

# OpenTheo

## A Chosen People



### Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the concept of a "chosen people" in the Bible, starting with the children of Israel in the Exodus era who were chosen by God with conditions of obedience. He explains that God deals with human beings collectively, often dealing with entire nations. The author then connects the idea of a chosen people to the early church, which is described as a spiritual race rather than a physical ethnic group with designations once attributed to Israel now attributable to the church. Ultimately, Gregg highlights the importance of community in the Christian faith and encourages believers to work together in bringing forth praise and good works.

### Transcript

I'd like you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 6. Exodus chapter 6. At the time that the events of this chapter were taking place, the Jews, who were not yet called Jews, they were simply called the children of Israel because they were all descended from the man whose name was changed from Jacob to Israel, and therefore they were called the children of Israel, though they numbered about 3 million at this time. They were slaves. They were in Egypt.

They had never really been brought together as a national entity of any kind because 400 years before this time, they had gone as a family of 70 men and their wives and children into Egypt to escape a famine in the days of Joseph. And they had been very blessed of God because the Egyptians had been quite hospitable to them, but then later the Egyptians were threatened by the tremendous population growth among these people until the Egyptians felt that the only way to remain secure in the face of such a large alien population in their midst was to bring those people under slavery and under bondage. So the Pharaoh brought the Jews under bondage, the children of Israel.

They were in bondage there for something like 400 years. and thirty years. And then God raised up a man named Moses.

Actually, God began to raise up Moses about 350 years after the bondage began because he was 80 years old at the time that he led them to safety. Now, when Moses

was 80 years old, he had fled as an exile from Egypt because a previous pharaoh had sought his life. And he had taken up shepherding sheep on the back side of the Sinai desert.

And as he was out tending his sheep one day, the Bible says that he saw a bush that was burning. And he was amazed because the bush was burning, but it was not consumed. And, of course, God called to him from the bush and called him to be delivered to his people.

Well, to make a long story short, Moses accepted the call, albeit somewhat reluctantly, and God sent him to Pharaoh to say, let my people go. Now, in this chapter, now all that happened in chapter 3 of Exodus. In this chapter, chapter 6, God is giving further insights to Moses concerning his plan for the children of Israel.

And one verse in particular, or two we could look at, verses 6 and 7, the King James Version says, God said, Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am Jehovah, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm and with great judgments. And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God. And ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Now, there's one thing I want to draw your attention to in this, though we could talk about a lot of different things, springing off from here. But God's stated intention in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt was, as he says in verse 7, I will take you to me for a people. That is, I will bring you to myself to be a people.

Now, if you have not read biblical language very much, it might seem strange to hear the expression, a people. We use the term people only in its plural sense in modern English, for the most part. I remember in the second grade, I was raised in a Christian home, and I had some exposure to church and biblical language and all.

And we were learning, well, I guess the word people came up as one of our spelling words in the second grade. And we were supposed to write a sentence on our test using the word people. And I don't remember what sentence I wrote, but I remember that I used the word people as a people.

And my teacher felt that I misunderstood, didn't realize that people was a plural word. And she came and she said, well, no, this would be a person or just people, but not a people, because people is plural of person and so forth. And I didn't quite know how to answer her, except I told her that I was quite sure that in the Bible, it talked about people in the singular sense.

It talked about the Jews being a people. And that's not uncommon in the Bible. And the teacher suddenly realized that, I was correct, I don't know how much exposure she'd

had, but she realized that we weren't just talking about a persons plural, but a people singular.

And to many ears, modern ears, it does sound strange to talk about a people singular. Yet we must understand that in the Bible, the word people is used as a collective noun, much in the same way that we use the term family. The word family is a singular word.

We would say a family. Yet when we say a family, we're talking about usually a number of members. No one ever heard of a family of only one.

Therefore, there's two or more in every family. Yet family is singular. It's a collective noun.

In the Bible, sometimes people is used in that way as a collective noun also. And it particularly is important for us to understand what it means when it is used this way in the scripture to really understand the purposes of God. At the time that we're now reading of, God was expressing his purpose to bring to himself a people, not just persons.

And this is something I want to stress tonight, that God is not just looking for persons. He's not just looking for people, but he's looking for a people. He is creating a people that is a corporate entity, which we now call the church.

In those days, Israel was being called to be that people. Not those people, but that people. Because we have to appreciate the fact that God, while he appreciates and acknowledges our individuality which he has created, nonetheless deals with human beings in a corporate way often.

That is, we know in the scriptures whole nations come under judgment from God in this very story. We know how that God sent ten plagues upon the nation of Egypt. And yet we certainly wouldn't believe that all the Egyptians were individually equally worthy of the same kind of judgment.

I'm sure some were more guilty than others. Pharaoh more than others. But God sent judgment on the whole nation.

He also sent blessing on whole nations when they would repent or when they would follow him. And he dealt with people as a people often in the Old Testament. And we will find that he did in the New Testament as well and does today.

We have another example of how God does this, and it seems a little unjust to us sometimes, but when God sent the Jews into Canaan to obliterate the Canaanites, he made it very clear that judgment was due upon the whole Canaanite people. Therefore, even the women and the children were to be destroyed because judgment was coming on the whole people, upon the whole ethnic group, the whole nation of the Canaanites,

or the many nations of the Canaanites. In a more, in a smaller sense, we remember in the book of Joshua how that when Joshua led the people into Canaan, especially against Jericho, that they were instructed not to take anything out of Jericho for themselves, because all the things in Jericho were to be dedicated to the Lord.

