

Some Titles as Evidence of the Change

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the spiritual nature of the new Israel, highlighting the family, house, heirs, city, flock, and kingdom of God, and the importance of holding fast our confidence to receive the inheritance.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:18

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

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the transition from the earthly Israel to the spiritual Israel, highlighting that while both are united in principle, the new Israel is constituted on spiritual lines rather than temporal ones. He explains that the Letter to the Hebrews serves as a key document illustrating this transition, showcasing titles such as 'God's family', 'the house of God', and 'the heirs of God' as evidence of the change. Sparks stresses the importance of understanding our identity as part of God's family and the implications of being heirs to His promises, urging believers to recognize their spiritual inheritance and the significance of unity in the body of Christ. He warns against the dangers of division and the loss of inheritance, calling for a deeper understanding of God's purpose for His Church.

Transcript

The point at which we have now arrived is that, in the constituting of the spiritual Israel, God is following the same line as He took with the earthly Israel, but with one great difference - with the earthly He followed temporal lines, but with the heavenly He is following spiritual lines. However, they are both one in principle. We have seen something of this and are now going to see a little more.

Surely it must be perfectly true that this is what God is doing. The Letter to the Hebrews is the great document of the transition from one Israel to another, and in it there are many evidences of this truth. If anyone has any doubt at all, there is one fragment which should settle all such questions:

"For ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that no word should be spoken unto them: for they could not endure that which was enjoined. If even a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned; and so fearful was the appearance, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake" (Hebrews 12:18-21).

That is the old Israel being constituted at the mount. However, the word to us is: 'Ye are not come to that. That is not God's way of constituting His new Israel.'

"But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel" (Hebrews 12:22-24).

That surely settles all argument! If we had only that paragraph in the New Testament we should know the difference between the old dispensation and the new, between Judaism and Christianity, and between what they were in and what we are in.

But that is not all: it is only a part of the whole argument. I would have you note some of the titles in this Letter which are evidences of this truth:

(1) God's family

We all know that God looked upon Israel as His family. He said to Pharaoh: "Let my son go" (Exodus 4:22). The evidence is too much for us to follow through, but it is quite clear that Israel of old was, in a certain sense, looked upon by God as His family. They were His children, and, in that sense, He spoke of Himself as their Father.

Here, in this Letter of transition from the old Israel to the new, that idea is carried over into the spiritual realm:

"For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying,

"I will declare thy name unto my brethren,

"In the midst of the congregation will I sing thy praise. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold, I and the children which God hath given me." (Hebrews 2:10-13).

You will notice a whole list of quotations from the Old Testament in that connection. Formerly it related to the old Israel. That Israel has now been set aside and God is taking up in a new way this principle of family life in relation to Himself. His Son is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29) and we are "sons of God, through faith, in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 3:26).

You have probably noticed that the very first idea of God was a family - the idea was born in His heart. This is not some official society or institution. The deepest thing in God's heart about us is to have us as His children, and you, who know the Bible, will be able to quote to yourself many passages, such as: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Psalm 103:13). We could build up a tremendous mountain of references to God as Father and to His people as His children. He could have made an organization of people into a kind of society. He could have called some from one place and some from another, given them the title of some denomination and said: 'Now you are members of this denomination. You are formed into this organization.' But God never had any such idea. His idea is a family, and the Lord Jesus said that He came into this world especially to reveal God as Father - "I kept them in thy name which thou hast given me... I made known unto them thy name" (John 17:12,26). The name of God which was most on the lips of the Lord Jesus was 'Father', and God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts whereby we say the same thing - "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his

Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6).

That is very elementary, but there is a very great battle for this family conception. We do not worry very much if some organization gets broken up, not even if it is the 'United Nations', but we are always filled with grief and shame when a family breaks up. We feel that there is something about a family which carries a very sacred idea. What a bad thing it is when a family becomes divided! When children are against one another or against their parents, and the husband is against the wife and the wife against the husband. That is a special mark of the devil's work at the end of the dispensation! There is nothing more terrible in our time than the break-up of family life. The lists of divorces are most distressing, and poor children are left really without father or mother because of the break-up of the family. This is a blow at the deepest thing in the heart of God, but it does not stay there.

The most distressing aspect of this whole thing is in the family of God. There is nothing more terrible in this universe than the break-up of God's family. The devil does not mind our denominations and organizations, but he does object to this family matter! It is God's most cherished idea.

I think that is one of the most precious things about a time together like this. Here we are, representing quite a number of different nationalities. Many of us have never met before on this earth and have not yet had time to shake hands with one another, but we are all rejoicing here together as a family. The family spirit is the most precious thing, and it is the very hallmark of the heavenly Israel.

