

God's New Israel

by T. Austin-Sparks

The New Testament is built upon the ground of the Old Testament, with the change being in God's method, not in His purpose or principles.

Scripture: Luke 12:32, Acts 15:14, 1 Corinthians 10:11, Galatians 6:16, Ephesians 6:12, Hebrews 8:9, Hebrews 9:26, 1 Peter 2:9-10, 1 John 5:19, Revelation 5:12

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Spiritual Emancipation"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that God's purpose remains unchanged as He transitions from the Old Testament's physical Israel to a new spiritual Israel, the Church, which is formed from all nations. He highlights the principles of emancipation from spiritual bondage, showcasing how the old Israel's liberation from Egypt parallels the Church's deliverance from sin and the world. Sparks stresses the importance of understanding the power of the Blood of the Lamb and the spiritual battle against evil forces, asserting that true believers are a threat to the kingdom of darkness. He encourages the congregation to recognize their identity as part of this new Israel and to rely on God's power in their spiritual journey.

Transcript

At the commencement of these messages we made one statement which was to cover all that follows. That declaration was that the New Testament is built upon the ground of the Old Testament; that is, that what God was doing in a temporal and earthly way then, He is doing in a heavenly and spiritual way now. There is no change in His purpose, nor in His principles: the change is in His method. His one purpose is to take out of the nations a people for His name (Acts 15:14). In this part of the world's history God is working to secure out of the nations a new spiritual Israel (Galatians 6:16 and the whole context of 1 Peter 2:4-10 - note verse 10). He is constituting this spiritual Israel upon the principles of the old Israel. The first Israel failed Him, violated all His spiritual principles, and broke His covenant (Hebrews 8:9). (Note the whole nature and purpose of the Letter to the Hebrews!) This is the nation to which Christ referred when He said to 'official' Israel: "The kingdom of heaven shall be taken away from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof", i.e. the fruits of the Kingdom of heaven, a phrase which always related to the Gospel to all the nations. This is a nation out of all the nations.

I am fully aware that there is a large body of Bible students standing at my elbow - so to speak - feverishly wanting to challenge me regarding the future of the Jewish nation with all the questions about Palestine and present developments there. This whole matter has divided Bible readers and their respective

followers into two main schools. Dr. Schofield leads the one school, i.e. the "Suspended Kingdom" school with a definite future for the Jewish nation. Dr. Campbell Morgan (pre-eminent as a Bible teacher in his generation) categorically denied the future for Israel (as such) teaching. We refuse to be drawn into a contention for either view. What we are saying with emphasis is that for this dispensation, "upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (I Corinthians 10:11), "Once at the end of the ages..." (Hebrews 9:26), the earthly Israel is in rejection, and the new heavenly Israel - the Church - is in the forefront of God's work. Touch this earth and world in any way and you touch confusion, frustration, and death! So we say with Nehemiah: "I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down".

No one will think for a moment that what we have said implies that we have no concern for the Jews. Jews are to contribute as much to the New Israel as are the Gentiles, but not as Jews or Gentiles, but a New Creation. We are as much concerned for the salvation of Jews as we are for anybody!

Let us proceed with the matter immediately on hand. We are now going to be occupied with THE EMANCIPATION OF ISRAEL

There are few things in the Old Testament which are given a greater place than the emancipation of Israel from Egypt, and the New Testament makes it very clear that God is taking His new Israel out of the nations on exactly the same principles as those on which He took out the old Israel. If this is not clear to you, then you must read your New Testament again in the light of what I have just said. All I can do is to put my finger upon some of these spiritual principles of emancipation; but the old Israel's emancipation was a tremendous thing, as we shall see as we go on, the emancipation of the new spiritual Israel is still greater. That means that to be a true child of God is a far greater thing than being a Jew of Israel.

Well, as you see, we are in the early chapters of the book of Exodus, and perhaps later on we shall move into the book of Numbers.

Now for some of these spiritual principles.

1. The emancipation of Israel from Egypt had spiritual background.

How did God Himself sum up that emancipation? He comprehended the whole thing in one statement in Exodus 12:12: "Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements."

It was not Pharaoh in the first place, for he was only an instrument; nor was it the Egyptians in the first place, for they were but the victims. It was the gods of the Egyptians. Behind Pharaoh and behind the Egyptians there was an evil spiritual system - and there is one verse in the New Testament which tells us all about that: "...principalities...powers...world-rulers of this darkness...spiritual hosts of wickedness" (Ephesians 6:12). Those were all the gods of the Egyptians, set over against the one God of Israel, and the Egyptians, but between God and the gods of the Egyptians.

I may not take the time to go into detail, but the Egyptians worshipped the River Nile. There was the god of the Nile - so God turned the River Nile into blood. The Egyptians worshipped frogs. The frog was as sacred in Egypt as the cow is in India. These just indicate that God was getting behind things and was dealing with a great spiritual system. The emancipation of Israel was emancipation from a spiritual system - and that is true of the emancipation of every believer from this world system. This world is governed by a spiritual system which is behind it, and every man and woman in bondage to that system. The Word of God says that "the whole world lieth in the evil one" (I John 5:19), and if you do not believe that of yourself

then I would suggest that you try to get out of this world system. You would find that your emancipation is a much bigger thing than you think!

