

GENESIS
Week 41, chapter 48 Pt. 2

The last time we met, I spent a lot of time trying to establish just what Paul meant when he spoke of a “true” Israelite (or Jew), and that I have decided to describe that true Israelite as a “Spiritual” Israelite. That is, one who has the spirit of the Living God in Him, and who by means of faith in the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua, now embodies the ideals of Israel, which are expressed primarily in Torah. These ideals were originally only existent in Heaven, and were essentially contained in an attribute or essence of God who is called the Word (in Hebrew, Memra.....and in Greek, Logos). These Heavenly ideals were introduced in physical form at Mt. Sinai, and given to Moses as the Constitution of Israel.....what we call The Law, or the Torah. Later, the Word Himself donned flesh and blood, and visited us in the form of Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, what has this all to do with Genesis 48? Well, we’re closing in on that. Recall that the central theme of Genesis 48 is this Cross-Handled Blessing of the last Patriarch, Jacob (called Israel) upon Joseph’s two Egyptian born sons. And the effect of the blessing was that those two sons of Joseph were adopted by Jacob and placed on par with his other 12 sons.....those sons who we today call the 12 Tribes of Israel. Further, Jacob (called Israel) blessed the two boys with an especially important blessing upon Ephraim, who was the younger of the two. And, that blessing indicated that Ephraim was in some undisclosed manner going to be a blessing to all the nations of the world.....which by definition means GENTILE nations. Let’s recall that at this point in history, and in Scripture, that God saw the world as composed of two basic groups: Israel, and the nations. Or, in another way of saying it, Israel and gentiles.

Let’s continue with our study.

READ Numbers 34:13-28

Here’s the context of this passage: after 4 centuries in Egypt, the Israelites are free and being led by Moses. They had approached the promised land some years earlier, but when spies were sent out to reconnoiter the land, the majority of them said that although the promised land was just as wonderful as God said it was, the inhabitants were too many, too fierce, too powerful, for the Israelites to conquer. So, due to this lack of faith and an essentially rebellious attitude, God drove those 3 million Israelites back into the desert wilderness to wander for 38 more years.

Fast forward. Now with 40 years having passed since Israel left Egypt, and with the extremely elderly Moses still leading, at God’s direction the Hebrew tribes are again ready to move upon Canaan and take the land. The time at which God gives the land to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has arrived. Up until this time, God always spoke about giving the land to the Hebrews in the “future” tense: that is “I will give it you”. But, many things had to happen first. Now, the time has come and He gives it to them. Look at Numbers 34:1 “Adonai told Moshe to give this order to the people of

Israel: ‘when you enter the land of Ken’an, it will become your land to pass on as an inheritance.....’ That is, the answer to the question “WHEN will the land become the property of Abraham’s descendants?” has been answered: it occurs the moment this enormous throng of Israelites crosses over the Jordan, and sets foot on the land of Canaan. At **that** moment in history, Canaan became the property of the Israelites.....in God’s eyes..... and is to remain so.....forever.

Let me pause for a moment to let that sink in and to make a point. As we are Believers of the God of Israel, we have a decision to make. Do we believe His Word, or not? If we do, then right here in Numbers we understand that from the ONLY viewpoint that really matters.....Yehoveh’s..... that land in the Middle East that is today called Israel was transferred to all those folks Moses was leading, and it would remain so in perpetuity. If anyone ever asks you where it says that the Promised Land was actually given to Israel...when ownership and possession was transferred..... it is here in Numbers 34.

Even more, do you ever once see in Scripture the issue raised (as regards Canaan) of “who was there first”, or “what is fair” from a man’s point of view as a factor in who owns the land? Or do we ever find God directing Israel to take whatever action *avoids* war and brings peace raised in the Scripture concerning the land of Canaan? None of these issues has any bearing whatsoever upon God giving that land to Israel as a permanent possession. Therefore, as we can see by the various books and articles and debates about Israel.....whether it belongs to the Jews, whether parts of it should be given to the Palestinians out of someone’s sense of “fairness”, whether it just makes sense for Israel to have less land for their people in exchange for peace..... that in the end, none of this should matter one whit for a Believer of the God of Israel. The one and only issue that overrides all others is this: did God give the land to Israel, or not? And, that question is answered right here in Numbers 34. Not only did He give it to them, but also they took possession of it around 1300 BC.

