

The Priesthood Of God (Part 9)

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We are going to begin this sermon by turning to I Peter 2, verses 4 and 5, and 9 and 10.

I Peter 2:4-5 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

At the conclusion of my previous sermon in this series on the priesthood, I hurriedly went through an explanation that I believe involves us, and I think we need to go through this explanation once again more slowly with a bit more detail.

I have adjusted the order of the scriptures and the expounding somewhat, and thus hopefully produced a clear picture of the instruction contained in the similarities and differences between the four tribal listings. No two of those four are exactly alike. I am not going to go into every detail, but just a general overview of the differences between Jacob's listing in Genesis 49, Moses' listing in Deuteronomy 33, the marching-order listing in Numbers 10, and the list in Revelation 7.

I also believe that it is time to once again remind us of the specific objective of what we are being prepared for. That is why I read a couple of those verses out of I Peter 2. We are being prepared to become a kingdom of priests, and all of the symbolism we have been exposed to in this series is important for our preparation.

Through symbolism we are being taught the characteristics of our spiritual High Priest, Jesus Christ—characteristics that we need for working under Him. The particular aspect we are now covering ties the New Covenant church to the worship operations under the Old Covenant.

It helps to show how God, from the very beginning, has been purposely heading toward a very definite conclusion. To reach it we are going to have to live by every word of God. What God has recorded in Leviticus remains pertinent to this very day to those who are called. What the physical represents is what is important. Ours is a path to holiness as co-heirs with Christ, while being prepared to serve in God's kingdom as priests under Him. We are children of promise—the promise that God gave to Abraham almost four thousand years ago.

Recall first that the explanation involved the listing of the tribes on the onyx stone on the shoulder of the high priest's adornment, the precious stones and their order on the high priest's breastplate, and the tribal listings that are given in Revelation 7—that is of the 144,000.

Let us go back to Exodus 28:9-11.

Exodus 28:9-11 "Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: six of their names on one stone and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth. With the work of an engraver in stone, like the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold.

This distinction here is that the shoulder stones, the onyx stones, were listed according to birth order. Now it is Jacob's order list that is in birth order. Note that all the names were on one type of stone (an onyx). The birth order combined with one type of stone indicates commonality and equality. The symbolism here is commonality and equality, and thus all the tribes are essentially equal. In this listing, no individual distinctive characteristics between the twelve are emphasized other than the birth order. Every person belonging to whatever tribe they were born into is perceived on common ground.

We are going to go back to the New Testament, to Galatians 3, and we will find a commonality with something here in the New Testament under the New Covenant. Paul writes the following:

Galatians 3:27-29 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

This is a parallel to the onyx stone, and we too, as part of the body of Jesus Christ, share in a commonality, but not a commonality of natural birth into a common human family, but a commonality of spiritual birth into a common spiritual family in what are called "chosen," "redeemed through Christ's blood," "accepted," and "adopted" regardless of nationality. So this is not a normal birth, but it is occasioned by faith in God's calling and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

One thing is clear, just from our own casual observations that there are differences between us, we all have Jesus Christ in common as our Savior, our Guide, and our High Priest. He is not only a High Priest, He is also our Shepherd as well, and it is He who bears us on His shoulder, so to speak, as we make our walk toward the Kingdom of God.

That symbolism is very clear in regard to the high priest, with the onyx stones on his shoulder, and it is symbolic that the high priest—the Aaronic type—had to bear, as it were, the children of Israel on his shoulders spiritually—a very, very responsible position.

Now back to Exodus 28, verse 15. We are moving from the onyx stone.

Exodus 28:15-21 "You shall make the breastplate of judgment. Artistically woven according to the workmanship of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, you shall make it. It shall be doubled into a square: a span shall be its length, and a span shall be its width [roughly 9 inches by 9 inches]. And you shall put settings of stones in it, four rows of stones: The first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; this shall be the first row; the second row shall be a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold settings. And

the stones shall have the names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes.

The breastplate stones are listed according to *tribal* order, not birth order. A different jewel represents each tribe. Does that not already begin to tell you there are differences between the tribes? All the jewels are valuable, but no two stones were alike. This suggests that our attention is purposely drawn toward the general differences, and therefore the services and rewards given each; that is, tribal gifts—strengths and weakness, which they had within them—peculiarities and tendencies.

