

LITERAL AND SPIRITUAL

An objection to the foregoing conclusions is sometimes made by saying that the promises yet to be fulfilled can apply only to a “literal Israel,” whereas in these texts, a “spiritual Israel” is represented. The difficulty in this case all arises from a wrong idea of the words “spiritual” and “literal.” The former is supposed to denote intangible, immaterial beings, of spiritual essence, inhabiting an invisible world; while the latter refers to real persons of flesh and blood, capable of happiness on this material planet. Therefore, as many promises do relate to material things, like the “land,” the “city,” etc., the assertion is made that they cannot be fulfilled to the spiritual Israel, but that some literal nation or people must be intended. We would simply remark that spiritual things are literal, but they are not carnal. Spiritual beings are not ghosts, nor disembodied souls of men. They are real persons. Heaven is just as literal as earth; angels are as literal as men. The “things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Then it is a fact that eternal things are actually more real than the temporal. The true Israelite is a literal human being. In the present life he has flesh and blood like other men. For the life to come he looks to the “Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.” (Philippians 3:21) Christ, after His resurrection, was a real, literal being, with hands, feet, sides, etc.; able to converse, eat food, and do any act of which mortal persons are capable. True Israel, the redeemed saints out of all nations, will be made like him; therefore they will be able to “dwell in the land,” eat the food it produces, and enjoy all its blessings. Individuals do not become spiritual Israel by dying and laying aside the physical body; but those who have died must live again before they can inherit the earth. Christ confounded the Sadducees, and proved the resurrection of the dead, by citing the fact that God is not the God of the dead but of the living; and as He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were then and are now dead, they must be raised to life. Therefore true Israel will always be a real, tangible, literal people, though finally made immortal. Now, they are saved Israel, by the Spirit dwelling in corruptible flesh; then, they will be redeemed Israel, by the same Spirit inhabiting incorruptible flesh. One condition is just as literal as the other, and both are *spiritual*. *Grasp the fact so plainly stated, that only those who are truly Christ's are Israelites indeed; hold it fast in all this dissension, and perfect harmony with each and all the accompanying conditions will be the glorious result.*

GENERAL REMARKS

Therefore we ask. Who are meant by Israel? —From plain words of inspiration we learn that the term “Israel” is not confined to any nation, either Hebrew or Gentile; in fact, these worldly associations are a hindrance instead of being a help. On the contrary, we find that Israel is the title of those who are “in the world, but not of the world.” They are the truly converted followers of Christ. Birth, wealth, education, or any other endowment of men, does not constitute a mark of God's people. All the promises of the gospel are made to the Israel of God, and no promise for the future is made to a Gentile. These are not statements made to support a human theory of national pride, but they are facts of great weight. We do not deny that there is a literal Israel in the world; but God alone can tell who they are, for he looks at the heart. We do not deny the promises yet unfulfilled to the chosen people; “for all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us.” We have one point settled, and this is a key which will unlock every door we shall meet. Without it, men wander in the maze of speculation. True Israel does not mean the “Hebrew nation,” the “ten lost tribes,” the “Anglo-Saxon race,” or the modern, Zionist state of Israel, nor any other division of natural men. It does mean a literal people, “born again,” composed of some individuals out of every nation and tongue under heaven. Here is solid rock on which to build for the future. All theories in opposition to these Scriptural facts rest on a foundation of sand, or are merely floating castles in the air.

What about you? Do you want to be a part of God's literal, spiritual Israel, to be called by His name? To receive a “new name,” given you by God Himself? All of these promises to literal Israel, given in the Bible, can be yours. Just follow Jacob's example, throw yourself, broken, wounded, and bleeding, stained with sin as you are, onto the bosom of Christ, confess your wickedness and rottenness of character and accept His forgiveness and love. He says to YOU, sinner, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” (John 6:37) Then He will give YOU a new name, just as He did with Jacob, and He will say of YOU, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”

(Adapted from the book “The Eastern Question in Light of God's Promises to Israel Prophetic and Historic.” By H.E. Robinson.)

