Spiritual Israel

Spiritual Israel is an idea that has gone the way of the dodo bird in modern Protestant Christianity. I frequently attend bible studies from different denominations and many are dispensational in their understanding of the church and Israel. I usually do not voice my opinions on Israel because they are so different but on a few occasions I have. This led to no small dissent and I was really shocked at how far many Christians have gone in the devotion to Israel. I was labeled as anti-Semitic simply because I do not believe that a largely secular and atheistic nation that was born in 1948 is a fulfillment of prophecy. Needless to say I was not invited back; I guess some cannot abide my good company and pleasant disposition. lol So I thought we would go thru the bible and see if there really is a spiritual Israel or if every mention of Israel is always ethnic.

The best place to start with anything is at the beginning so lets start with Jacob the father of Israel. Jacob which means supplanter or deceiver lived up to his name when he stole the birthright from his brother Esau by deception. Jacob was forced to leave his home and family and was actually deceived himself by his uncle Laban when he gave Leah to him as a wife when he thought it was Rachel. Jacob after many years away from home decides to return with a large family of his own. Just before he returns he learns that Esau is waiting with a large company of men who surely mean to do him harm. He splits up his family and spends the night alone in prayer when a stranger attacks him and they wrestle throughout the night. His attacker after hours of conflict touches his thigh and knocks his hip out of socket and tries to leave. Jacob who must have realized the identity of his attacker refuses to let go until he receives a blessing. His tenacity and determination are rewarded when he is given the new name of Israel which means prince of God or he who strives with God.

What we should take away from this story is that Jacob was not born with the name of Israel. It was given to him later in life after he prevailed with the angel of the Lord. This word prevail is very important and actually the word overcome has the same meaning. The overcomers of the seven churches of Revelation receive all the blessings. And actually one of those blessings is receiving a new name. Jacob overcame and became the father of Israel therefore membership in Israel is not based exclusively on ethnicity. Jacob was also the father of ethnic Israel or the twelve tribes so we see two distinct lines that come from him. One line based on spirituality or faith and the other based on ethnicity or the flesh. Jesus speaking of the Roman centurion said - Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matt. 8:10-12

…to be continued

The seven churches of Revelation are the next stop in our studies on Spiritual Israel. Contrary to popular historical belief, the seven churches do not represent seven ages of the history of the church. Nowhere can this even be hinted at by the text itself. This belief may

have been popular in Martin Luther's day but it has long since fallen out of fashion. The seven churches were first and foremost seven churches that existed in the 1st century in Asia minor or modern day Turkey. There are also verses that suggest these churches may have counterparts in the last days when Satan sets up his seat or throne on earth, the imminent language of holding fast till the coming of Jesus as a thief in the night and the protection that he offers during the hour of temptation that will come upon the whole world. The lessons of each church are applicable to Christians of all ages and especially to the last generation who will see them fulfilled before their very eyes.

Jesus presents himself as walking among the seven golden candlesticks with each one representing a church. In the temple the Menorah was a seven branched candlestick similar to what we have here but not quite the same. The Menorah was a single candlestick with seven branches while the seven golden candlesticks are separate perhaps indicating that the original light to the Jewish people is now multiplied to the Gentiles. This is not the only Jewish symbol being applied to the church. The overcomers from Pergamos are allowed to eat the hidden manna, the overcomers from Philadelphia will be made like pillars in the temple of God and also the Philadelphians have the Father's name written in their foreheads just like the twelve tribes of the 144,000. Far from the church and Israel being separate and distinct, we see here that they share in the blessings of God together. The church is the spiritual fulfillment of Israel where one day both Jews and Gentiles will live in the same city or the new Jerusalem.

The 144,000 have been completely divorced from the church by modern Protestant Christianity but as we have already seen they both share the seal of God or the name of the Father. Some other similarities between the two are that the 144,000 are said to be the first fruits unto God and the Lamb. To the ancient agrarian mindset the first fruits were a sampling of the main harvest. The great multitude which are found in the same chapter are most likely this harvest and are said to come from all nations, peoples and languages. So the twelve spiritual tribes are comprised of the same - Jewish and Gentile believers with circumcised hearts. Lastly the 144,000 have not been defiled by women and are virgins. All throughout the OT God likened idolatry to spiritual fornication or adultery. The message that goes to the world in the last days will be to come out of Babylon and not to partake of her sins. The 144,000 have not committed spiritual fornication with Babylon and in this sense only could they be said to be virgins.

Many dispensational Christians view the book of Revelation as pertaining to the church until the end of chapter 3 and after this it's all about ethnic Israel. Is this an accurate picture of the last days with the church being raptured out and ethnic Israel evangelizing the whole world during the tribulation? No it's a fairy tale and when their rapture bus blows an engine and they are stuck in the tribulation with everyone else their faith will be shattered and will become easy pickins for the beast and his image.

All throughout his writings Paul contrasts the spirit and the flesh and Israel is no different. Circumcision was central to this understanding. Circumcision was an outward sign of the

flesh that marked someone as a Jew or a member of Israel. This was first given to Abraham the father of the faithful as a sign of the covenant between him and God. Paul addresses this in Romans 4 where Abraham was given the sign of circumcision for the faith he had while still being uncircumcised. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. Now to those that work for righteousness the reward is one of debt and not of grace. But to those who give up working for righteousness their faith is counted for righteousness that it might be by grace to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed. So we see that the cutting of the flesh was just a sign and not the real thing. The real circumcision was the faith that was found in Abraham. The OT law bears this out when Moses said the LORD your God will circumcise your heart that you may love him with all your heart and soul Deut. 30:6. A new heart or being born again is what God desires and this is why Jesus rebuked Nicodemus saying you are a master of Israel and do not know these things? He should have known because it was found in the law.

Verily, verily I say unto you, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirt. A new spiritual birth means we are a brand new person with a new name, a new mother, a new father and a whole new family tree. The father of Israel was born into this world as Jacob the deceiver but after conversion he was given the name of Israel or the prince of God. Saul which means desirable was born into this world as a Pharisee of the tribe of Benjamin but after conversion he was called Paul which means small or little and was adopted into the Israel of God. Paul had been humbled and had become small in his own eyes after seeing the glory of Christ who knocked him off his proverbial high horse. Paul is an interesting study because he was both part of Israel of the flesh and Israel of the spirit. He counted his fleshly inheritance as dung compared to the excellency of the knowledge of Christ through whom he suffered the loss of all things. Gentiles can never claim to be part of Israel of the flesh but we can and must claim our eternal inheritance that is the promise of the new testament reserved for the Israel of God.

For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ you have only one father for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Christ is the spiritual father of all those who are born again so who would be our mother? But the Jerusalem above is free and the mother of us all Gal. 4:26. Our spiritual mother is the heavenly Jerusalem which is symbolized by the new or everlasting covenant that was first communicated to Abraham. The new Jerusalem is not just a city in heaven it is also the bride of Christ or his people here on earth. We have been adopted into Israel and just as there were tribes of the flesh so also there are tribes of the Spirit. The tribes of the 144,000 are the tribes of spiritual Israel. Each of the men who started the original tribes had a peculiar character. Simeon and Levi were aggressive and hostile while Joseph was meek and lowly. We fall into the tribes based on our character type not blood type. Jesus said that the twelve disciples would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The disciples were either from Judah or Benjamin of the flesh which leaves ten tribes unaccounted for. Benjamin cannot judge Issachar or Zebulon so the twelve disciples were spiritual heads of the twelve tribes with each disciple falling into a separate tribe. The twelve foundations of the new Jerusalem each contain the name of one of the disciples or apostles aka the twelve tribes of Israel.