Hear me: don’t EVER all into the trap of debating someone on the issue of Israel’s legitimacy on the basis of its historical or modern day geo-political realities. Because from that standpoint....which is, by definition, merely men’s various points of view and ideas of morality or fairness..... there are indeed reasonable sounding arguments as to whether Israel ought to have all that land or not. God is not the least bit impressed by those arguments. What matters is that God declared that land to belong to His people, Israel, and that is that. In fact, the Genesis 15 warning to all mankind that whoever curses Abraham’s Hebrew descendants will themselves be cursed, and whoever blesses them will be blessed, revolves around only two matters: the land of Israel and the people of Israel. Not one OR the other, but both. Do you stand with the Israelites as the apple of God’s eye, or do you see them as the source of many of the world’s problems and as rejected and replaced? Do you stand with the land of Israel as belonging exclusively to the Israelites...without compromise... or do you see this as simply a matter international political intrigue, strategic borders, obtaining oil, and making nice with the Muslims so they don’t keep blowing us up?

Let's look a little more at Numbers 34. And, as a point of reference, Numbers 34 occurs about 450 years AFTER the happenings of Genesis 48. So, between Jacob giving his Cross-handed Blessing, and the dividing up of the land of Canaan in Numbers 34, almost 5 centuries have elapsed. The gist of what we read in Numbers 34:13-28 is this: 2 of the tribes of Israel, and part of another tribe (the Bible says ½ of that tribe), made a decision NOT to enter into Canaan, but instead to make their homes on the EAST side of the Jordan River. These tribes were Rueben (remember, he was Jacob's actual biological first-born, but Rueben was passed over for the first-born inheritance), and Gad (Gad was one of the 3 tribes that made of the division if Israel that Rueben led), and apparently about half of the people who made up the tribe of Manasseh (one of the two Egyptian born sons of Joseph).

The remaining 9 tribes (of which Ephraim is one), plus the other half of the tribe of Manasseh that decided it wanted to go on into the promised land, would be given territories inside the land of Canaan. Now, just to remind us, 9 ½ tribes plus 2 ½ tribes equals 12. But, in fact, there were 13 named tribes, weren't there? What happened to that 13th tribe? As we look at the list of tribes in Numbers 34 we see that, as was ordained 450 years earlier in the Cross-Handed Blessing of Genesis 48, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh replaced the tribe of Joseph. So, we don't see Joseph in this listing of Numbers 34.....we don't see a "tribe of Joseph", but we DO see the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. They, in essence, REPRESENT Joseph's tribe. But, there's another important name missing in this tribal listing: Levi. Moses' own tribe, the priestly tribe, the tribe of Aaron, Moses' brother, the first High Priest of Israel, Levi, is not mentioned. Why?

Lets read now Numbers 35:1-5. Remember, these chapter and verse marks are simply modern additions to the Bible, only put there for the purpose of making it more convenient for us to find, and reference, certain scriptures. When this scripture was originally written, it all ran together....it didn't start and stop in sections or chapters. Modern scholars, using their best efforts, decided where to say one chapter or verse ended and the next began. So, we need to read Numbers 35:1-5 as though it was just attached to, and a continuation of Numbers 34. It all regards the same subject, which is the dividing of the land into separate territories for the tribes of Israel.

READ NUMBERS 35:1-5

Here we see what God's plan is as regards land and territory for the tribe of Levi. In the first couple of chapters of Numbers (we'll not read that tonight, you can read it on your own), we discover that there was a census taken of Israel, early on after leaving Egypt. And, what we find is that there were actually two censuses taken: one ONLY for the tribe of Levi, and another for the other 12 Israelite tribes. Later we find that the reason for this is that God is effectively removing Levi from Israel, and making them a special group of people whose sole job is to be in service to Yehoveh, for the SAKE of Israel. Just so you get the picture: the tribe of Levi at that moment is no longer seen as a part of Israel. They are now a special tribe set apart for a special divine purpose.

Therefore, the Levites will NOT receive a named territory of their own like the other 12 tribes, partly because Canaan was exclusively for Israel and Levi was no longer part of regular Israel. Rather, the Levites are to be given cities, and some small amount of open land surrounding these cities to be used as pasture land, as their portion. And, these cities of the Levites are to be within each of the territories legally ascribed to each of the 12 tribes of Israel. In fact, the Levites were to be given a total of 48 cities and the land surrounding each; and these cities and land would be for a special purpose, and would be controlled by the Levites.

So, from that moment forward, even though we can count 13 tribes emanating from Israel, only 12 are to be considered as “Israel”, for only 12 have been given territory; one tribe, Levi, has (effectively) been removed from Israel. Just as Jacob had adopted away Ephraim and Manasseh from Joseph, to be his own, God, in essence, adopted away from Israel the tribe of Levi to be HIS own; His own tribe of priests unto Him. Even though the Levites came from Israel, they are now in a special category.