But a certain man named Achan took a golden wedge and a Babylonish garment, which he saw in Jericho, and he hid them and he kept them for himself. And God knew of it, of course, and exposed him. But before the man was exposed, Israel went to war again and lost a battle, and thirty-some-odd people were killed in that battle, even though they knew nothing about this man's sin.

And when Joshua said, What's going on, Lord? The Lord said, There's sin in the camp. That's why judgment has come upon Israel. That seems a bit strange to us, that this man, this one man had sinned, and God judged the nation, and thirty-some people are killed who knew nothing about the sin.

Certainly, they wouldn't be considered responsible. And then shortly thereafter, when Achan's sin was discovered to the public, Achan and his family, his whole family, were stoned to death and burned as a judgment. Now, perhaps that seems strange to us.

It might seem to us like we ought to be dealt with only as individuals, and that God does deal with us as individuals is also stressed in the New Testament and the Old Testament also. In Ezekiel chapter 18, for example, it says, The soul that sinneth, it shall die. A man shall not be held accountable for his son's sins, and a son will not be held accountable for his father's sins.

There's individual accountability. Also in the New Testament, Jesus said, The very hairs of your head are numbered. Not one sparrow falls to the ground without your father knowing it, and how much greater are you than sparrows? And what he was saying there is that God takes note of us as individuals.

He knows every detail of our lives. But while it is true that he deals with us as individuals, it is a much neglected truth, I believe, that he deals with us as a people or as corporate entities. And the Jews were being called to be a people, that is, a family, an ethnic group, a racial group, a nationality, to be God's own chosen people, as you've no doubt heard that term.

And as he brings them to Mount Sinai after the Exodus, in Exodus chapter 19, I'd like you to look there, please. In Exodus chapter 19, God is giving further instructions to Moses as he is giving them the Ten Commandments. He gives them the Ten Commandments in chapter 20.

But in chapter 19, he's telling Moses that Moses must instruct the people to obey God's commandments. In verse 5 and 6, it says, Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice

indeed and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people. For all the earth is mine, and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation.

These are the words which I shall speak unto the children of Israel. Now, here God places a condition upon the Jews if they wish to remain his own special people. The conditions are, if you will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant.

Those are the conditions. If you keep those conditions, he said to them, you will continue to be this. You will be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.

Now, this expression, peculiar treasure unto me, is substituted later in later Old Testament and New Testament writings with the expression, a peculiar people. And the word peculiar means simply someone who is set aside particularly and peculiarly for one purpose. It doesn't mean odd or eccentric or anything like that.

Peculiar means set aside for one particular purpose. Peculiarly his. Uniquely his.

That's basically what it means, unique people. Now, he said under these conditions the Jews would remain his peculiar treasure or his peculiar people. If you look at Deuteronomy chapter 14, I'd like you to look at all these verses if I give you the references because it registers better if you see and hear rather than just hear.

I know this from experience. In Deuteronomy chapter 14 and verse 2, this is Moses speaking to the Jews who have now of course wandered 40 years through the wilderness and are about to go into the promised land under Joshua. He says in verse 2, for thou art an holy people, singular, an holy people unto the Lord thy God and the Lord has chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself above all the nations that are upon the earth.

Sounds similar to what we read about Mount Sinai. A peculiar treasure unto me above all people, he said there. Here he says a peculiar people unto himself.

God has called us or he called them to be a peculiar people unto him. Let's look at one other verse on this before we move to another point. Deuteronomy chapter 26.

Deuteronomy 26 verses 18 and 19. Moses is still speaking to the same folks. He says, and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people as he hath promised thee and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments and to make thee high above all nations which he hath made in praise and in name and in honor and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God as he hath spoken.

Now here we're told again they are peculiar people, and in this place and the other Deuteronomy reference, chapter 14 verse 2, we are both places told that they are to be a holy people. The word holy means set apart for God, set apart for sacred uses so that the Jews were set apart as a people. It wasn't just as though God picked out one man

here and one man there and another man over here in different parts of the world from different nations.

He chose a people, a group, not individuals within the group and not individuals outside the group, but he chose this group. Now that doesn't mean that only those in that group could be saved, but it means that this group as a whole, as a community or as a people, were to be specially dealt with. They had special obligations.

They had special privileges. They got the law, for example. God sent them the prophets.

They had certain covenants that God made with them. In fact, God compared them as a people, singular, to his wife in many places in the Scripture, especially in Jeremiah. We find in chapter 3 and chapter 2 references to God having married Israel, and there's other places too, in Hosea and other places in the Scriptures in the Old Testament, Israel was called God's bride.

It's as though he called a people, a corporate group, a racial group in that case, to be his wife. He saw them as an individual. He treated them as an individual, though they were a people, and he made certain promises to them which were conditional.

If they'll keep his word, if they'll keep his covenant, then they will continue to be his wife, his people, his holy people who are set aside for holy purposes. Well, as we trace Jewish history, we find that they were not faithful to God, that they broke his covenant many, many times. In the days of the judges, they repeatedly served idols and other gods, and God had to judge them by sending oppressing armies against them, which later were overthrown by Jewish judges.

And later on, even still after the days of Solomon, their kingdom broke up into two, and the northern kingdom always was worshiping golden calves after that, and the southern kingdom was having some trouble with that area too. And so the people of God, the people that he had called out of Egypt, did not meet the conditions and ceased to be a holy people. And when we find the New Testament now, when we come to that, we find that Jesus, or actually John the Baptist before Jesus, began to make ready a people for God, and this was, of course, to the Jewish people that John came.

