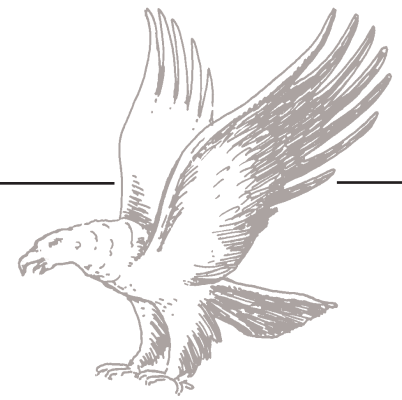


# Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."  
Isaiah 40:31*



March 9, 2014

## Spiritual Israel

A preoccupation with the political fortunes of the modern state of Israel has blinded many people to an important distinction revealed in the New Testament.

*"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Rom. 2:28-29).*

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Since 1947, when the modern state of Israel was created, American evangelicals have been obsessed with trying to align their Bibles with current events. Every Middle East war sets off another round of speculation about this or that prophecy coming to pass. Even our government's foreign policy has been influenced by this compulsion to protect "God's chosen people."

But if folks spent more time studying their Bibles, they would realize that this fascination with modern Israel is based on a misreading of the Scriptures. They would know that today's Israel is not to be identified with the state of Israel, but rather with a class of people bearing a unique *spiritual* identity. "Israel" is indeed the people of God—but the definition has changed.

In our text, Paul affirms that in the New Testament order, the true Jews are now identified by their *state of heart*, not by their ethnicity. They are children of God by virtue of their faith in Christ, not by an accident of birth.

Many of the physical characteristics of the old nation now have their spiritual counterparts in this new Israel. For example, these people pay homage to no earthly temple, because they *are* the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:9, 16, 17). They offer their daily lives as "living sacrifices" to God, instead of animal offerings (Rom. 12:1). Their allegiance is to "the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22), rather than the earthly city that prefigures it. They have even undergone the rite of circumcision—but it's an operation on the heart, not on the flesh (Col. 2:11-12). These people constitute the true "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16).

More importantly, these people are drawn from every nation under heaven, without respect to ethnic or tribal identity. "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" (Gal. 3:28-29; see also Rom. 9:6-8).

So where does all of this leave physical Israel—either the ethnic group or the nation? There is no question that the Jews of the Biblical era were God's chosen people. But they bore that honor for a specific purpose, namely, to bring the Messiah into the world. Once that milestone was achieved, the designation of "God's chosen" passed to a different class of people, to those who are "Jews inwardly." The earthly Jews have not been rejected by God *as a group*; rather *each individual* now has access to God the same way everyone else does: by faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ.

Whatever sympathies we may have toward the only functioning democracy in the modern Middle East, we must be careful not to confuse our daily headlines with what we read in the Bible. The Israel of God is defined, not by ethnicity, ancestry, or territorial boundaries, but by the heart. That's where our emphasis ought to remain.

— David King