The jewel arrangement was also partly necessary because Joseph, who was not literally the firstborn, was given the *right* of firstborn when Reuben, the *true* firstborn, disqualified himself. That shook up the order of the jewels, and thus Jacob appointed Joseph firstborn, and he was given the firstborn's right of inheritance that normally would have gone to Reuben.

Now to be named "firstborn" is a distinctive honor setting the one named apart from all of his brothers. Joseph therefore received a double portion of the inheritance, and God backed Jacob's decision, and the Joseph tribe thus became two tribes—Ephraim and Manasseh. That made thirteen tribes, and that would have upset the order, and the configuration of the jewels, because it is an uneven number, and that would have destroyed the balance of the four rows, each of the three jewel arrangements on the order of the breastplate.

A careful reading shows that the Levite tribe was not listed among those represented by a jewel on the breastplate, and of course Joseph's name was not listed either. But with the addition of Ephraim and Manasseh—that is, Joseph's double portion—that brought the breastplate jewel number back to an even twelve.

Incidentally, I have no idea why they are all different. I have some ideas that I can get out of the scriptures, but I think it is interesting to notice this peculiarity. Why did God permit this? Why did He inspire it?

Turn to Numbers 10:14.

Numbers 10:14-17 The standard of the camp of the children of **Judah** set out first according to their armies; over their army was Nahshon the son of Amminadab. Over the army of the tribe of the children of **Issachar** was Nethanel the son of Zuar. And over the army of the tribe of the children of **Zebulun** was Eliab the son of Helon. Then the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of **Gershon** and the sons of **Merari** set out, carrying the tabernacle.

Judah was set out first, not Reuben. Right behind Judah was Issachar, and right behind those two was Zebulun. Very interestingly, the next tribe in line was two-thirds of the tribe of Levi. Levi is not named, but two of his sons *are* named in verse 17: Gershon and Merari. It also stipulates what they are doing in the marching order. They are carrying the tabernacle. It had to be broken down into all of its pieces, and distributed among those two tribes. They had test them onto their shoulders, and when they were marching, those two tribes (both sons of Levi) were carrying the entire tabernacle in all its various pieces on their shoulders.

Numbers 10:18-20 And the standard of the camp of **Reuben** set out according to their armies; over their army *was* Elizur the son of Shedeur. Over the army of the tribe of the children of **Simeon** was Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. And over the army of the tribe of the children of **Gad** was Eliasaph the son of Deuel.

Then came Reuben (in row 2 of the breastplate), Simeon, and Gad. Interestingly again, now comes another descendant—a son of Levi: the Kohathites. This incidentally was the tribe of Moses and Aaron. The Kohathites carried all of the tabernacle furniture. They broke it down into its various pieces. They carried the burnt altar. They carried the incense altar. They carried the watering trough for the laver (as it is more properly called). They carried the candelabra. They also carried the mercy seat and the ark.

Numbers 10:21 Then the **Kohathites** set out, carrying the holy things. (The tabernacle would be prepared for their arrival.)

After the Kohathites came Ephraim and Manasseh and Benjamin—Joseph tribe's (and his brother's), but Joseph is not mentioned. Then in the fourth row came Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.

Numbers 10:22-27 And the standard of the camp of the children of **Ephraim** set out according to their armies; over their army was Elishama the son of Ammihud. Over the army of the tribe of the children of **Manasseh** was Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. And over the army of the tribe of the children of **Benjamin** was Abidan the son of Gideon. Then the standard of the camp of the children of **Dan** (the rear guard of all the camps) set out according to their armies; over their army was Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. Over the army of the tribe of the children of **Asher** was Pagiel the son of Ocran. And over the army of the tribe of the children of **Naphtali** was Ahira the son of Enan.

One of the interesting things about Judah given the preeminence at this early time is that God had not yet appointed them or gave them to be the royal tribe from which the Messiah would come. God apparently knew what He was going to do, and He put them in the forefront, leading the pack, so to speak, but He did not name them yet as to what they would be.

The marching order of all of the tribes is not specifically explained. We can only speculate about Judah leading things off, because we know what happened later, so the marching order is not specifically explained. The other two *were* specifically explained. One was the birth order, and one was the tribe order, but the marching order is not specifically explained, but we can get something that is, I think, a right explanation for at least part of it.

Most of the researchers feel that because of Judah leading the show, you might say, and because of the tribes of Levi doing what they were doing in the place they were given, that all the rest were placed in the order they were, by God's design, according to the services they were to render for all of Israel. It does not mean one is more important than the other, but there was some reason God had them that way.