But let's turn to Luke when Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was visited in the temple by an angel, and the angel is predicting the coming of John the Baptist. This is in verse 17. It says, "...and he," that is John, "...shall go before him," that is before Jesus, "...in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Now, that's what the angel predicted that John the Baptist would do, that he would go ahead and make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Now, as we see the life and ministry of John the Baptist, we know what he did do is he

prepared the Jewish people by commanding them to repent and prepare the way of the Lord, and many of them did repent, and they were prepared. And those people who did repent under the preaching of John, many of them later followed Jesus Christ, and they became that people, a people prepared for the Lord. And Jesus began to call a people together.

A lot of times we stress the fact that Jesus called individuals away from their jobs and away from their homes, away from their other pursuits, in order to follow him. And we stress that sometimes in preaching to tell everyone, okay, you've got to decide, are you going to become a disciple of Jesus Christ? And that's true, everyone has to decide that. But we sometimes have a tendency to focus on the individuals that he called and overlook a very important thing, and that is that the individuals he called were not just called away from their jobs, they were called to become part of a community, a people that Jesus was forming.

He was preparing a people, which was at first his band of disciples, and eventually it grew in the early days of the church to those who responded to Peter's call on the day of Pentecost and grew into the present entity, which we now call the church. But that was a people that God was calling. Jesus was forming a people unto himself.

And I want to talk about this characteristic of the church tonight just a little, by looking at a few scriptures, that we are a people. And the reason I do is because we have such an individualistic mentality, most of us, that we think in terms of what God's going to do for me, or what God has done for me, or what's going to happen to me, or what do I get out of this. And we sometimes overlook the important fact that we have not been called just to have an individualized walk with Jesus only, but that we have been called to a great movement that he has started.

He's created an alternative society, a people, a parallel community in the world, that he calls a people, he calls it a generation, he calls it a nation. And if you'd like to turn, in fact, I would like you to turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 2, you'll see that all of these expressions are used to describe the church. And I'd like to talk to you about what some of the meanings of these are, not for your academic interest, but for, I hope, some very practical reasons.

1 Peter chapter 2, Peter is describing the church, and it's in verses 9 and 10. He says, But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light, which in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God, which have not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Now, these two verses, there are at least three or four Old Testament passages alluded to.

One of them is obviously the passage in Exodus 19 that we saw, where God said to the Jews, If you will continue in my word and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar

treasure unto me, a holy nation, a kingdom of priests and all. There are allusions to that verse in here. Also, there's an allusion to Hosea chapter 1, verse 10, and Hosea chapter 2, verse 23, and other verses in the Old Testament that say that we were not a people, but now we are the people of God.

Very clearly, Peter is saying that those designations that were once attributed to Israel are now attributable to the church. Israel was offered the opportunity again and again and again to be a holy people, the community with whom God dealt. As they traveled through the wilderness the forty years under Moses, they were not just three million individuals, they were a mass of people.

They were a body of individuals moving together. There was no individual guidance going on in that particular community when the Jews came out of Egypt. They were all following a cloud, a pillar of cloud which was God's presence with them.

And they moved in mass. They didn't go a few going, a few staying, and a few going in different directions. They all moved together because they saw themselves as a people, not just as people, not just persons, three million strong, each deciding what he was going to do, each having his own individual relationship with the Lord that led him three million different directions, but actually moving together in unity and harmony and seeing themselves as attached to each other and being dealt with all together as a group.

And that is how God is dealing with the church today. We are a people. Peter says we are a chosen generation.

The word generation there comes from the Greek word *genea*, which is behind our English word *genealogy*. You know what a *genealogy* is. It's a family tree erected of your family background.

Well, *genea* actually refers to, it means a generation or it could literally mean a family of people. And that's what I believe it means here, or a race of people. There are some newer translations who have said we are an elect race instead of a chosen generation, an elect race.

Now we know that the Jews were a race of people in the most literal physical sense. There is a Jewish race in the world to this day. They were an ethnic group.

But we know that in the body of Christ there's not one particular ethnic group. We know that we have black people and white people and brown people and yellow people and red people and people of any, all kinds of colors. People who are totally unrelated physically speaking, but who are now come into this race, which is obviously a spiritual race.

It's a spiritual people rather than an ethnic group. Nonetheless, it is a generation or a



race. We are a holy race, a chosen elect race, also a peculiar people.

That is that very term that the Old Testament used frequently to refer to the Jews. They were to be God's peculiar people, but Peter now turns to another group. He turns from the Jews to the church and he says, you are now that chosen generation.

You are that peculiar people. And therefore we who have come into Christ have not just come to be individual believers, but that we have become engulfed in. We have actually merged ourselves into a people of God that God is dealing with corporately and not only individually.

Now in all this I don't want to give people the impression that I don't believe that God is dealing with you as an individual. I know He is. He deals with me as an individual and He deals with you as an individual.

But there is something greater even, though you might not think it greater, I believe that once you come to reflect on it somewhat and get maybe some revelation of it, that it will seem greater yet. Greater than His dealings with me as an individual or with you as an individual are His dealings with His people, the people of God, the church today. He has a destiny for the church.

