyone free; by design, they tie both parties to the conditions of the agreement. We are free from any agreement or covenant. While it is true that we are free to sin and rebel against God, we are also free to produce Godly fruit in our lives, we are free to walk a walk that is pleasing to Him, we are free to study His Word, we are free to learn all we can about Him and His awesome love for us, we are free to share truth with others, we are free to love

Him, and we are free to serve Him. No covenant produces the kind of relationship we have today with God, through Christ. No covenant translates us into the Kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13). No covenant promises us heavenly seats (elevated positions) in the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 2:6-7). No covenant causes God's grace to blanket our lives like that, which we enjoy today in the Dispensation of Grace.

The SEED & BREAD Bible-study leaflets are published as often as time and means permit and are sent free to all names on THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY mailing list. Send us your name. There will be no obligation, solicitation or visitation. Additional copies of any issue available on request.

MORE SEED & BREAD, ISSUE NO. 303, Published July 2015