

The Israel of God - Part 5

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks explores the significance of Jesus' choice of the twelve apostles as a foundation for the new Israel and the essential apprenticeship in the kingdom of God.

Duration: 59:34

Scripture: Isaiah 52:13, Isaiah 53:2, Isaiah 53:5, Isaiah 53:10, Mark 3:14, Mark 3:17, Luke 10:22

Topics: "Israel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the essential apprenticeship unto the kingdom of God. He focuses on the significance of Jesus choosing twelve disciples, highlighting the diversity among them and the discipline they underwent. The speaker emphasizes the symbolism of the twelve foundations and apostles in the book of Revelation, representing a solid basis for the everlasting Kingdom. The sermon also touches on the number twelve as a representation of heavenly and earthly government, embodied in Jesus' acts.

Transcript

We are now much too advanced in the matter that is before us in this conference to be able to go back and review, much as it might be helpful to those who are now with us for the first time. They will understand that what we shall yet say has a large context, is a part of and is set in a very much larger realm than what is immediately considered. On the other hand, without reading again the various passages of scripture which have been our platform, friends who have been here will, I trust, be able to recognize that what we are now going to say is in that setting.

So I turn you this afternoon to the Gospel by Mark, chapter 3, verses 13 and 14. And he goeth up into the mountain, and calleth unto him whom he himself would, and they went unto him. And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach.

And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth. A particular aspect of our whole consideration, which I want to bring to you this afternoon, is what I am going to call apprenticeship unto the kingdom of God. That is, of course, all contained in the word disciple or discipleship.

Now you will have noticed the very precise terms in which this statement was made. It was a very deliberate, calculated, considered, far-reaching, and very significant act, this choosing of the twelve.

Another time he said, I know whom I have chosen.

And again, have I not chosen you twelve? And you will observe that his choice follows time alone with his father in much prayer. I repeat, it was a very deliberate act, prayed over and considered, and it was far from casual, with a very large background in his own mind. These are not just comments upon it, statements about it.

They are supported by all the very teaching of the scriptures. You will see that in some little way as we go on. And he chose twelve.

What a dangerous thing for him to do. What a significant thing for him to do. That number was a well-understood number in Israel.

One of the great dominant numbers of the Bible, and particularly of Israel. Were there not twelve patriarchs? Were there not twelve tribes of Israel? In many other ways, that number comes into view in itself and in its multiples. In relation to Israel, first of all.

Now, death is laid hold of deliberately by him and brought over as the very beginning of the movement into the new death sensation. So, we have twelve apostles. In the new Jerusalem, we have twelve foundations, the wall.

The city itself is twelve thousand furlongs in each direction. It has twelve gates, are twelve powers. There are twelve angels.

So, we could go on. Seventh chapter of the book of the Revelation, the number of the seals, the multiples, twelve. One hundred and forty and four thousand.

Twelve times twelve thousand. You beginning to see something to this deliberate act of the Lord Jesus? I say it was not casual. He knew what he was doing.

In one sense, he was doing the most dangerous thing that he could do when he did this. Of course, all the Jews and all Israel, and especially the rulers, would jump to a conclusion. Draw their own conclusions from this, what he was doing.

In their minds, at once, there would arise, oh, he's setting up another Israel, is he? Oh, you see. And so he was. Then he's got the point.

With him, the one that has been is set aside and repudiated, as we have been seeing. With him, another is brought in. To these twelve, he says, you shall sit upon twelve thrones.

Now, you know quite well, or many of you do, what this number stands for in Bible symbolism. It is the number of government or of administration. Israel knew that.

And so again, the implication of choosing twelve, he's setting up a new government, a new administration. And so he was. But a very different one, as we shall see.

It is the number of government. You see, by its multiples, three and four. Three is always the number of divine fullness of government.

Heavenly government. The very Godhead. Over all.

Four is quite obviously the number of earthly government. That is, everything that belongs down here is governed by four. North, south, east and west comprehend the earth.