His destiny is not just that I go to heaven and you go to heaven and all God's children go to heaven. But His destiny is that the people of God in mass be led, just like the Jews as a mass of people were led through the wilderness to a destiny, to a destination, to the promised land. So the church is being led forward.

Now a lot of us have no concept of this whatsoever. A lot of us have just had the impression that the church is like a social club. It meets on Sundays, you pay your dues in the tithe, you go through a certain ritual, you go through the same thing every week, sing a few songs, stand up, sit down, pass the offering plate, give the announcements, hear the sermon, give the altar call, dismiss the meeting with a prayer.

And I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that kind of order of service. That's as good as any as far as I'm concerned. The only problem is that with some of us, our mentality is such that that's all we think of the church as.

It's just a gathering, a weekly gathering of people. Some people are so dull even to think of the church as the building. That is to think that the very building with the steeple on it, made out of bricks and stones and wood, that that's the church.

Of course, the Bible nowhere uses the term church in that respect. It's never seen as a physical building. It's always the people of God.

But even among those who are more enlightened and know that the building is not the church, there are many, most I suppose, that have never caught the concept that the

church is a people, that it is a race, it is a nation, a holy nation, Peter says, and it has a national destiny, a racial destiny, so to speak. There are black Muslims today who are very violent and very militant, and they believe in a violent overthrow of the white race, and I've talked to some of them, and it seems to me that to them what's important is not whether they're Muslim, but whether they're black, and to them the enemy is just the white people, and of course there are white people who feel the same way about the black people. We've been hearing a lot now about the Aryan Nations movement, which is the FBI or the CIA is now saying that the Aryan Nations movement is more dangerous even than the Ku Klux Klan, because they've recently assassinated some Jewish people, and they're against everyone who's not white, Anglo, Saxon, Christian, Protestant, and so they see this thing as a whole physical racial thing, and to them their whole goal is for their race, their white race, or in the case of the other group, their black race, or some Jews feel this way about their race, and of course the Japanese, I suppose, in World War II felt that way about theirs, but the whole goal was that for their race to experience victory together, and to wipe out whatever other race they had, and to wipe out the enemy, and we have to see ourselves as a race of people, and our efforts are not to benefit us alone.

We're not just thinking to hold on ourselves until the rapture. Just try not to lose the faith until Jesus comes back. If I can just do that, maybe I can just hide in my house and lock the doors and not let the persecutors in and I can just hide my closet and pray and hopefully I won't backslide.

And some people have no greater vision for themselves than to avoid backsliding until Jesus comes. Where in fact, we have to appreciate that God has called us to be runners in a race, but it's not a race where it's one man running against everyone else. It's a relay race.

It's a team effort. And the whole team either wins or loses together. The whole chosen generation, the whole elect race either wins or loses together.

Paul put it this way when he was talking about the church in the figure of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. He says, whether one member suffers, this is 1 Corinthians 12 after all, whether one member suffer, all suffer with it. And if one member is exalted, all rejoice.

Now he wasn't saying that's the way it should be. He's just saying that's the way it is, whether we know it or not. If one member is suffering, the whole race, the whole people, the whole church is suffering.

It doesn't mean that when we hear that one of our brothers is suffering, we have to make ourselves feel sorrow. Although we should be sorry, but the point is that whether or not we feel any sorrow, we are hurting because we are connected to each other and the fortunes or the misfortunes of one affect the whole. And, of course, we saw the

whole nation of Israel as a people of God, were the holy people, and when one member sinned, the whole nation could suffer defeat at the hands of their enemies.

And that's a pretty heavy thing when you think about it because now that we are the holy nation, we are the chosen generation, we are the peculiar people, we might assume that God would have some similarities in His dealings with us. That my individual sins don't just affect me anymore. And perhaps they never did, but I used to think that they did.

I used to think that if I just sinned, a secret sin, it won't affect anyone but me. I can always, you know, repent later or whatever if the pressure gets too hot of conviction, but it doesn't really hurt anyone. And now I have to realize that because I'm part of a people that God sees as a corporate unit, that my sins affect the whole.

In fact, God could bring judgment on a body of people. He could bring judgment on my whole family, we know. If my sins, if I were an alcoholic, I won't say God would bring judgment on my family, but if I were an alcoholic, which I'm not, my whole family could suffer because of it, not just me.

And as members of a people or of a nation or of a spiritual race, just like the Jews were, so are we only now, we're a spiritual race rather than a physical race. We affect others also. Our victories affect others and our defeats affect others.

No matter how personal they may seem to us, we are, Paul said it in this way, in another place, none of us lives unto himself. None of us lives unto himself. We all belong to the whole community, you see, the whole people of God.

And so we are members of a body or cells in a body or bricks in a building or subjects in a kingdom or sheep in a sheepfold, but none of those things really picture it quite as much as just a people, a group of people that God deals with as a unit as well as dealing with us as individuals. Now, if I if that particular point has gotten through, I'd like to just point a few other scriptures that have relevance to this point in the Old Testament and in the new. First of all, look at Deuteronomy chapter four with me and verse 20.

Moses again is speaking all through the book of Deuteronomy, it's Moses speaking. He says, But the Lord has taken you and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as you are this day. So what does he mean, a people of inheritance? Does that mean a people that are to receive an inheritance? Well, of course, it could, because we, as the people, do receive a wonderful inheritance, as the Bible makes very clear.

But I believe that that's not what is intended in this verse. It means that we are a people. Who are God's inheritance, that is, he inherits us.