It is also believed, it seems unanimously, that the jewels on the breastplate were arranged in the same order as the marching order, and that is picked up from the very fact that Judah is mentioned first in one, and the stone also represented Judah. It was the sardius. So that gives us the order, then, of all

the other stones. If you recall, Hebrew reads from right to left. English reads from left to right, so you would have to then say the order of the stones begins with Judah at the top right, and moves to the left, and to Judah's left would be Issachar's stone, and to his left would be the Zebulun stone. Then down in the next row would come the sons of Levi, but the main tribe there after that would be Reuben, and then Simeon, and to his left Gad, and so forth all the way to the end. But again, remember there is no stone for Levi. There is no stone for any of his sons. They had something far more valuable than that. They were carrying the tabernacle and they were carrying the furniture for the tabernacle.

If you examine that marching order, you will then find that whenever they were on the move, the Levites were always surrounded front and back by the armies of the other states, and therefore, you might say, in this sense, what they were doing was more important in the marching than what any other tribe was doing, and therefore they were protected by the other tribes because they were carrying the tabernacle and its furniture. They were the tribe that was least likely to be attacked because it was the job of the other tribes to protect them.

We will take this one step further, and that is this. Whenever they stopped, whenever they camped, the Israelites formed a huge circle with all of the tribes in their order, beginning with Judah. I say "circle," but what I really mean and am leading to is that they surrounded the tribe of Levi. In actual fact though, they were put in the same order as the breastplate. From the east tribe would be Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, and then to the south would be Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. Then on the west side would be Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, and on the north side Dan, Asher, and Naphtali, and right in the middle is the tabernacle and all of its furniture, and the tribe of Levi.

Now even the Levites were surrounding the tabernacle (the house of God, the place where God symbolically lived and where all of its furniture was) and so, in one sense, the Levites were the last line of defense should somebody attack and break through the other tribes.

One more thing that is interesting I feel is that whenever they set up, no tribe other than Levi was allowed to be any closer to the tabernacle than a Sabbath day's journey. They had to keep their distance. That is where the Sabbath day's journey concept came from. All of the tribes, all four sides, but the very closest tents to the tabernacle—the tents where they were living—were not allowed to be any closer than a Sabbath day's journey to the tabernacle.

See, God is teaching you something there—something that you and I need to take into consideration whenever we think about the blessing we have been given. We are allowed to go right into God's presence—right into the Holy of Holies spiritually. The Israelites had no chance to get close to God. They could not go to Him.

If you can recall of any outline, I guess you might say, even of the temple, there were these large courts all around it. If you were moving out from the temple doors, the first thing you would come to would be the court of the priests. They were allowed to at least get fairly close. Then the next court was the court of the men. That is as close as they could get. And then the next court was the court of the women, and then everybody else (meaning the nation, the Gentiles) was outside of that.

I have been told that the Jews, the Israelitish people, even had a sign there to the Gentiles: "If you step inside this sign, you are a dead man." The temple police would take their life.

Again, the understanding here is this. What a blessing we have. Jesus Christ has won that for us, that we are allowed right into the Holy of Holies. There is nobody keeping us out, except ourselves. What an awesome thing!

If we accept the birth order (given in Genesis 29 and 30) as the original listing of the tribes, Jacob's order (in Genesis 49) is different from the birth order (Genesis 49). Moses' listing in Deuteronomy 33 is different from Jacob's. Simeon is not even mentioned. He only lists eleven of them. It is true that apparently the tribe of Simeon was so violent, such a rough people, and we do know this is true, that there is no land assigned to the Simeonites in Israel. They were there. They were scattered in order to keep their violent nature scattered all over Israel rather than them being concentrated in one place.

The marching order is different from the other two. No Joseph is listed, and neither is Levi listed, except through their children.

In Revelation 7, interestingly, Joseph is added back to the list. Dan is taken out of the list. Manasseh is in the list, but Ephraim is not in the list. His place is taken by Joseph. You can just write them all down. That is what I did and compared them. You can see they are different. No two are alike, and that is kind of interesting. If God gave each man who prophesied or wrote or whatever, his head in doing it, putting them down the way he thought of them, well fine; but I think that God would overrule and do a little inspiring if the list did not agree with what He wanted down there.