So the emancipation of Israel and the Church is from a spiritual background of a very powerful system, and redemption is a tremendous thing.

2. The emancipation of Israel was an exhibition of ultimate strength.

Of course, God could have just wiped out Egypt with one word. He who spoke the word and the creation came into being could have spoken and Egypt would have been dismissed from history; but God was teaching men a great lesson. He was not teaching Himself. He was teaching, first of all, this principle in Egypt, and was teaching something to Israel, the old and the new, the nations and the devil.

Here we have, then, an exhibition of final power. God is slowly but steadily drawing out the power of this evil system, exhausting all the power of the evil principalities. Each one of these ten judgments is an increase upon the one that went before. God is saying: 'If you resist Me on that, very well, have some more!', and you notice that in the tenth judgment He has gone far beyond all the ten powers in Egypt. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Corinthians 15:26). That is the full and final power against God, but the "power of His resurrection" is "the exceeding greatness of His power", and it exceeds all power in this universe.

Dear friends, have we really understood the greatness of our salvation? Have we really appreciated what it means to be a member of this new Israel? What was the great note of the Apostles as they went over the world? Men and devils killed the Prince of Life! They did the last thing that they could do, but the shout of the Apostles everywhere is: 'God raised Him! You killed Him, but God raised Him!' This is something beyond all the power of evil spirits and men, and it is a principle upon which God is constituting His new Israel. No wonder that the Apostle Paul, who had seen this, cried: 'Oh, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection! If the fellowship of His sufferings will result in that, all right!' It was an exhibition of ultimate strength, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

3. The emancipation of Israel was an expression of the virtue of the Blood of the Lamb.

You know Exodus 12 in which the Passover lambs are slain, but I wonder if you have recognized where the Passover lambs were slain! There was no temple, no tabernacle and no altar, so where were the lambs slain? They were slain on the threshold of every house, and the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the two side posts and on the lintel. What have you there? A circle of blood - a national circumcision. The nation was circumcised that night, and circumcision was the sign of the covenant, the sign that the people were God's people. There were in a covenant of blood with God, and that is a covenant of life. The Egyptians were not under that covenant. Their first-born died that night, but Israel lived, and they went out through this circle of blood - the mighty virtue of the blood of the lamb.

Well, all Christians know about that! Our Christian life begins there, with the mighty virtue of the Blood of Jesus, and it will end there. The fullness of God's new Israel, taken out of every nation and kindred and tongue! What are they singing in glory? "Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain!" (Revelation 5:12). Oh, the mighty virtue of the Blood of the Lamb! Do you not thank the Lord for that every time you pray? I can never pray without remembering the precious Blood, for it is the way out of death into life.

4. The presence of Israel in Egypt was an expression of the menace the elect is to this world.

This battle in Egypt revealed a very wonderful thing - what a menace the elect is to this world. The presence of Israel in Egypt was like a thorn in the side of the Egyptians, and every day poor Pharaoh was feeling that thorn in his flesh. He would say: 'There is a people in my realm who are a threat to my kingdom. I killed all their male babies and now they have become six hundred thousand men, without women and children. What am I going to do with these people? If they go on like this I will have no place left for myself, or they will take the kingdom of this world.' Have your minds leapt over into the New Testament? 'What can I do with these people? I will give them as hard a time as I can and do everything that I can to make them serve my interests.' Can you see the work of the devil in this present age? Is the prince of this world making it as hard as he can for the people of God? Is his mind set upon making them serve his interests? That is the nature of the battle, and you only have to leap right over into the wilderness with the Lord Jesus during the forty days and forty nights. The prince of this world came to Him personally and tried to get Him to compromise, to accept the kingdoms of this world on his terms. "All this will I give Thee if Thou wilt worship me." 'If You will serve my interests I will give You a prize!' And behind his word there was this: 'If You don't, woe betide You! There will be a Cross for You! And I will rally all my principalities and powers and concentrate them upon You on that Cross.' The Lord Jesus gained the victory in that battle! The devil did his worst, but what is the verdict of the Word of God? Read it again in the letter to the Colossians: "(He) stripped off from himself the principalities and the powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross."

Dear friends, this applies to the new Israel. It applies to us here. We, as the Lord's people in this world, are a menace to Satan, a menace and a threat to his kingdom, and he knows that unless he destroys us we are going to take the kingdom - and, praise God, we are! "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). But what a big word: "Fear not!"