You ever wondered what God wanted out of this deal? When you think about it, God

became a man. He lived a very vulnerable life among men. Vulnerable both to man and to Satan, he was tempted in all points like as we are, but never sinned.

He actually was put into the hands of men who killed him. He died and rose again, as we know, and ever since then, he's been interceding for us at the right hand of God the Father. He's been working with us.

He sent his Holy Spirit to convict us. He's been very busy from the first day until now. Even if we go back further to the day he created us from scratch in Genesis chapter one.

What did he want out of all this? We tend to think, oh, I'm so glad Jesus died for me. I'm so glad that Jesus rose for me. I'm so glad the stripes were put on his back for my healing.

I'm so glad that me, me, me, me, me gets so much out of this deal. But when it comes out, what does God get out of the deal? What could God even want? He's got everything. He's got everything.

He made it all. The Bible says the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof in Psalm 24. And if everything is God's, then what in the world does he want? What do you give to someone who's got everything? Well, there's a number of things the Bible says he wanted, but one of the things in particular that he wanted was he wanted to inherit a people unto himself.

Why this was important to him, we're not told. Most Christians speculate that God, because he was a God of love, desired to have someone to show his love to because love is an active sort of a thing. And without without having anyone to show his love to, you know, he'd be frustrated.

Therefore, he made man. It's almost as though they feel like he needed man or else he'd be unfulfilled. But I was raised with that view.

And I just first of all, the Bible nowhere says that that's true. It does say he's a God of love, but the rest is conjecture. And after all, God did have the angels, if he wanted someone to show love to.

We had the angels by the myriads before he created man. So it's hard to use that as the full explanation. But for some reason or another, God wanted to pass on his works and the knowledge of himself to someone else.

Just perhaps like a father delights to leave his business into the hands of his son. A man who's worked with his hands and built a trade, built up a shop from the ground up. And he's raised some children.

It's a delight to him to see his son taking after him and going into the same trade and to

know that when he dies, that this thing that he had started with so much blood, sweat and tears, it would be passed on to a faithful son who would continue it in his and, you know, in the same spirit that he had done it. And perhaps there's some of that in God's motive. We don't know exactly, but but God certainly has bestowed a great deal upon us.

But what does he get out of it? He gets an inheritance and that inheritance is his people. Moses said to the Jews, they were a people of inheritance. That is, the people that God would inherit.

And to make it clear that that's exactly what he meant, we can look at how this term is used later in the scriptures in First Kings, Chapter eight, verses 50 and 51. This is Solomon's prayer as he was dedicating the temple he'd just built for God. And in verse 50, he said, and forgive thy people that have sinned against thee and all their transgressions, wherein they have transgressed against thee and give them compassion before them who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them, for they be thy people and thine inheritance.

Which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, out of the midst of the furnace of iron. Now, it's very clear by the references to being brought out of Egypt, out of the furnace of iron, that Solomon is alluding to the verse we just read in Deuteronomy, where it says that you you are a people of inheritance that God brought out of the furnace of iron, the iron furnace out of Egypt. Solomon is alluding to that where Moses had said, you are a people of inheritance.

But here in alluding to it, Solomon puts it this way, for they are your people, they are your inheritance, meaning God is inheriting a people. He's not just inheriting individuals. He didn't just send Jesus down to die so that you could have a mansion in glory land.

He sent Jesus to die because he wanted in this planet a people that would be his people peculiarly, uniquely his, that he would inherit. He would have something for himself that he never would have had if he had not created the world and sent Jesus to redeem it. That is a people, which we later find a people unto his praise is the expression that is used.

But let's look at the New Testament to make sure that the New Testament agrees with this, because sometimes we find things are changed between the Old and the New Testament. But in Ephesians chapter one, Paul is praying for the Ephesians. And among his petitions that he offers is in verse 18, he says, Now, he prays that our understanding will be expanded to perceive what is the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints, the saints is us, the church.

That is in us, God has an inheritance. So that shows that God has a vested interest in us. He didn't just send Jesus so that we could be saved.

He sent Jesus so that he could have a people for himself to inherit. We are his inheritance. And if you'll turn to Psalm 2 with me just for a moment, which is familiar to many of you because we work in and out of Psalm 2 quite a bit around here.

But in Psalm 2 we have a promise uttered by the Father to Jesus. And it says in Psalm 2 in verse 8, Now, the heathen simply means Gentiles, people who are not Jewish. In the context of this, David who wrote this was aware that the Jews were already God's inheritance.

That's how God viewed it. They were the people of his inheritance. But now God is saying to the Messiah, if you'll just ask me, I'll also give you the Gentiles for your inheritance.

I'll give you the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession. Now, to find this statement in the Old Testament is quite a preview of the main theme of the New Testament. Namely, that not only the Jews, but also Gentiles get to be the people and the inheritance of God.

But here it's Christ who gets them as an inheritance. We are his inheritance. And we are, those of us who are not Jewish by birth, and I don't know if any of us here tonight are Jewish by birth.

Some of you might be. But most of us certainly were not born Jewish. And nonetheless, while we did not have a natural claim to being people of God's inheritance.

Now, as Gentiles who have responded to the call of Christ and joined ourselves to that people. We are a people of inheritance as they once were. Now, this people of inheritance, we've already read in the Scriptures, they were called to be a holy people.

Which means that we, as that people, must be holy and separate under God. That we are to be inherited by God. Therefore, we must seek to be the kind of people that will be a good inheritance for him.