In Light of Prophecy Fulfilled
1775 E Palm Canyon Drive #110-108
Palm Springs, CA 92264
info@inlightofprophecyfulfilled.org
www.inlightofprophecyfulfilled.org



Who is Israel?



The modern nation of Israel is in the news today and has been for decades. The agitation of the world over the Middle East is not a new thing. It stretches back over 200 years, back to the time when the Ottoman Empire, an Empire almost entirely forgotten today, controlled Jerusalem and Napoleon tried to take Palestine from them in 1799. The agitation over Palestine and the idea of a “Jewish Homeland” grew through the 19th century and into the 20th until it became a reality in 1948 with the establishment of the modern nation of Israel. But is the modern state of Israel a fulfillment of Bible prophecy? Are the Old Testament promises to God's chosen people exclusively for the Zionist state of Israel today? Let's consider what the Bible has to say about it.

No one will deny that there are many promises to Israel which pertain to the future, and that they will all be exactly fulfilled in due time. But in their fulfillment the whole earth and all the people upon it are involved, and so through them these questions and every other question of prophecy and God's promises are open for study.

In the discussion of any subject it is necessary that the terms employed should be clearly understood. Otherwise misunderstanding will arise, and discord will ensue. Our first duty, therefore, is to ascertain who are meant in the Scriptures by the words “Israel,” “Jew,” “Abraham's seed,” and similar expressions. Modern use restricts these titles to one particular nation — the Hebrew people, the Jews of the modern state of Israel. Does the Bible universally apply them in that way? What meaning is attached to them by the Lord? It will at once be seen that this is a vital point. God's definition and application must be followed, if we would understand His promises. We are not at liberty to attach an arbitrary interpretation to these names. Many conclude without investigation that the commonly received meaning of these words is the same as the Bible gives to them. But this should by no means be taken for granted. If a wrong base is laid at the start, the whole structure will suffer, notwithstanding the infinite labor bestowed on the dome. Therefore before we can understand the promises to Israel, we must first ascertain who are Israel in the mind of God. On this point the following testimony is ample:

The name “Israel” is defined as “a prince of God.” It is first used in the Bible in Gen. 32:28. From its use on this occasion we may learn its meaning, by noticing the following circumstances: Jacob, as the name indicates, was a tricky, dishonest man, who had supplanted his brother, Esau,

deceived his father, Isaac, and outwitted his uncle, Laban. While thus guilty, he set out to return to his boyhood home after an absence of twenty years. On the journey, he was attacked one dark and lonely night by what appeared to be a robber bent on murder. Jacob wrestled for his life until the morning began to dawn. Then by a mysterious touch from his unknown antagonist, Jacob's thigh was put out of joint, and he could struggle no more. But the same moment that Jacob saw his helplessness, he also saw the Lord as his adversary—the same One he had seen in his dream at Bethel when he fled an exile from his father's house. Hope immediately took the place of fear, and to the Lord's apparent intention to depart, Jacob, now humbled and penitent, exclaimed, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” His confession of sin is shown more fully in the words of Hosea 12:3-5: “He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God. Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him; he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us; even the Lord God of Hosts; the Lord is his memorial.” Jacob's faith gave him victory with the Lord. He was then a converted man, a new creature in Christ Jesus. Then the Lord bestowed a new name on the new man: “And he said unto him. What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.”