Here we are, getting very close to the time of the listing in Revelation 7. Brethren, why is Manasseh there, but Ephraim is not? Why is Joseph listed, but Ephraim is not? What caused whoever inspired John when he wrote that list, did John just come up with it? Why did he not think of Ephraim? I do not know, but being that God is ultimately the One who inspired the Bible, there is some reason. Now there are some people who think they understand why Dan is not listed, and why Ephraim is not listed, but those things, brethren, I feel are things we do not know for sure, and it will be nothing more than a guess.

You might wonder why in the world has he gone in all of this material about the order of things. Well, brethren, this is very important to you and me, and we are going to go back to I Corinthians 12 where a principle is involved that is important for you and me to understand. Actually, in a way, it fits right into Ronny Graham's sermonette ["Test the Spirit"], and the lack of humility that was attributed to Cassius Clay—Muhammed Ali—or whatever you want to call him, and of course others as well.

I want you to look at verse 4 of I Corinthians 12.

I Corinthians 12:4-6 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

Now start making a parallel in your mind to these four lists, and maybe especially the ones that were given by Jacob, by Moses, and by the marching order. God does things carefully. He is the ultimate inspirer, and there is some reason why these things are put in the order they are, but I have to assume, and I think it is a safe assumption that God wanted them in the order that He caused them to be listed there. It does not necessarily mean that one is greater than the other, but He has His reasons.

The same God is working with you and me, and the same kind of mind is inspiring things in regard to His church, and so we find already here that there are diversities of activities.

Remember I said earlier that it looks as though they are in the order they are because that is the way God wanted them to be, especially the marching order, and maybe the breastplate order because it is the breastplate of judgment and has to do with discerning and judging. All of the jewels were different. They were all valuable. They were all precious, but each one was different. God put the tribes in the order He wanted them to be in marching, and where they lined up around the tabernacle whenever they stopped.

Now back to the church.

I Corinthians 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:

Remember I said God broke them up like this so they could serve the rest of the companies of people. They were marching through the wilderness. Now in like manner, in the church, there is a place for everybody, and God wants everybody in his place.

I Corinthians 12:8-13 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

I Corinthians 12:18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

Paul was using the human body as his model. I am sure that he was very familiar with the Old Testament listing of the tribes and the order that they were in. They were in a particular order for a reason that God determined. The human body has every part of its body, its organs and so forth, placed exactly where God wants them, and they are operating in the way God wants them to operate. Each has a responsibility assigned to it. Paul's instruction is patterned for you and me in regard to the church.

I Corinthians 12:28-29 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? [Is the whole body a stomach?] Are all prophets? [Is the whole body a mouth?] Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?

Paul is teaching that the pattern we see in the Old Testament exists also in the church. I am not saying it is always easy for us to find our place. It would be nice maybe if God spoke up every once in a while and did something that we could very easily understand and say, "I want you here." He does not always do that.

I want you to look in John 14. Listen to what Jesus says at this very difficult time.

John 14:1-3 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

In spite of the somberness of the things Jesus was talking about regarding His death, He is reassuring them and us that there is a place for each of us within the body, and of course within His kingdom as well.

We are going to take this one step further. I know you are familiar with this, but we are going to go back to the book of Revelation, chapter 14, verse 3. Verse one tells us it is the 144,000. In verse 3 it says:

Revelation 14:3-4 They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

The 144,000 are clearly distinguished as being the firstfruits to God. That of course is the church. They have already been assigned, in general, to be Jesus Christ's retinue. These people go wherever the Lamb goes. That is, His own personal retinue. Persons in positions here are not specifically named, and this is why in I John 3:2, John said, "We do not know what we shall be, but we shall be like Him." He meant that we do not know specifically where we are going to be assigned, but we will be there.

We are still on the same subject because there is part of this I have not finished yet.

These are things, which in the early days of the church, you were involved in studying, but we are going to go all the way back to Genesis 12 again to pick up on the promise that was made to Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This is where the promise regarding the Israelitish people begins. I want you to notice though what God said to Abram. He said, "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." That statement takes the promise to Abram beyond the Israelitish people. It does not say it specifically, but generally it does say it there. This particular blessing is a prophecy that applies to spiritual salvation through Jesus Christ. Jesus was born as a human being, directly descended from Abraham through David.

Now turn to Genesis 17:3-7. Here the promise to Abram in chapter 12 is expanded a bit.