Most of us would like to leave good inheritances to our children in one way or another. How much more should we desire to give God a worthy inheritance? In our lives, not only as individuals, but as a church, as a body, are going to be his inheritance. Therefore, our passion should be that the church become all that God would desire it to be.

That he might have pleasure in his inheritance. We should not be concerned only that you and I avoid certain sins. Or that I get the victory or you get the victory over besetting sins in your life.

So that you can please God in your life. But we should not be satisfied with only that. But that all would come together as a whole.

Now, there is something said about the destiny of his people in Isaiah, which carries also

over to the New Testament. But let's look at Isaiah 43 quickly here. It's verses 20 and 21.

Well, actually, I suppose we ought to go back to verse 18 and read through verse 21. It says, Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing.

Now it shall spring forth. Shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The beasts of the field shall honor me, the dragons and the owls, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert to give drink to my people, my chosen.

This people. Notice, not these people, as if he's treating them as individuals, but this singular per people. This people have I formed for myself.

They shall show forth my praise. Now, this is what God's looking for. What do you give to God who's got everything? First of all, he's going to inherit his people.

Well, what's so great about that? Because they shall show forth his praise. And that's what he's really looking for. He's looking for a people under his praise, a people who show forth his praises.

We read a moment ago in First Peter, Chapter two. And verses nine and 10 says, We are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood and holy nation, a peculiar people that we should show forth the praises of him that has called us into out of darkness into his marvelous light. That's referring to this verse, too.

He's called us to be a peculiar people that we should show forth his praises. When you think about it, praise is the one thing that God can't get out of you by force. If God wanted your money, he could take it any time he wants to.

If he wanted your life, if he wanted to kill you, he could do that easily. If he wanted to get your children from you, he's got power to do that. If he wanted to take away all your opportunities and your job and your reputation, he could handle those without an effort.

He could get rid of anything. He could take from you anything he wants to get from you. But one thing he can't take by force, and that is your praise.

And if he could take them by force, they'd be meaningless. Because there's nothing satisfying about being praised by one who's got his arm being bent up his back saying, now praise me or else, because such praise is uttered from someone whose force would be meaningless praises after all. The one thing God really values is the thing he can't take from us by force that we have to give voluntarily.

That is praises to him. The Bible calls it a spiritual sacrifice offered up to him. Now, I feel we begin to touch on why God is looking for a people.

Why this would be of value to him. Because they are not only a holy people, they're not only a people of his inheritance, but they're a people that he has created for himself, he's formed them for himself, and they shall show forth his praise. He said here in Isaiah 43, 21.

And I might add that this whole section that we read in Isaiah 43, verses 18 through 21, is talking about the church. When he says, remember not these former things, he's talking here about the old covenant made with the Jews. But when he says, I do a new thing, he's talking about the new covenant that he's going to create with the church through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, when he later says, this is for my people, my chosen, he's talking about the people of the new covenant, which is us. And he says, these people have I formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise. Now you see, God has created the church to be a praising community, a praising people.

Not just that you and I can run around as individuals praising him, but that in the earth there might be a global community of individuals who with one mind and one mouth praise God in unity and show forth his praises to the world in which they live. Now that is, of course, a high calling. God could have sent angels to praise him.

He could have called the animals to praise him. In a sense, the heavens declare the glory of God, but not verbally, and not everyone understands what they're declaring. But he has chosen us to be the people who declare to the world his praises in a verbal, in an audible, in an understandable way, so that we are the people that are set aside to show forth his praises and to communicate with others and to spread the knowledge of him to them.

And that's a high calling, and it's something that he values very greatly, obviously, because of all things that he's created, only his church are said to be the thing that he will ultimately inherit when it's all over. That's what he offered to Jesus, ask of me and I'll give you the heathen for your inheritance. They won't remain heathen, they'll become part of his church, and they become part of his inheritance.

This people that we are called to be is a people of good work. Look at Titus chapter 2, verses 13 and 14. It says, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God in our Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Now, notice that it says, he gave himself for us. We might say, so that we don't have to go to hell, but we can go to heaven instead. A lot of times that's the only part of the message we've ever heard.

Why did Jesus die? He died so I don't have to go to hell, so I can go to heaven. Oh yes,



that's true, but that's not what Paul said here. Paul said, Jesus gave himself for us so that he might purge us and purify us and redeem us unto himself as a people, a peculiar people who are zealous of good works.

A people zealous for good works, a people who show forth his praise. Let's look at Ephesians 2.10 just for a moment here. The verse is probably more familiar than the one we just looked at.

Ephesians 2 and verse 10. It says, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. When Paul says, we are his workmanship, the word workmanship in the Greek is poema.

We get our word poem from it. It means we're an actual piece of art, a work of art. Not you and I as individuals, but we as a group.

We are that people that he has formed for himself, as it said in Isaiah. And he has done this so that we might walk in good works. It says, we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

So we are a people who are for good works. In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5, Jesus pretty much summarized all that we've said. So far, in a few verses here, Matthew 5, verses 14 through 16.

Jesus said, ye, plural, are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, which is in heaven. Now, he said to his disciples, which was a very small group at that time, he says, ye, plural, you are the light of the world. And he compared them to a city.

Now, we think of a city as a geographical spot on a map. It's a little dot there with the name of it by it on the map. And of course, that's what a city is.

It's a location to us. But the word city in the old, in the biblical times, referred to usually a city-state, especially in the Old Testament times. Almost every city had its own walls around it and was an entity to itself.