From this we learn that Jacob was not “Israel” by being born of Hebrew parents. Only by the pardon of his sin could he receive the title of “a prince of God,” and the name “Israel” was conferred upon him by the Lord himself. Applying these principles in a general way, the conclusion follows that no person is an Israelite in the true and primary sense of the word by being born of Hebrew ancestors; that this distinction relates to a righteous character, received by faith; and that God only can bestow it on those who are “born from above.” Israel is a title which cannot be transmitted from an earthly father to his son; but it must come from the Heavenly Father, and is given to those alone who become children of God. Here is a difference often overlooked in common speech; people are called Israelites by men, simply because they are Hebrews; but in the sight of God no man is an Israelite by human descent. Natural birth, physical form, and national language have nothing to do with the matter. The features of a true Israelite are a contrite, humble heart, which only God can see. This agrees with the words of Christ concerning Nathanael, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile;” (1 John 1:47) also with Paul's language: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, *but a*

new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” (Galatians 6:15,16) Here, then, is the “rule” given by the Holy Spirit and applied by the apostle: A person must be a “new creature,” in order to be classed among the “Israel of God.” That same “rule” holds good to-day, and men have no right to use any other in measuring God's chosen people.

This is not saying that in the Bible the word “Israel” always means converted men. On the contrary, the term often designates a certain race of people without reference to character. But the former is the original and correct application, while the other is a secondary use of the word. In all cases where it is consistent with the context and circumstances recorded, the primary definition should be understood. An example of both meanings is found in the use of the word “Christian.” Strictly speaking, a person is a Christian only when converted to Christ; but the word is often used now to designate a whole nation, even though a large majority make no profession of being Christ's followers. No one will claim that all are Christians who belong to so-called “Christian nations.” In like manner the word “Israel” is sometimes employed to describe a nation when perhaps but a very few are Israelites in the true sense. Hence Paul could declare, “*For they are not all Israel which are of Israel.*”

By ignoring the fact that the promises of future blessings to Israel refer to those only who are Christ's indeed, many writers and teachers have framed erroneous theories concerning the modern state of Israel, and so of course are entirely wrong in their conclusions about Bible prophecy. Therefore we emphasize the statement that the reader must clearly discern this distinction, and apply it properly, in order to avoid untold confusion. In harmony with the foregoing, notice how the word “Jew” has a double use.

WHO ARE JEWS?

The Lord's description of a “Jew” is similar to that of an Israelite: “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” (Romans 2:28, 29) No one can misunderstand these statements. The name “Jew,” like “Israel,” is a sacred title which God alone can give. When the Lord applies it, the man has “praise of God;” when mere men give that name to a person or people, it is simply “praise of men,” and amounts to nothing, except to show that those who use it and those who receive it in this manner, do not really know whom the Lord calls a Jew. Let the Hebrew of to-day beware of those who would flatter him as

a special subject of God's favor because of his natural descent; and let those who thus apply the term to unconverted men, as proof that special blessings are promised to them in this or a future age, be careful lest the blood of deceived souls shall be found upon them. Let God's idea of a Jew be taught, and more will desire the praise of that name from divine lips. It is astonishing how carelessly these words are now applied to all classes of men, until their real significance is nearly lost. But God has not changed, and he knows those who are really His, and also those “which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie,”

ABRAHAM'S SEED

The same general principles which pertain to the true Israelite, or Jew, are equally applicable to those whom the Lord recognizes as “Abraham's seed.” The name “Abraham” did not come by natural descent from any man. “Abram” was the appellation bestowed by the human parents to designate their son born of the flesh. No honor in God's sight comes through that source. Christ says, “The flesh profiteth nothing;” and Paul writes, “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God;” and he applies this truth to the particular case of Abraham in the words, “What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?” and then proceeds to answer the question by stating that all he received came to him by believing God. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Then so far as men are concerned, faith is the only avenue to God's favor. In this way Abram became the friend of God, and his name was changed to Abraham, “the father of all them that believe.” Thus, over and over again the important lesson is taught that no permanent blessing can come to any person without the exercise of faith on his part.

Likewise the “seed” of Abraham derive nothing from the fleshly birth. This is made very plain by noticing the difference between the two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. The former was born “after the flesh,” the latter “after the Spirit.” In reference to them the Lord said: “Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.” (Galatians 4:22-31) It is therefore certain that the natural descendants from Abraham are all Ishmaelites in God's sight, and only those who have been begotten by the direct power of God are counted for the seed through Isaac. Notice this same conclusion in exact Scripture: “Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children; but in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, thy which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.”