Spring, summer, autumn, winter comprehend the seasons. And so we could go on. Heavenly and earthly government embodied in this number twelve.

And that, again, is very significant as to his acts. How much we must push aside the details and valuable materials in all this. Know that to Abraham the covenant was made.

And to the seashore, stars of the heavens, his seed should be but his seed. Now we call back our phrase from Paul. Not seed, but his seed, which is Christ.

Heavenly and earthly government in Christ. I think that's enough to be indicative of what we are after. Is that the choice of twelve brought first of all into view the new Israel.

And then the new government by that Israel of heaven and earth. And that's the church as represented by the twelve. But this Israel, we repeat once more, is very different.

It is a spiritual seed. The fruit of his travail. The seed which he shall see because thereof, according to Isaiah.

It is spiritual as a people inheriting, taking over the real spiritual meaning of that nation called Israel. The prince with God. The prince with God.

There inherent in the very name is the governmental element. Now of the Israel after the flesh, many things were said about their preeminence being head of the nation. The head and not the tail and so on.

That has failed. Where they are concerned. But you see, God's principles don't go when God's instruments fail him.

When anything which God suddenly chooses to express his principles fails so to do. He doesn't abandon the principles. He may have to abandon the vessel or the instrument that he'll go on with his principles.

And so the principles is taken over. And the new Israel becomes the fulfillment of this conception. A prince with God.

The head and not the tail. The head of the nation. Now that is the setting.

Let us get closer to it. Two major aspects to that. Firstly the essential nature of this Israel.

And then the essential apprenticeship unto the kingdom. Firstly then the essential nature. We have said this seed of Christ is spiritual in constitution.

We spent a lot of time on that this morning in John 3. But let us just touch it again. You see, in the Israel after the place you have an actual people on this earth whom you could recognize any day. You could see that they were physically and in every other way a nation.

A people. Now however it may manifest itself in us physically that is not the constitution of the new Israel. It is not now a physical constitution.

A constitution of physical features. It is essentially a spiritual constitution. That is it has to do not with anything outward at all in the first place.

It has to do with character. Character. It is an Israel constituted on the basis of another character.

And that character is Christ. It's very constitution is Christ. It is constituted with a faculty for knowing.

For knowledge. Which is altogether outside of the reach and range of any other kind of person. Well there again we come back to John 3. Let the man be born.

He cannot see, he cannot enter, he cannot see, he cannot enter. Kingdom. He is beyond him in sight, in knowledge, in understanding.

Say nothing of inheritance. This. This Israel is an Israel which has a seeing capacity.

Which the old had not and no other has. It is constituted that way. This is, mark you dear friends, not only a statement of truth.

This is a very certain thing to us as to our being children of God. Being the spiritual children of the tribale of Christ. This is not something that is extra to the Christian life if you advance to certain heights and degrees.

Right from birth you and I, every one of us ought to have a faculty of spiritual understanding and perception and knowledge that no other person has that does not belong to this kingdom. A lot of time we could spend in pointing out the tragedies that have come into Christianity because of failure to recognize that or to live up to it. I would go as far as to say that the largest proportion of all the trouble between Christians is due to either a lack of or a failure to live on the basis of spiritual understanding.

Spiritual discernment, spiritual perception, spiritual knowledge. Any amount of natural knowledge in the Christian world. Bible knowledge, prophetic knowledge and what not.

But spiritual knowledge is a rare commodity and yet it is supposed to be a constituent of our new birth from above. A faculty that we ought to have. Now if some of you are saying then woe is me, I don't know much about that.

The Lord is simply saying to you, yes this is yours by right. It is not some extra thing to which you attain by struggle and effort or by years of laborious Christian living or by some specific act that is some terrific upheaval in your spiritual life. It's a birth thing, a birth right.

You have a right to this. If only you come the Lord's way. You will know.