And usually, in many cases, had its own king and all. But basically, the word city is used as a government or a people living under a certain government. And that's what Jesus, I believe, was implying here, that we are the city of God.

We live under the rule of God. We are his subjects. We are citizens of his city.

Together, we make up the city. You see, in the Bible, the word city doesn't mean the

geographical spot where the citizens live. But it simply means the citizenry, the people who are the citizens.

They are the city. When I go down to Santa Cruz and people say, well, what's Santa Cruz like? I have to think, well, are they asking me what it's like geographically? What it's like in the natural, you know, about the trees and the ocean and the beaches and so forth? Are they asking me what it's really like spiritually? Are they asking me what kind of people are there? I mean, when I think about Santa Cruz, I don't think so much of the beaches and all. I think of the spiritual environment there.

It's crazy down there. Every kind of cult, every kind of irresponsible lifestyle is represented down there. And it's a place full of darkness, spiritual darkness and deception.

And while it's beautiful as far as a geographical spot, the people of that city make it have a certain character. Sodom and Gomorrah were cities. You probably don't even know where they were on the map, but you probably feel like you know those cities very well.

Not because of where they were, but because of their citizenry. The city of Sodom was destroyed, not because of its geographical landmass, but because of the citizenry. When Jesus said that we are like a city, He's not talking about where we are located.

He's talking about the fact that we are citizens together of God's community, of a people that God has planted in this earth. And He goes on to say, Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good work. We are a people unto good works, as Titus 2.14 tells us.

So this is what the people of God is. It is a corporate entity. It is a national thing, really.

Not any earthly nation, but it's God's own kingdom. It's a spiritual race of people, a peculiar people who are set aside to bring forth the praises of God and to do good work. Also called, as we saw in 1 Peter, a generation, a chosen generation or race.

Just before we close, I want to bring out a few verses that talk about that particular aspect of us being a chosen race, because it will help us to see. In Psalm 22, I want you to look at Psalm 22 with me, because of the tremendous significance of the two verses we're going to look at. Psalm 22, more than any other Old Testament passage, gives a detailed description of the crucifixion of Jesus.

There are other places that allude to it in the Old Testament, but none, nearly as much as Psalm 22, give us a picture of the crucifixion of Jesus. And it's very evident that the message of Psalm 22 is that the Messiah would come and die for his people. But the last verses of the psalm tell us what the result of his death and resurrection would be.

And it's in verses 30 and 31, Psalm 22, verses 30 and 31. It says, "...a seed," which

means an offspring, "...shall serve him. It shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.

They shall come and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he has done this." Now, this is an interesting statement and perhaps a bit confusing if we hadn't talked about some of these concepts already, but it says, "...they shall come and declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born." This is talking about the church. Israel already existed. It was a people.

But the church, which is a people also, was not yet born. It had not come into existence at this time. He's talking about a future people, the church.

And it says about them in verse 30 that they are a seed that would serve him. They would serve Christ. And it, that seed, would be accounted to the Lord for a generation.

That is, we'd be called a generation, even as Peter says we are a chosen generation. The church is seen as a generation, which more properly means race of people. In Psalm 102, Psalm 102, verses 16 through 18, the psalmist says, Psalm 102, 16, "...when the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.

He will regard the prayer of the destitute and not despise their prayer. This shall be written for the generation to come, and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord." Now, it's interesting. It says this is written for the benefit of the generation, which is to come.

"...and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord." Remember, we said that we are a people unto his praise. He talks about he's going to create a new people, which is the church. In the days this psalm was written, the Jews were the people.

But there was a people that would yet be created. And we know that it has come to be created in the body of Christ. It's called the generation, which was to come.

The holy generation, the chosen generation, the church. Now, with that in mind, let's look at one last passage. And this is all that I intended to share tonight.

It's in Acts chapter 2, where we hear the first gospel sermon from Peter, the day of Pentecost. Acts chapter 2, beginning with verse 37. Now, that's not where the sermon begins.

The sermon's much longer, takes up most of the chapter. But these are the closing words of the sermon. It says in Acts 2, 37, "...Now when they heard this," that is, when the people heard Peter's sermon, "...they were pricked in their heart and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sin, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are far off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day were added unto them about three thousand souls.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles, and all that believed were together and had all things common. And they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved." Now, this is the first time the word church is used in the book of Acts to refer to the new community of believers. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached the sermon.

So people were pricked to their heart. They said, What must we do? He said, Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Then he said, he exhorted them, and testified further with many more words, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

The word untoward means crooked and perverse. From this perverse generation. Now, remember, there was a new generation started.

This was the people that was to be created, the church of the living God, a new people. But the Jews were the generation of which Peter was speaking. All the listeners were Jews.

And the Jews had been chosen to be a chosen generation in the Old Testament. But they'd been untoward. They'd been perverse.

They'd been crooked. They had broken the laws of God. They defected from God.

And God was now saying, OK, you've got to be, if you're going to be in my people, you've got to jump out of this group into my new group. You've got to save yourself from this untoward generation and become part of the new chosen generation, the holy people. A new people, which we find at the end of the chapter called the church.

Now, one thing that we can observe from this passage is that Peter's invitation was not simply to individual salvation alone. Now, it's true, we are saved as individuals. Praise God for that.

God deals with us as individuals, but he was calling people to defect from one

community, so to speak, into a new community. Save yourself from this generation or this race and become part of this new race. He was calling them not to an individualized heavenly goal, but he was calling them to be part of a new race, a new community, which would eventually become a global community as the apostles later spread the gospel throughout the whole world.