Genesis 17:3-7 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

That statement in verse 7 clearly expands the original promise into eternity. It will be an everlasting covenant. I think I mentioned this to you the last time that we in the Church of God have subconsciously, I think, tended to limit this already fantastic promise to the Israelitish physical descendants of Abraham, and I think partly the reason is because of the influence in the teaching of the *United States and the British Commonwealth in Prophecy*, because that whole booklet was about the Israelitish people and the expansion of it. But now we are into the church era. We are looking at an everlasting covenant, and we cannot afford in our own minds to leave the Gentiles out of this picture.

Turn now to Exodus 12:48-49.

Exodus 12:48-49 And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you."

Here we are only in the book of Exodus, time wise only a couple of hundred years from Abraham, and God is already making it clear that the covenant is open to the Gentiles. We know from history, though, that the Israelitish people did not make much effort at preaching and getting converts from the Gentiles. Well, that changed pretty rapidly after Christ's resurrection, because, by chapter 10, God directed Peter to the Gentiles. It was not long after that when the Apostle Paul was called, and he was sent out by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and so vigorous educational activities through the preaching of the Gospel and through conversion began to be made toward the Gentiles.

Now despite this, even to today—in fact, I would have to say all through the generations, the decades, a couple of millennia, from the time of Acts the tenth chapter—almost all efforts have been to Israelitish nations. It is not that the Gentiles were completely ignored, but it has just been the history of things. The Israelitish nations have always been the center and the focus of the message of Jesus Christ right on down to this day.

The Bible shows a very interesting thing regarding this. We are going to go back to the book of Galatians. This is just kind of an intermediate stop to the book of Ephesians. Remember that earlier we read Galatians 3:26-29, but here we are going to go to the beginning of that chapter and look at verse 6.

Galatians 3:6-8 Just as Abraham, "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed."

We read that all the way back in Genesis the 12th chapter. Now what is Paul doing here? He is reminding all of us that from the very beginning God had the Gentiles in mind, just as He did the Israelites. All nations.

Galatians 3:9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

As long as they do what Abraham did, and that is, to believe by faith.

Galatians 3:10-14 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

What we just read leads right into those very important verses beginning in verse 6, where by faith the Gentile and the Israelite, both together, become one in Jesus Christ. They are united regardless of race, regardless of ethnicity, as long as they meet the requirement—the same requirement that came upon Abraham, and that is to believe God and activate his faith.

This is an epistle written to a Gentile congregation. We are going to go to another epistle written to a Gentile congregation. We are going to go to Ephesians 2:11-23 as Paul continues on this theme.

Are you beginning to see we have got tribes listings in Revelation 7? They are all Israelitish tribes, but we are seeing here that God is piecing Gentiles together with the Israelites and making them a part of the tribes of Israel.

Ephesians 2:11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh.

Can you pick up on that? Paul, in a sense, was saying, "You are no longer Gentiles in the flesh." There was a time when they *were* Gentiles in the flesh, but now they are converted. Now they are in the church. Paul said that is the way it used to be. Their flesh has not changed one bit. Their parentage has not changed in a sense that they were born in a Gentile nation to Gentile people, but something has changed.

Ephesians 2:11-12 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— [Paul is saying that the Israelitish people called the Gentiles uncircumcised] that at that time you were without Christ, [Has something happened now that they are of Christ?] being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

By their being called of God, by repenting, by being converted, by receiving God's spirit, radical things had begun to take place in their mind and in their standing before God.

We have already seen that they are no longer Gentiles. Once they were, but as Paul was writing this, in God's eyes they no longer were, and they should not be, as it were, in the church's eyes either.

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

What were they far off from? One thing is that they were far off from the Israelites, the circumcised. Another thing they were far off from is that they were far off from Israel. They belonged to another nation. Not only that, they were far off from Christ and the covenant.

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

They are being drawn into a different circumstance altogether. Maybe you can think of Israel camping in the wilderness, and it is though people are being selected from the surrounding tribes that are out there, and they are a Sabbath day's journey away, but God is drawing them into the same area as the Levites, into the tabernacle.

Ephesians 2:13-17 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ, for He Himself is our peace, who has made both one [the circumcised and the uncircumcised, the Israelite and the Gentile] and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh [that is, by His death] the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, [He is blending them together. Can you remember Jesus' prayer to God in John 17? His prayer to God was "that You, God, make them one with us." This is what is happening.] and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body [the church] through the cross [the crucifixion], thereby putting to death the enmity [that is, making peace]. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

We are no longer a Sabbath day's journey away—both Israelite and the Gentile. So in verse 19 Paul concludes with the following:

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

That is an intriguing name—"fellow citizens with the saints." What are we citizens of? Well, in the largest most important sense, our citizenship is in heaven, but there is kind of like an intermediate step here we have not really covered yet.