Well perhaps after all you do know, although you don't know that you know. You do know. You've got a new sense, a new faculty, a new something in you that makes you know to some little measure at least what is of the Lord and what is not.

What is spiritual and what is not. But oh for the increase of that. It is the development of that, the increase of that which is the apprenticeship in the school of Christ.

We learn by mistakes. We learn by blunders. But the thing that we are learning is not just objective.

We are learning inwardly that such and such is not the way of life. And we should do well to avoid it. And such and such is the way of life.

And that's the way for us to go. We learn it inward. Knowledge.

A new kind of knowledge. And a new kind of power. This particular kind of seed or divine progeny has a power, an ability, a strength which is quite different.

Quite different. And in this apprenticeship, in this school, one of the things that we do learn if we are at pupils, if we are really abandoned to know the Lord. One thing that we do learn is the Lord on the one side undercuts and undermines our natural strength and brings us to positions where the very best natural strength of any kind cannot cope with the situation.

We've got to have a strength to go through that is not in us by nature at all even though we might be the very best specimen. Here then back to Nicodemus. You just cannot, said the Lord to Nicodemus.

You just cannot. You may be as willing as anybody can be. You may be as anxious and as interested, but what stands over you is cannot.

Great question arising again and again from Nicodemus' list. How? How? How? But this seed has something of a strength which is different. Quite different from all that.

An ability which is of another order. Paul spoke of it, he said, as of the ability which God gives. And so we could go on with the Constitution.

But it will all amount to this, that it is of another generation. Another generation. It is of the generation of Christ.

There are here capacities and possibilities and resources which are from heaven which cannot be accounted for on earth at all. You see the old Israel was in a symbolic or typical way put on to that basis. We said this morning they were put on to the basis of Christ.

They were put on to the basis of Christ. We saw how they were put on to the basis of Christ. Just rooted up from the land when everything went wrong with them spiritually and morally and they were unworthy of the name of Israel.

Those twelve sons of Jacob and their children behaving as they were, putting Joseph in the pit and deceiving their father and counseling murder and whatnot and the exposure of them before him when they didn't recognize him in Egypt. The sorry tale of Israel. What a breakdown.

What a fall. So they must be put on to the ground of Christ through death and resurrection. Come into the meaning of his tribulation.

Be born out of it. Then their afterlife constituted on the basis of Christ so that there is no accounting for their bread or their water or anything else for forty years in the wilderness on any other ground than heaven. Moses gave not the bread but my father.

It was heavenly. You see the point. Constituted according to Christ with something, let me repeat, which is not explicable on any other ground than it is from heaven.

Thank God for that. It's the most wonderful thing. Most wonderful thing to live on Christ on heavenly ground.

Perhaps you think this spiritual life must be a very difficult one. Well, to the flesh of course it is. To the natural man of course it is.

To the self life it is. But it's a romance in the spiritual life. What the Lord does.

Oh, it's just wonderful. How my heart went with my brother yesterday afternoon about ministry on this matter. Wouldn't we like, oh yes, wouldn't our flesh like always to have it all well in advance and worked out and mapped out and planned and have it all there so that there's really no trouble at all.

And the Lord shuts us and holds us and waits so often to the last minute and gets us into a perfect travail over a message. And day comes. That is the story of 30 years here, dear friends.

It's something wonderful. It's something wonderful. Well, that by the way.

But this is no mere theoretical sort of thing. It is marvellously real. And really marvellous.

That is the nature of this new Israel. The nature, the constitution. This seed is a mystery.

This Israel is a mystery. That is, it cannot be understood by natural means at all. Everything to do with it is a mystery.

Now, don't you take that in a wrong way and interpret it to mean that you've got to be very mysterious people. A lot of people trying to be mysterious and think that that's spirituality. But a mystery.

It's the mystery of a life. Of course, life in the natural is always a mystery. You can't explain life.

