

WHO ARE GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE?

By [Kenneth J. Davies](#)

Does God have a “chosen people” today? If so, who are they? What makes them “chosen”? What were they chosen to do?

The answers to these questions can only be found in the Bible. As you study this subject in light of this essay, you may find that it contradicts what you have been taught. If this is so, it is because you have been taught a “system,” not the Bible. What does the term “chosen people” mean? What does the Bible say:

“For you are a holy people to the Lord your God: the Lord your God has chosen you to be a special people to Himself, above all people that are on the face of the earth.” – Deut. 7:6

To whom was this spoken? A look at Deut. 6: 3-4 reveals it was spoken to Israel. At that time, Israel consisted of all those that came out of Egypt with Moses (see Deut. 7:8). A very similar verse is Deut. 14:2: “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a peculiar people to Himself, above all the nations of the earth.” In 1 Chron. 16:13, Israel is called “His chosen ones”: “O you seed of Israel His servant, you children of Jacob, His chosen ones.” David wrote: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom He has chosen...” (Psa. 33:12). And: “O you seed of Abraham His servant, you children of Jacob His chosen... He brought forth His people with joy, and His chosen with gladness.” (Psa. 105:6, 43).

Isaiah records these words from the Lord: “But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, My friend... You are My servant; I have chosen you, and not cast you away.” (Isa. 41:8-9) “You are My witnesses,” says the Lord, “and My servant whom I have chosen...” (Isa. 43:10). “...I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen.” (Isa. 43:20). “Yet Hear now, O Jacob My servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen:” (Isa. 44:1). In Isa. 48:12, the Lord refers to them as “My called,” and Daniel calls them “His chosen people” (11:15).

From the above, it can be seen that the phrase, “chosen people” definitely applied to Israel?

But, what was the composition of OT Israel? According to the Bible, Israel was made up of:

1. the descendants of Jacob (Ex. 1:1; Josh. 13:6, etc.), and,
2. those who joined Israel through circumcision and keeping the law (Ex. 12:48f).

Keeping the covenant was requirement for all those who wished to remain a part of Israel: “And the uncircumcised male... shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” (Gen. 17:14). “...whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day [of the Feast of Unleavened Bread]. That soul shall be cut off from Israel... for whoever eats anything leavened, that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger, or born in the land.” (Ex. 12:15,19). For other examples, see Ex. 30:32,38; 31:14; Lev. 7:20-21, 25,27; 17:4, 9-10, 14; 18:29; 19:8; and Num. 15:30-31.

These Scriptures, and many other, show that membership in the nation of Israel was dependent on obedience to God's commandments. To disobey God was to lose one's citizenship.

When most people think of O.T. Israel, they think exclusively in terms of Israel as a nation. Yet, this is not the true Biblical meaning of "Israel." The Old Testament scholar A. R. Hulst has shown that the name "Israel" has always had a twofold significance: one national, and the other religious.¹ For example: "...you [Israel] will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Ex. 19:6. The prophecy of Amos (9:11-12) proclaims that the remnant of Israel would be "largely an entity of religious instead of national destination."²

Isaiah says much the same thing: "[God's] house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. The sovereign Lord declares – He who gathers the exiles of Israel: I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered." (Isa. 56:7-8).

The noted scholar Hans K. LaRondelle has demonstrated conclusively that the primary meaning of "Israel" in the O.T. "stands for the religious covenant community, the people who worship Yahweh in truth and Spirit. Secondly, it denotes a distinct ethnic group or nation which is called to become spiritual Israel. Decisive for the Old Testament prophets and their prophecies is the theological quality of the 'people of God,' not their ethnic and political characteristics."³

Contrary to the claims of Hal Lindsey, and other dispensational authors (Charles Ryrie, etc.⁴), the blessing of Israel's election was not unconditional. "The purpose of the election is service, and when the service is withheld the election loses its meaning, and therefore fails....If she [Israel] ceased to acknowledge Yahweh to be her God, then she declared that she no longer wished to be His people. ...Her high calling to be the Chosen People was not the mark of Divine indulgence or favoritism, but a summons to a task exacting and unceasing, and election and task were so closely bound together that she could not have one without the other."⁵

Did O.T. Israel lose her election? As Paul would say, "God forbid!" The Old Testament prophesied in many places that a "remnant" would be saved. The question is: Of whom was this remnant to consist? According to Jer. 31:31-34, the remnant would be made up of those who "know the Lord," and whose sins would be forgiven completely (unlike under the Old Covenant – Heb. 10:1-4). This was to be made possible through the initiation of a "new covenant." This New Covenant (or "Testament" –KJV) was ratified by Jesus at His crucifixion, shown to His disciples in symbolic form in the Last Supper (Mt. 26:28 and parallels; 1 Cor. 11:25).

Is New Testament Israel any different from Old Testament Israel? If so, how?

