

TEXT - Revelation 7:1-8

REVIEW

Are the 144,000 from 12 tribes a reference to people ethnically Israelite, believing in Christ? Or are they a picture representing something else? Neither of those interpretations is obviously right or wrong. Lots of Bible scholars disagree on what to think about it.

So, this is going to take some work: some reading of the Bible and some thinking this over.

-This evening we'll read in the Bible some passages that show why someone might seriously maintain that this refers literally to the children of Israel.

-Hopefully next week we'll read some of the passages in the Bible that might make it seem that identifying the 144,000 as representing something rather than actually literally being Israel, is not actually ridiculous.

We'll read some things in the scriptures that give us reason to take seriously the interpretation of the 144,000 from 12 tribes actually being people who are ethnically Israelite, who believe in Jesus Christ, even as most of their nation refuses to believe in him.

But whatever you end up thinking about that point of interpretation, we are most concerned to take the warning and the comfort that comes with knowing that Jesus Christ knows who truly trusts in him and serves him, and he will guard us from the wrath of God coming on the wicked.

LESSON

Romans 9:1-8 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, 2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. 3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: 4 Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; 5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. 6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

God has made promises to Israel, but it seems that many in Israel are not finding those promises fulfilled. Why is that?

-v. 6 not everyone who is descended from Israel is the Israel to whom God made those promises

-v. 7-8 not even all of Abraham's sons were considered the children of God, but only Isaac, the child of promise

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

Romans 10:16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

Romans 10:21 But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

-the apostle desires that Israel be saved, and prays to God for that

-but they have not all obeyed the gospel; instead, they are disobedient

Romans 11:1a I say then, Hath God cast away his people?

-if most Israelites do not believe in Christ

-does that mean God has cast away his people?

Romans 11:1b God forbid. or Certainly not!

-the answer is "no," God has not cast away his people

-It seems that God has cast away his people. What do you mean that it is not so? If many Israelites are not believing in Christ, how can you say that God has not cast away his people?

Romans 11:1c For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

-When you look and see that some Israelites are saved through faith in Christ, you are seeing that God has not cast away his people Israel.

Romans 12:2-5 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, 3 Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. 4 But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. 5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

-God is not unfaithful to his promises to save Israel; God has not cast away his people Israel, in that he is saving some of them, a remnant.

-In the time of Elijah, out of the millions of Israelites, God had reserved to himself just 7,000

-In that same way, God has now reserved to himself an elect remnant, by his grace.

-v. 5 “at this present time”

Our Lord Jesus and his apostles spoke of Israel as still consisting of twelve tribes.

Luke 22:29-30 And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; 30 That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Acts 26:6-7 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: 7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

We see that in the time of the New Testament, Israelites from several tribes were saved through faith in Christ.

Benjamin - Paul

Judah - most of the Jews who believed were of Judah

Levi - Barnabas

Acts 4:36-37 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, 37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

There is even record of a believing woman who was from one of the several tribes of Israel, that had been scattered in the time when the northern kingdom was conquered by the Assyrian empire.

Asher - Anna

Luke 2:36-38 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; 37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

It seems that when those tribes were scattered, not every individual member was, because some had come to live in the south near Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 11:13-17 And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts. 14 For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the LORD: 15 And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made. 16 And after them **out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came to Jerusalem**, to sacrifice unto the LORD God of their fathers. 17 So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon.

2 Chronicles 15:8-9 And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the LORD, that was before the porch of the LORD. 9 And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and **the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon**: for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.

2 Chronicles 30:6-11 6 So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. 7 And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. 8 Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you. 9 For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him. 10 So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. 11 Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem.

So, the 12,000 from each of 12 tribes of Israel may be interpreted as teaching that
-although most of Israel does not believe in Christ, and so are lost;
-God, by his grace, still is saving a remnant of Israel, represented here as 12,000
from each of 12 tribes.

Historically, in the time when Jews were scattered all over the Roman Empire,
and most were unbelieving, there still would have been some whom the Lord was
saving by his grace.

And throughout the centuries, despite the fact that most of Israel will not receive
Jesus as the Christ, God always is saving a remnant of Israel, according to
election by grace, and so is true to all his promises made to Israel.

CONCLUSION

There are some things in the scriptures that give us reason to take seriously the
interpretation of the 144,000 from 12 tribes actually being people who are
ethnically Israelite, who believe in Jesus Christ, even as most of their nation
refuses to believe in him.

But whatever you end up thinking about that point of interpretation, we are most
concerned to take the warning and the comfort that comes with knowing that
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Henry:

though we read not of the return of the ten tribes in a body, yet we have reason to think many particular persons, more or less of every tribe, returned to their own land; perhaps, by degrees, the greater part of those that were carried away. Christ speaks of the twelve tribes, Mat_19:28. Anna was of the tribe of Asher, Luk_2:36. James directs his epistle to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, Jam_1:1.

Gill:

though ten of the tribes had been carried captive, and had not returned as tribes, yet there were many of the several tribes, who either were left in the land, or returned along with the two tribes, and were mixed with them: and this way of speaking here used by Paul, and also by James

Bengel:

Even the Ten tribes had in considerable numbers (a good part of them) returned from the East,

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

Clarke:

the twelve tribes were in actual existence when James wrote this epistle (see more from Macknight in this place)

Carroll:

That brings up the old question of the "lost ten tribes." And this context shows that James does not consider that they were lost. The Old Testament shows that the ten tribes who were transported to Assyria, and most of whom never returned, were not lost. A great many of them came back, and the continuity of the tribes was kept up, which can be proved by many scriptural references, in both the Old and New Testaments.