You don't know what life is. The greatest reality and yet the thing which is most impossible of explanation is life. But in the realm of the spiritual there's another life and it is a mystery, this life.

It's a life that persists in spite of everything that can be set against it. There's a mystery about the church. There's a mystery about the people of God.

A mystery about this life. How it survives. It survives.

It goes on. It increases. The mystery about it.

There's nothing in all this universe which is so set against as this life of the people of God. All the dark, sinister forces of Satan's kingdom have but one ultimate object. That is, one way to quench this life.

All the experiences through which the Lord allows his people to go and sometimes takes them, which looked at naturally, could be said to be death. Death are only allowed to bring out this wonderful reality that there is a life which put to the test, subjected to every kind of test, survives, overcomes. It's a mystery.

Just a mystery. Its power, its persistence and its progress. The more they were oppressed, the more they grew.

Carry that over into the spiritual Israel. Looks today very much as though evil forces, hell and men, are reducing by putting to death, by driving out of triumphant faith many of the Lord's people. But that's not the

end of the story.

These people are fools. They can't read history. They can't read history.

If only they saw what they were doing, they would see that they are doing the very thing which is going to accomplish what they are trying to frustrate. Oh no, don't you make any mistake about it. Long centuries of terrible ordeals have proved this.

Here's something you cannot explain or account for naturally. There's a persistence and a growth here. That's a mystery.

It's a mystery. Now that should be true of every child. So take hope, take heart, dear child, tried child of God.

You're feeling that it's more death than life. The ordeal is tending to be one of reduction. That's not the end of the story.

Not the end of the story. Now more than half my time this afternoon is gone and I haven't touched half of what I must say. But I try to condense it.

I come to this matter of the essential apprenticeship unto the kingdom of God, as I am calling it. That is, he chose twelve. Now more than half my time this afternoon is gone and I haven't touched half of what I must say.

But I try to condense it. I come to this matter of the essential apprenticeship unto the kingdom of God, as I am calling it. That is, he chose twelve.

He's seen the significance of his acts. And then that they might be with him and that he might send them forth. Two halves of one thing.

Essential half be with him. Why? That he might teach, that he might instruct, that he might equip in order that he might send forth. All going forth must issue from the closest association with Christ in his school.

And all association with Christ in his school must issue in going forth. The Lord does not want monasteries and cloisters and people shut up like that always. Always studying and learning.

Accumulating knowledge of things even though they might be heavenly things. Every bit of God imparted knowledge is to be for practical purposes. And all practical activity which does not come out of God imparted knowledge will not effect the kingdom of God.

So these are the two things. Now then, Christ teaching, instructing, training the twelve. Note that it all came out of his own spiritual life.

It did not come out of books. It did not come out of the school. The thing which battles the scholars of his day.

Christ has this man, these things, this knowledge, having never learned. He was not a man of the school. He was not a man of the library, of the study.

It all came out of his own spiritual life. He had a spiritual knowledge which was unique. It differed entirely from every other kind of knowledge.

One thing, and this was the basis of everything, his knowledge of the Father was unique. Look at this in Luke 10. You hardly need to turn to it as you know it perhaps so well.

But here it is, Luke 10, verse 22. All things have been delivered unto me of my Father, and no one knoweth who the Son is, save the Father, and who the Father is, save the Son. And he, to whomsoever the Son willeth, revealed him.

No one knoweth the Father. Who the Father is, save the Son. Sweetest statement, that.

Tremendous claim, that. His knowledge of the Father, I have said, was unique. And that knowledge sprang out of spiritual oneness with the Father.

Not studying, not contemplating, but inward spiritual oneness with the Father. Now, those of you to whom it may be of importance and help to note, note this. The Fatherhood of God was not a doctrine preached by Jesus to the general public.

Now you can testify if you like, going to the word. It was a mystery disclosed in private to his disciples. The Fatherhood of God was not a doctrine with Jesus.