So, with the removal of the tribe of Levi, we’re back to 12 tribes of Israel, with the names of Ephraim and Manasseh essentially taking the place of Levi and Joseph in the list of Israelite tribes. Two tribes are dropped (Levi and Joseph), two tribes are added (Ephraim and Manasseh), so it’s a zero sum game.

Wow; complicated and a lot of information, isn’t it? But, if we have any hope of understanding the prophetic happenings that follow.....as well as the prophetic happenings of the End-Times (many of which we are now witnessing), we need to get a handle of the tribal structure of Israel, and how it evolved, and how it WILL evolve further. Well, we’ve just scratched the surface. In order that I can explain it further, we need to add another important piece of information: and that is that even though there are 12 tribes of Israel, plus the set apart priest tribe of Levi, Israel will eventually be divided into two distinct groups that the Scriptures call *houses*. Each of the 12 tribes will eventually belong to one or the other of the Two Houses of Israel. The Bible speaks often of the “Two Houses of Israel”, and of the “Whole House of Israel”. Well, the Two Houses, when combined, make-up the whole house of Israel. It’s important for us to not only see the difference between the two houses versus the whole house, but also which tribes belong to which house.

Let’s examine some scripture.

READ Isaiah 8:11-16

Here we see in V14 the mention of “both”.....obviously referring to *two*.....houses of Israel. While that is the point most germane to our topic, I picked this passage because it also points out something that is happening today, in our time that is significant.

Israel, modern Israel, believes that the source of all their trouble is a conspiracy of men, of nations, of terrorist groups, all against them. And, Israel negotiates and deals and argues and fights with these nations, and with these men.....the UN, the US, the EU, the

Palestinians, the terrorists.....because Israelis believe that THESE are the ones to be feared, the ones that Israel must pay attention to, and therefore the ones to which they must turn to gain peace. But, in fact, they are wrong; and that is what God is instructing Isaiah to tell the Israelites, and to tell us.

Isaiah is told NOT to believe as Israel believes, nor to fear as Israel fears; nor is he to fear WHO Israel fears, nor to react as they react. Rather, it is God with whom Israel should sue for peace. It is God who has the might to defeat their enemies. And, once Israel realizes this, and gives up their stiff-necked ways of self-dependence, secular humanism, and apostasy, and they turn back to God, THEN He shall become their sanctuary and settle this long running dispute once and for all time.

But, beloved, since as Christians we have an obligation to follow and believe the truth of God, we need to realize that the Roadmap to Peace, the Oslo Accords, various UN resolutions, treaties and agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, and all the other plans and conspiracies of men that will come and go..... these are NOT what will decide the future of Israel. These are NOT the avenues that we, as the Church, should seek or embrace or accept, as the way to peace. And, for us to debate the Palestinian/Israeli problem over issues of rights of return, fairness, economic policies, humanitarian concerns, etc., is to do EXACTLY as God commanded us NOT to do, here in Isaiah.

There is one reason and one reason ONLY that Israel can lay full claim to that land.....and it is the ONLY reason we, as believers, should declare: God gave it to them. And, there is one person and only one person who is going to solve the dilemma of the Middle East: Yeshua of Nazareth. Neither the consensus nor the compromises of men is going make for a lasting peace. So, let us resolve first to stand up for Israel, and second, when asked why we stand up for Israel, tell all who will hear that it's because God gave them that land, as a covenant between He and them, forever. No other reason has any bearing at all.

Let's read a little more Scripture.

READ Jeremiah 33:23-26

Now, I chose this particular scripture to demonstrate a couple of things. First, notice in V24, that God refers to the "two families" which the Lord chose. What people did the Lord "choose"? Israel. This "two families" reference is just a synonym for 2 houses; the 2 houses of Israel.

But, I also want you to notice the gist of what God is saying here through His prophet Jeremiah: God says, look, the world in general, even including some of the Israelites themselves that have fallen away from the principles and ideals of Israel, are saying that God has rejected these two families, these two houses of Israel. That is, people are saying God has rejected Israel, He's through with him, He's transferring His blessings to other people, and some are even saying that Israel is no longer the Father's special people.

And, God answers this false assertion emphatically, by saying..... NOT on your best day, Satan! Israel will ALWAYS be My chosen. And, very colorfully Abba says....if you want to know what it will take for me to reject Israel, here it is: if day and night no longer exist, if all the stars and planets and galaxies no longer exist, if their fixed movements in the heavens and the physics of the Universe that control those movements, no longer exist, THEN I would reject my people.