At this point, it was all in Jerusalem. But note, what they formed was a new community. They saw themselves as having one heart and one mind.

They saw themselves as a people. Not 3,000 individuals, but they saw themselves as a people. No one even said that the things he owned were his own, because they felt like, hey, what's mine is yours.

We're all part of the same people. And so right from the very beginning, the church was seen as a people, which expressed itself in certain forms of community. And it was called the church.

That's how the term came to be used. Now, the word church there in the Greek is ekklesia, which was a term that the Christians used for their community. Ekklesia.

The word ekklesia in the Greek comes from two words, which means the called out one. Now, the important thing to note is that the word ekklesia was used in the Greek Old Testament for the congregation of Israel. The Old Testament, of course, was written in Hebrew, but it was translated into Greek in 287 BC or something like that.

And the Greek translators of the Old Testament used the word ekklesia to refer to the congregation of Israel traveling with Moses in the wilderness. The called out ones. They'd been called out of Egypt.

They were moving as a community together. The called out community. Following their leader, following actually the cloud, following the presence of God to a destiny that they would share together as a unique people if they would obey.

And now the new community formed on the day of Pentecost takes that name, ekklesia, to refer to themselves, the church, this people, the people of God, the chosen generation, the elect race, the holy nation, the city set on a hill. All these are collective terms. They all refer to one thing, the ekklesia, the church.

And the church worldwide is the called out ones. We are a people. And when we become Christians, we become part of a people.

We don't just become me and Jesus in my individual closet. I become part of an enormous movement that God began about 2,000 years ago, but really it had roots going back in the Old Testament. And we become part of a moving mass of individuals.

And Jesus always spoke of the church or the kingdom of God corporately. When he said the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that grows, or the kingdom of God is like leaven put in a lump, or the kingdom of God is like this or that, a field. He always thought as a movement that involved every member, not as something where it was just an individual matter alone.

And we are called to relationships with each other. We are a people of God and we need to learn how to be a people under his praise. He's called us.

We are a people that he's formed for himself who should bring forth his praises. He's created us to be a peculiar people, zealous of good works. There should be not only a few people in town that others look at and say, that person must be a Christian because he has good work.

And when they think of good works or they think of Christians, it's a shame that they might think of a few individuals that they've known who stand out as being particularly good. But how desirable it is that when the worldly people look at or think of the church, they think of a people who together and consistently express good works and praise toward God, who have a corporate identity that they share, who relate to each other in unity. This is certainly the way God looks at his people and what he expects of them.

And I don't know whether we'll be led to talk any more about this subject in future weeks, but one thing I really want all Christians to realize is that we're not in this as individuals only. We are following God as a community of people. I don't mean great commission community here on this property.

I mean, the global community of Christians. God is bringing us all to, as Paul said it in Ephesians 4, unto a mature man, unto the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ. God saw or sees the church so much as an individual that he sometimes refers to it as an individual, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, a new man, as Paul calls it in Ephesians 2.15. The church is a new man.

And so you can see that God does not want us to think of ourselves as a fragmented, individualized group of people as we were in the world. Peter says, we were in times past, we were not a people, but we are now a people of God. Before you were a Christian, it was you against the world.

It was looking out for number one. If you didn't do it, no one was going to look out for you because you were not a people. You were not part of a people.

You were just you. But now we are we. We are the people of God.

And when one member suffers, all suffer. When one is exalted, all rejoice. And it's a one for all, all for one kind of an arrangement.

And while many Christians have tried to bring into their Christian life the whole fragmented, individualized concept that they had of their lives in the world, where, you know, it don't matter to me. We sing a song here, which we probably shouldn't sing, so it has a negative truth in it. But one of the songs we sing is, If the preacher don't go, don't bother me, I'm on my way.

I'm on my way to Canaan land. If the deacon don't go, don't hinder me, I'm on my way. Praise the Lord, I'm on my way.

And that's true. Even if no one else went, we should be determined to go ourselves. Another song we sometimes sing is, Though none go with me, still I will follow.

Though none go with me, still I will follow. No turning back. Those songs express a tremendous spirit of determination to follow God, even without support from others.

But they might cause us to forget that there are others going with us. And it is our concern if the preacher don't go, or if the deacon don't go, or if anyone don't go. It's our concern because we're all going together.

When the trumpet blows and the cloud begins to move, the whole company moves together. And as God is leading His church on, we sing a song, The church of God is moving on. I don't know if that had any meaning to you, but to me, I believe God is leading the church to its destiny.

And that is to be a unified people unto His praise, zealous of good works, visible and recognizable to the world, as a city set on a hill that cannot be hid, so that men may see our good works and glorify God. Thus we not only are people that bring praise to Him from our own lips, but we bring praise to Him from others because they see our good works and glorify God. And that's really what our calling is, to be a holy people, a people of God's inheritance.

And we ought to seek that God should have at least as good an inheritance as we should wish for our children or ourselves. And certainly we should put more effort into making God's inheritance a thing of beauty and value, that is His church, than we do for making our own children or our own estate a thing of value. We need to save ourselves from that wayward and crooked generation to which we formerly belonged and become part of the new community of God, where we have one heart and one spirit among us, and are walking together and bringing each other, bringing along the weak ones, helping each other along, seeing that if one lags behind, it's going to cause a delay for the whole company, because we're not in it alone, we're in it together.