It was not a theory. It was a reality in his own spiritual life and in his own spiritual being. To the Twelve, he did not even give the teaching, the theory, of the Fatherhood of God.

He made it real. He made it real. And not by argument, not by argument, nor by much speaking.

But because the Father was to him the supreme reality in his life, came out of that. His teaching came out of that. His training of the Twelve came out of that.

And you note how much there is with them in his teaching of them and in his training of them which centred in the Father. How much he said about the Father. The Father.

My Father. Your Father. Father.

You are not impressed? Look it up again. This was the heart of everything in his training of them. When it comes to prayer, it's all based upon that.

Saying, after this manner, Our Father. Our Father. And I say it's something on the inside of the school.

It's not for the general public. It's a mystery disclosed alone to them inside. But it is made real.

Dear friends, this new Israel has got to be constituted on that basis. Just as he trained the Twelve on the basis of his union with the Father. So all our training will be by our union with Christ in the same vital way as his union with the Father.

So that we in union with the Son ourselves come into the mystery and wonder of that Fatherhood. It's a secret within the theme, within the Israel of God. A secret.

The de-wonderful secret of Fatherhood. Not a title but a great reality. Oh what a lot we would be saved from if only that became real in our being as it was in his.

Just note him in this manner. From beginning to end it's just that. His reference is to the Father.

His deference is to the Father. His appeal is always to the Father. The controlling reality in all his movements is the Father.

Everything for him is coming from the Father. The last words that he uttered referred to the Father. Father into thy hand I commit my spirit.

It was that dear friend that kept him strong. It was that that kept him right. It was the great motive force in his refusing everything that the devil offered him.

The motive power of enduring suffering. It was everything to him in every way a deep inward reality. And I suggest to you that we lack something in Constitution if we lack an adequate sense of that spiritual union with him as our Father in Christ Jesus.

Get us near to that. Get him as near to that. You begin to see something because you see he sought to inculcate into them the new Israel the meaning of this relationship between himself as son and father.

It was a practical account in their relationship with one another. He was not constituting a kind of clientele and following a new movement of people of common interest. He was constituting a family.

The apostle in the letter to the Hebrews makes that so explicit, doesn't he? He is not ashamed to call them brethren. Say, I who declare thy name unto my brethren. I and the children whom God has given me.

Now in effect and in definite statement he is saying, look here, you are all brethren because you are all of one family, children of one Father in this deepest reality in your Constitution. That's the basis on which you should regard one another, behave toward one another, cherish and care for one another. Even as I have loved you.

See, this is the same thing. Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them. Unto the uttermost, unto the end.

That is only making practical in their corporate life the relationship between himself and his father, father and himself. It was a training. Mark you, it was a discipline.

A real discipline. For if ever there were twelve diverse kinds of people on this earth, these twelve were. Yes, you've got to hear something of every kind.

Temperamentally, constitutionally, dispositionally. Naturally they would fly to fragments at any moment. There's nothing here naturally of cohesion, integration.

But under his hand, in his cool, something is happening, going to happen. Something is going to happen. At any rate, if the symbolism of the book of the Revelation in its last chapters means anything at all, there's a fairly hollid thing here.

Twelve foundations, twelve apostles of the Lamb, making one hollid basis for the everlasting kingdom. Something's happened. Something's happened.

Now that is what the Lord is trying to do with us. If you feel that you can't get on with another child of God and want to get into the realm where the Lord doesn't answer your prayer, ask him to move them away. Or move you away.

That's a prayer that he doesn't answer. Until something has happened. Until something has happened.

We have to go through all the sandpapering and difficulty of these contradictory constitutions and dispositions and temperaments amongst the Lord's children. And it seems the Lord does nothing about it on the outside. Oh, wouldn't it be good if only he would take that very difficult person away.

No, he's going to do something on the inside. He may take them away, but not until that something on the inside has happened, been done. That's the apprenticeship unto the kingdom.