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [not members of physical Israel].

That does not say, "not members of physical Israel." It says it in my margin because I wrote it in there, because the Israelites in the church are no longer, in God's eyes, citizens of Israel either. We still live there, but did I not just say to you that Paul says our citizenship is in heaven? I did, because that is what the Bible says, and that includes people who formerly were Gentiles.

And now, brethren, what *is* the household of God? It is His family. And what is the Kingdom of God? It is His family. It is the same thing, and that is why Paul said we are members of the household of God. Who is our Father? It is not Abraham, really. It is God. This is heavy stuff, but it is so important that we grasp this.

Ephesians 2:20-22 Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone [e is talking about the church—the body of Jesus Christ], in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Are you aware that in John 2, beginning in verse 18, Jesus prophesied there, saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"? He was talking about Himself. Here He was prophesying that He would become the temple. Do you know what He meant by that?

That early, He was already prophesying of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, of the building in Jerusalem. That did not happen until 70 AD, but Jesus was already prophesying that that temple was going to be destroyed, and that when He was resurrected, instead of the temple being central to the worship of God, *He* would be central to the worship of God; whereas in the days before that, God was accessed, as it were, through all of the temple services that were performed there. But once that temple was destroyed—actually before then—all worship to God would be funneled through Jesus Christ. Really interesting stuff.

There is one more thing I want to add here. I am going to read Ephesians 2, verses 11 and 12 from the Amplified Bible. If you have an Amplified Bible at home, it is good to get it out and go through it slowly and meditate on it. It is good to take note of these verses, because it reminds us of Israel's blessings and also the blessings of being in the church, because that provides us with a greater fullness than the Israelites of old had by far.

I wonder how many times we thank God in our prayers to Him, that we were born, that we live in Israel, whether it is the United States, or Canada, or Britain, what an advantage God has given to these nations, along with Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, and those democracies of Western Europe. All they had to do, brethren, was to reach out, and the Book was right there from which they could get guidance from the Eternal God. I feel absolutely certain that the great prosperity that the Israelitish nations have enjoyed through all of these millennia of time has been because the Book is in these lands, and in many cases the people were able to get at least some instruction from it.

Listen to the Amplified Version of Ephesians 2:11-12:

Ephesians 2:11-12 (*Amplified Version*) Therefore, remember that at one time you were Gentiles (heathens) in the flesh, called Uncircumcision by those who called themselves Circumcision, itself a mere mark in the flesh made by human hands. Remember that you were at that time separated (living apart) from Christ excluded from all part in Him, [the

kind of thing we have taken advantage of, or maybe failed to take advantage of even though it was here in these Israelitish lands] utterly estranged and outlawed from the rights of Israel as a nation, and strangers with no share in the sacred compacts of the Messianic promise with no knowledge of, or right in God's agreements, His covenants. And you [Gentiles] had no hope (no promise); you were in the world without God.

That never really happened to us anywhere near to the extent that it happened to the Gentiles, because always God's word was right at hand. Whether we took advantage of it or not, it was there, and some people *were* using it. Maybe they were unconverted, but they still had its direction.

Now what has happened to the Israelites, and what has happened to the Gentiles? Remember, in the eyes of God we are no longer citizens of Israel because the reality is, we are citizens of another nation He has named here in the book of Galatians.

Let us go back to the book of Galatians that was written to the heathen nations, I guess you might say.

Galatians 6:16 And as many as walk [live their lives] according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

This verse is telling us that there are now two Israels. You put this together with Ephesians 2, and there are two Israels. One is the physical nation that has existed for millennia of time, scattered at times, but that nation consists of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and it is still on earth to this day. But the Israel of God is not a physical nation. It is a spiritual nation that consists of the family of God. So there are very clearly now two Israels—the physical nation and the spiritual nation. That spiritual nation consists of those people who are part of the household of God, and that, brethren, is designated right in Galatians 6:16 as, "the Israel of God." That is quite a distinction. That is the one God claims He is the God of.

Israel has rejected the true God. They still exist, and God has plans for them, but all of those Gentiles and all of the Israelites are now part of the household of God, and that household of God is named by God as His—"the Israel of God."