Well, there are four mighty principles. We could, of course, spend hours on every one of them, but "what seest thou?" Are you getting some light? Are you seeing that Satan will do everything in his power to keep you from breaking away from his kingdom? If you are still in spiritual bondage, do not put it down to secondary causes. Do not say: 'Well, it is because of so-and-so... it is because of my husband... it is because of my wife', or it might be a thousand and one other things. You go right to the root cause of it! If you are in spiritual bondage and darkness, it is the prince of this world who has put you in prison, and you will have to appeal to the victory won on Calvary by the Lord Jesus, and take your position by faith in the virtue of the Blood of Jesus.

If you are a true child of God, if you have come out of bondage, are you seeing now why the devil tries to give you such a bad time? Do you see why he will make it as hard as he can for you? The explanation is that he is afraid of you! Yes, Satan is afraid of the true Church. He is not afraid of the imitation church, of the false Israel, but he is afraid of the elect, and he does not give them an easy time.

THE NEW WORLD

Well, the people are out of their bondage in Egypt and are out unto the Lord. What about it? They are in a new place, a place that they have never been in before. They are not accustomed to anything in this place. They are in another world which is altogether different from the one in which they have been living. Yes, they have a real joy in being out and sing the song of redemption:

"I am redeemed, O praise the Lord!"

But what kind of a world is this into which they - and we - have come? We are strangers in this world! What is it that Peter is saying? "I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims..." (1 Peter 2:11). Somehow we do not seem to belong here, and we have to learn everything all over again. Well, in Egypt we could at least see where our bread was coming from. It may not have been everything that we would like but every time we needed food there was at least something to see. We knew that at a certain time someone would sound a trumpet and call out 'Come to the cookhouse!' We could see things in Egypt! Things were such that we could handle them, and we did know that our meals would be provided at the right time, but what kind of a life is this? We cannot see anything here. We just do not know what is going to happen out here! We are absolutely dependent upon supernatural power. This is a most unnatural life! Well, from time to time, God works a miracle. We have a very wonderful experience of Him, and then it is as though He goes away and leaves us, and this unnatural life goes on.

Do you know what I am talking about? Is that true to the Christian life?

We have come into a new place, and in this place God has to be everything. We have to prove Him every day, and we are tested by the very place into which we have come. We say: 'We are going out with the Lord.' All right - but do you know what that means? It is going out to the Lord, and to the Lord only. Out in this new place we seem to be suspended between heaven and earth. What is the meaning of this new place? Well, all our natural abilities and facilities are useless. I have more than once flown over that wilderness in the days of flying boats which did not go very high, and from six thousand feet I could see everything in the wilderness; and I came to one conclusion: it would be a hopeless thing to bring a plough into that, or to sow corn in that! That would soon break any farmer's heart! Fancy living in that for forty years. Only God almighty could keep you alive in that. So it was for these people - but what did this new place mean?

TESTING OF MOTIVES

First of all, it was the place where their motives were tested. What is the motive that has brought you to this place? Did you come out to the Lord in your own interests, or for the Lord? If your motive was a 'self' motive, you are going to die out here, but if it really was for the Lord, only He will carry you through this.

PROBATION FOR A LIFE OF THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The second thing about the new place was that it was the probation for a life of the power of the Holy Spirit. The book of Joshua is the book of the power of the Holy Spirit, and shows that you will never come into that power if you have selfish, personal motives. Your spiritual circumcision is going to be tested here: Is it all of the Lord, or is there something of myself?

In the New Testament there are two books which are set right in this new place, and in them you have Christians between Egypt and the land; and it is all a question of motive.

In the first letter to the Corinthians the Christians are with Israel in the wilderness. Their motives are being tested, and in chapter ten Israel's failure in the wilderness is used as a warning to Christians.

Then there is the letter to the Hebrews. There was a time when Israel in the wilderness said: 'Let us go back into Egypt! Things are too difficult for us this way.' Stephen said in Acts 7: "(They) turned back in their hearts unto Egypt". You see, their hearts were not truly circumcised. In the letter to the Hebrews, those Hebrew Christians who were having a difficult time, were inclined to go back, and Israel's example is taken

as a very solemn warning, and the writer says: "They (Israel) were not able to enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:19). But the word in the letter to Hebrews again and again is: "Let us go on!" "Let us... let us... let us..." "Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience" (4:11). This world is a great power, and that power is set against our going on to God's full purpose. First it will do all that it can to keep us from coming out to God, and then it will exercise its power to turn us back. But there is another power, what Paul calls: "the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20), and that is a secret and hidden power. You want to feel it, but you do not feel it. What is the evidence of that power? How do you know that there is a power working in you which is greater than all the power of this world? How do I know? I have sometimes thought that the devil has almost exhausted all his schemes to get me back to the old place! I say that very carefully - but how do I know that there is a greater power? Because, after all that the devil has done, and after over sixty years of being out with the Lord, I am still going on! Not by might, not by human strength, and not because of anything in us; we are "kept by the power of God", and we know that power because today we are still out with the Lord. That is a tremendous thing, because of all that has been against.

"What seest thou?" Are you getting a little light? I hope this will explain quite a lot!

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