How can we rule, reign together in the kingdom and govern if we are there going to be all in contradictory positions, conflicts. No, he's not going to have a kingdom like this. Nor a government like this.

So, their being with him was a deep practical instruction and teaching in all this meaning of the fatherhood of God, this deep secret and mystery to find its expression in a corporate life. Now, you see, I've embarked upon funding this matter of training which covers a vast amount of ground, many other aspects from the one that I have meant. But I conclude by pointing out, and it is of such tremendous importance that we recognize this, whatever it may have been in this apprenticeship, this training for the kingdom, in relation to the kingdom, whatever it may have been, in every one of its aspects.

Shall I pause to say, dear friends, that while it is true the kingdom came on the day of Pentecost, the New Testament speaks of the kingdom in three tenses. It has come, it is coming, and it is yet coming. And it is unto that coming now and yet coming that you and I are being trained.

We are now in school for the present coming of the kingdom. It won't come only through the discipline of those who are called into fellowship with Christ. And the final manifestation and appearing of the kingdom is something for which a great preparation is going on.

Preparation in us all. We're in school unto the kingdom. Now, whatever may be the aspect of the training, notice how Jesus held everything unto the cross.

He had them apart with himself. He left the multitude. He left the world.

He got them to himself. He is saying deep things, wonderful things. And then he heads it all up to, he's going up to Jerusalem and being delivered into the hands of the rulers and being crucified.

That was the thing they could not expect. They could not understand. That was the thing that stumbled them.

But he held everything to that. As though, he was saying, all this that I have been saying to you, all this that I have been holding up to you, all this for which I have chosen you, all this for which you have been in the school with me, is based upon the cross. It's based upon the cross.

Not one bit of it can be realized apart from the cross. You can come into not a fragment of it, only by way of the cross. The cross is essential to your being, this is right.

You will be born out of that tribulation. Before that you will be scattered, every man. How true it was.

But born as an organic entity out of his travail, out of his tomb, out of his resurrection, standing up together on the day of Pentecost. I don't think they'd ever been together quite like that before. Some knew togetherness.

They are born on the day of Pentecost. The newest bride is here, been spoken about, prepared for, had much instruction, much teaching, much handling, but wanted the cross to produce it. So for the Israelite God, the cross is essential.

The cross is essential to the kingdom, the reign. The cross is essential to the service, the administration. I am tremendously impressed, as I turn back to that part of the prophecies of Isaiah, from which we have taken our basic passage, to note that the real beginning of that chapter is not with what is marked out in our arrangement, verse 1 of chapter 3. The real beginning of Isaiah 53, as we call it, is verse 13 of chapter 52.

Behold my servant. Behold my servant. And then you follow on.

The suffering servant. But what is said of him immediately? He shall be very high. How? Well, the next.

To prolong his days, the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. He shall see the travail of his foes, and be satisfied. Who is this? The servant of the Lord.

See? Behold my servant. He shall dwell. They were to be with him in the service of the kingdom.

His fellow servants. They were to be the servants. You notice the margin here in Luke 10.22 says that some authorities add, and he called them apostles.

Well, here we are. Here is the whole service of the kingdom fully in view. It's Isaiah 53.

Mainly 10 and 11. By the travail. By the travail.

It all comes out of the travail, dear friend. No other way. Something has got to be undone in the cross.

Disintegrated, broken up, and scattered. It's a false thing that cannot stand and will not go through. Proved.

Proved to be. Unforgivable. Another thing must be brought in, which is spiritual, which is of the spiritual, which can go through.

The cross is the instrument, darling, to bring out the new Israel, the new kingdom, and the new servant of the kingdom. I trust you'll be able to gather something from all this. My trouble has been that I've got too much, that's all.

That's the mystery of it all. But the Lord does say something to every one of our hearts from out of this mass. Show us what kind of people he is.

Our forgetting. Why he is taking the way with us that he is. He has in view a service here, and more so hereafter, which requires a people of this kind.

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