I have often said, in speaking about the heavenly Jerusalem as it is presented symbolically at the end of the Bible, that it has only one street. Our hymn-writers have led us astray over this, for they talk about the streets of gold. The Bible says there is only one street of gold. So we have to live in one street for all eternity! What do you say about that? How are you going to get on with your neighbours? Don't worry, it will be a very happy thing to live on one street, for, you see, it will just be a holy family. When the whole family is one it is not a bad thing to live next door to one another!

Well, that is just a symbolic way of speaking about this, but you know what it means. This is a spiritual relationship: Father, big Elder Brother, the all-uniting Holy Spirit... "holy brethren, companions in a heavenly calling". It is a glorious thing to have companionship!

Thus this very first idea of God in the old Israel is carried over spiritually to the new Israel.

(2) The house of God

"Moses indeed was faithful in all God's house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken; but Christ as a son, over God's house; whose house are we, if we hold fast our boldness and the glorying of our hope firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:5,6).

Did you notice what that said? "Moses indeed was faithful in all God's house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken." When is the afterward? It is now. "Whose house are we." The house of God is something which is carried over in principle by God from the old to the new. Peter says that we are a spiritual house - but there is one thing which needs to be made quite clear here. When we use this word 'house', we usually think of a place in which people live, but that is not the meaning of the word here. I do not know whether you can understand the change that I am going to make, but do you know the difference between a 'house' and a 'household'? A household is quite a different thing from a house. A household is two things: the people who dwell there and the order that exists. It is a house

with a certain kind of order.

This is God's house, composed of His people who are under His order. He is a God of order. He is not only concerned to have things done, but to have them done in His way. It matters just as much to Him how things are done as to whether they are done at all. God's house is a house which is ordered by God. Everyone in it has to be in subjection to the Spirit of God and has to come under the headship of Jesus Christ.

We could spend very much time on the house of God! However, if you look into God's ordering of the life of Israel in the old dispensation, you will see how particular He was as to what was done and how it was done. God's spiritual and heavenly house was brought in on the Day of Pentecost, and He had His own new order. You will see how in those first days of the life of the Church two things were happening. God was demanding that His new order should be observed. Even the apostles had not come fully to recognize that new order. They were holding on to something of the old order, and when the Lord was moving toward the Gentiles in the case of Cornelius, the Gentile, Peter said: 'Not so, Lord. This is not according to the old order. I was not brought up in this way. The old system says I must not do that. Not so, Lord.' But the Lord is Lord of His own house, and He made it perfectly clear to Peter that He had brought in a new order. This was a new Israel. The Cross had made a great change: "What God hath cleansed, make not thou common" (Acts 10:15). The Cross has dealt with all uncleanness and we are moving on to a new basis.

Peter came to see that. Of course, this incident was not the end of the difficulty even for him, but I think that when we come to his Letters we get to a Peter who has fully accepted the new order. "A spiritual house", says he, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices" (I Peter 2:5).

But we were noting that in the Book of the Acts we have two things: there is the movement of the Spirit of God concerning the new order, but there is also the movement of the evil spirit against this new order. There is that terrible episode of Ananias and Sapphira who violated the new order of God's house. They brought in their own personal interests, and Peter summed it up in this way: "Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" (Acts 5:3). On that terrible day the new order was upset. Satan struck a blow at this new Israel, but to show how jealous God was for His heavenly order, see what happened to those two! God has therefore laid down the principle very clearly, and He is very jealous for His heavenly order.

Nothing but trouble can follow if we get out of God's order. While that is suspended everything is in confusion.

That is enough about the house of God for the time being - "Whose house are we".

(3) The heirs of God

This matter is introduced with the Lord Jesus Himself.

"Whom He appointed heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:1).

In verse fourteen of the first chapter we are spoken of as the heirs of salvation ("...for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation").

In chapter six, verse seventeen, we are spoken of as "the heirs of the promise", and in the eighth chapter of the Letter to the Romans, verse seventeen, Paul says that we are, "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ".

In the earthly sense, Israel were to be God's heirs. The promise was made to Abraham that his seed would inherit the earth: God covenanted with him that his seed should be the possessors. Israel were to be God's heirs and they ought to have become joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. But they killed God's heir. They said, as in the parable spoken by the Lord Jesus, "This is the heir: come, let us kill him" (Matthew 21:38). They killed Him whom God had "appointed heir of all things", and in so doing they robbed themselves of the inheritance.

Then the Church comes in - "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ". The Church is now the heir to the promise made to Abraham, and this whole Letter to the Hebrews has to do with the inheritance, the great inheritance to which we are called as companions of the heavenly calling. The appeal to us in this Letter is: 'See that you do not miss the inheritance! The old Israel lost it through unbelief. You can lose the inheritance.' So the Letter uses Israel by way of illustrating the terrible possibility of Christians losing the inheritance.