Rather, God says at the end of V26 concerning the 2 families, the 2 houses, of Israel: "...I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them". In other words, while because of Israel's mistrust, sin, and rebellion they will pay dear consequences.....their fortunes will rise and fall.....God's mercy upon them will endure. That He chastises them, and disciplines them, in no way indicates that He rejects them.

Hopefully this settles the matter once and for all, whether or not Israel is still God's chosen people, and whether He is through with them or not, and whether the Church has replaced Israel as God's chosen. The last time I looked up at the heavens, day and night still existed, and the sky was full of stars. And, therefore, Israel is still, and will remain, God's chosen people and He has decided that NOTHING they can do, no amount of sin and rebellion, no amount of their rejection of Him, is going to change that. Even if there is nothing left but a handful of Hebrews, the remnant of Israel, He will keep His promise to them.

Let's put some more meat on these bones.

READ Ezekiel 37:15-22

Here we get further understanding and definition of the "two houses of Israel". The heads of the two houses are identified as 1) Judah, and 2) Ephraim.

We also see that from the time of Joseph, all the way to the time of the return of Israel in the latter days, Ephraim remains as the chief representative of the tribe of Joseph.

Next we see in Ezekiel 37 that God is going to take these two families, these two houses, also at times called two Kingdoms, of Israel, and make them into ONE united family. Never again to be divided. This is often referred to in the Bible as "the Whole House of Israel". And, the catalyst and source of that coming unity will be Jesus the Christ.

Well, a good question might be, when and how did Israel go from being one united family, to a divided family of two houses, two groups?

Back to the Scriptures to find out!

READ Hosea 6 all

In the book of Hosea, God has decided to judge Ephraim because their behavior has become such an abomination to Him. At this point in history, the tribe of Ephraim has

brought every tribe of Israel under its control, EXCEPT for Judah, Benjamin, and most of the Levites. In fact, historians would say that Ephraim has, to a degree, ABSORBED several of the other Israelite tribes. So, when we see Ephraim referred to here, its is speaking of a conglomerate of 10 tribes....all of which have been gobbled up by Ephraim.....and together these 10 tribes form one huge super-tribe, which the Bible calls the House of Ephraim. Again, why is this 10-tribe entity called Ephraim? Because the powerful tribe of Ephraim came to rule over those 9 other tribes. And, we see, as it says in V9, that “Their conduct is an outrage” to the Lord.

Let’s read a little more in Hosea.

READ Hosea 7 all

Now, when this prophetic Scripture was written, Ephraim and Judah had become two separate nations. These nations are also referred to in the Bible as houses and families. In this context, the two nations, two kingdoms, two houses, two families of Israel all mean exactly the same thing. The tribes had been split; the tribes of Judah and Benjamin essentially formed the Kingdom of Judah, and all the other tribes essentially formed the Kingdom of Ephraim.....or as our Bibles often call it, Israel. Remember, the Levites are in a special category, and are not counted as among the 12 tribes, and therefore they are NOT part of the Two Houses of Israel.

How did this split of Israel into two kingdoms, two houses, occur? You see what happened was that after King Solomon died (about 925 B.C.), the nation of Israel split in a horrible Civil War. As a result of the split, although the people of both kingdoms still thought of themselves as Israelites, only one Kingdom continued calling itself Israel, and that was the kingdom that came to be known as Ephraim. The Kingdom of Judah, not long after that Civil War, stopped calling itself Israel, and called itself simply Judah.

Just like in our American Civil War, where our nation was temporarily divided, though the people of both sides still called themselves Americans, one side called WHERE they lived the Union, and the other the Confederacy. Same principle as what happened in Israel.

Soon though, the northern kingdom dominated by Ephraim even stopped calling itself Israel, and instead began to call itself Ephraim. So, just like we have to understand that Jacob is eventually called Israel, and we’ll see the Bible switch back and forth between those two names, it is the same idea when the Bible speaks of the house or kingdom of Ephraim, and the house or kingdom of Israel.....it is speaking of the same place. But, this applies only to the time AFTER the death of Solomon and AFTER the civil war, which split the nation into two kingdoms.

So when we get into that time period, post civil war and post Solomon, we have to watch the context of the prophets’ writings very carefully.....because they’ll switch back and forth from calling the northern kingdom Ephraim, and at other times Israel. But, when they refer to the kingdom of Ephraim and the kingdom of Israel (after the Civil War) they

are NOT including in their meaning the Kingdom of Judah, which is now seen as a separate entity. In fact, the Kingdom of Judah is dealt with quite separately by God.

Next week we'll look a little closer into just what eventually happened to the Kingdom of Ephraim, and why it's so relevant to our time.