Do you notice the little word 'if ' which occurs so often? "We are become companions of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:14): "Whose house are we, if we hold fast our boldness" (Hebrews 3:6). That little word is a very big word! A lot hangs on it. We are not talking about the loss of eternal life, but of the purpose of salvation, which is a very much larger thing than just being saved. Paul says that there will be a lot of people who get into heaven having lost everything. All their life work will go up in smoke: "He himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire" (I Corinthians 3:15). Everything but their salvation will be lost. Do you want to get into heaven "yet so as through fire"? No, this Letter says there is something more than being saved. There is a great inheritance, but we can miss it. Read the Letter again in the light of that.

However, our point here is that this principle of being heirs of God is carried over into the heavenly Israel.

(4) The city of God

If you look into this Letter, you will find that the city is referred to on several occasions, such as: "Ye are come ... unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12:22).

The life of Israel was, of course, centred in the earthly Jerusalem. It was the centre of their unity. They were all united because of that city. That is why their males had to go up to Jerusalem so many times every year, and as they came, from the north, the south, the east and the west, a wonderful caravan, they sang the songs of Zion. Those Psalms about Zion are wonderful Psalms, and these men were glorying in their city, finding the expression of their national life there. It was the centre of their government. Their whole national life came out from the government in Jerusalem. Yes, Jerusalem was everything to them.

The writer of this Letter to the Hebrews is speaking about the approaching day, when that will have gone forever, or for a whole dispensation. Jerusalem today is the very symbol of division. The Jews have one bit and the Arabs have another, and they cannot live in peace together. It is the symbol of disunion, and with God it does not stand. It has been passed over and God has brought in His heavenly Jerusalem - "Ye are come... unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem".

We have been made "to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). All our unity, as the new Israel, is centred in Him above. There will only be a true expression of unity amongst the Lord's people when they have a heavenly position. Our unity is in heaven, not on earth. Our government is from heaven, not from earth. Paul says we are "fellow-citizens with the saints" (Ephesians 2:19), and that our "life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).

Yes, the city exists. God's thought concerning it has been carried over to the spiritual Israel.

(5) The flock of God

These are all wonderful conceptions of the old Israel! If that Israel was God's family, the house of God, the heir of God, the city of God, so it was thought of as God's flock, God's sheep: "Thou leddest thy people like a flock" (Psalm 77:20). That idea, of course, lay behind the cry of the prophet Isaiah: "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6). Israel was God's flock and He was their shepherd. We will dwell more fully upon that later (See Volume II) - it is indeed a very large matter in this new relationship to the Lord.

God has carried this over and it is a very precious thought of His concerning the heavenly Israel. We are "the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (Psalm 95:7), and when we come to the end of this Letter to the Hebrews we have this beautiful word: "Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep... even our Lord Jesus" (Hebrews 13:20).

There is a sense in which that spreads itself back over the whole Letter. The companions of Christ are His sheep: "I am the good shepherd; and I know mine own, and mine own know me.... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life" (John 10:14,27,28). That is a grand idea for sheep!

(6) The Kingdom of God

We all know that Israel of old was God's kingdom, over which He was king. Do you remember that when they chose Saul to be the king, Samuel was very distressed and went to the Lord about it? The Lord said to him: "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them" (1 Samuel 7:7). The Old Testament has a great deal to say about Israel being God's kingdom.

Then we come into this new Israel: "Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28). In the Greek the tense is: "Being in process of receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken". We are God's kingdom, and people under His kingship and government.

We will have much more to say about this matter later, but I think I have said enough now to show that this is a very real thing. We have come in a spiritual way into all that which was foreshadowed in the Israel of old. The Lord Jesus said to that Israel: "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43). Peter said that we are "a holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). We are the inheritors of all that God ever meant for His people. In us, that is, in His true Church of this dispensation, God is in process of realizing all that which He had foreshadowed through many centuries.

We are a very privileged people. The great need of our time is for Christians to know what God has called them unto. Many do not know. You can go over this world and find Christians in the majority who have no idea of these things. They know that the Lord Jesus came into the world as the Son of God and lived His wonderful life, did His works, gave His teaching, died an atoning death and rose again, has gone to

heaven and is coming again; but they do not know one bit of what it all means, that is, what it is all unto, the great eternal purpose of God in it all. They are mostly quite ignorant of the things about which we have just been speaking, and that is why Christianity is in such a poor state today. They have not been given true instruction and have not a true understanding of God's great purpose in His Church through Christ Jesus. It is a very wonderful thing that we have come into in this dispensation.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/some-titles-as-evidence-of-the-change/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net