The Israel of the New Covenant is made up of:

1. those descendants of Jacob who believed in the Messiah (Mt. 10:6; 15:24; Acts 2:36-41; 21:20, etc.), and,
2. those who joined Israel through spiritual circumcision and the keeping of the new "law" (Rom. 2:28-29; 13:10; 1 Tim. 1:5).

With the establishment of the New Covenant, physical descent was no longer a determining factor for entrance into Israel. Only those who believed in the Messiah could enter or remain a part of Israel. Let us examine what the Bible has to say on the subject: "The Lord called you [Israel] a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form. But with the roar of a mighty storm He will set it on fire, and its branches will be broken." (Jer. 11:16). Verse 17 says this was directed to "the house of Israel, and the house of Judah." Hosea says of Israel: "His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree...." (Hos. 14:6).

Paul picks up the olive tree motif in Rom. 11:17-24. He says those Jews who rejected the Messiah were themselves rejected and “broken off” (or cut off, to use the O.T. term) from the “olive tree” of Israel (v.20). The apostle showed that the only possible way to remain a citizen of Israel was to believe in Jesus as Messiah. This citizenship was also offered to the Gentiles on the same condition. If they would put their faith in the Messiah of Israel, they would be made fellow citizens of Israel (cf. Eph. 2:19). “Christ created His Church, not beside Israel, but as the faithful remnant of Israel that inherits the covenant promises and responsibilities. Christ’s Church is not separated from the Israel of God, only from the Christ-rejecting Jewish nation.”⁶

The identification of the Church with Israel is explicit in Peter’s first epistle: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...” (1 Pet. 2:9). Here, Peter definitively states that those who “believe” in Christ Jesus (1 Pet. 2:7) were the “chosen race” and the “holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9; compare Ex. 19:6; Deut. 7:6; and 14:2). “Only in Christ could Israel as a nation have remained the true covenant people of God.’⁷ God’s covenant people are no longer distinguished by racial or territorial characteristics, but exclusively by their faith in Christ.⁸ And the land we have inherited is a spiritual one. The spiritual blessings of citizenship in the Israel of God are ours as Christians, but what of the “unconditional” land promises of the so-called “Palestinian Covenant”?

One of the most common assertions of the premillennial dispensationalist today is that the formation of the State of Israel in 1948 is proof that the Jews are still “God’s Chosen People,” and that He still has prophetic plans for them. (This has been asserted more vigorously than ever due to the recent hostilities in the Middle East). It is claimed that God was at work bringing the Jews back to their “ancient homeland,” and that they have a Biblical right to claim Palestine as their own.⁹ Are these claims correct? Was the formation of the State of Israel evidence of God’s blessing? Of God’s election?

Just what Scriptures do dispensationalists use to support these claims? How do they come to their conclusions? As you may know already, the dispensationalist uses what he calls a “literal hermeneutic.” That is, he claims to interpret the words of the Bible at face value, understanding them in their “normal,” everyday usage and meaning.¹⁰ This extremely literally hermeneutic is then used to “interpret” the prophecies of the Old Testament that speak of the return of God’s people to the Holy Land. However, this literalism is also used as an excuse to ignore the plain reinterpretation by the New Testament writers of these very same prophecies. Even when the inspired writer of the N.T. give a meaning to the O.T. prophecies other than a “literal” one, the dispensationalist will say that this is not the complete meaning, and that these prophecies “remain to be realized for Israel.”¹¹

One of the Scriptures the dispensationalist claims was fulfilled by the 1948 formation of the State of Israel is found in Ezek. 36-37. This prophecy was given to Ezekiel during the Babylonian captivity (Ezek. 1:1-2), and foretold the eventual return of Israel to their land. Tied in with this prophecy was the prediction of the coming Messiah (Ezek. 38:24), and the inauguration of the New Covenant (Ezek. 38:26-28). As we know from both secular history and the New Testament, the people did return to the land and the Messiah did come and establish the New Covenant (Mt. 26:28). Despite this, dispensationalists deny fulfillment of either of these prophecies, saying they found only a “partial fulfillment” in Israel’s return and Christ’s first advent.¹² They further allege that the regathering of Jews to form the current State of Israel is part of the final fulfillment. They say the blessings of the “Palestinian Covenant” are only now coming into existence. The promises of such passages as Deut. 30 are touted as “Scriptural basis” for Israel’s regathering.¹³ How should we answer such claims?

According to Deut. 30:1-8, a necessary condition for the regathering of Israel to Palestine was returning to the Lord: “And [when you] shall return to the Lord you God, and shall obey His voice...with all your heart, and all your soul, then the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity....” (vs.2-3).

Based on this clear passage of Scripture, it can be definitely concluded that the State of Israel which now exists was not formed as a result of the blessings of this covenant (the “Palestinian Covenant” of the Scofield Bible).

The Jews of 1948 (except for maybe a few isolated individuals) did not turn to the Lord, And, to base the formation of Israel upon their alleged “faithfulness” to Judaism is to betray a fundamental misunderstanding of what Judaism is. Some think the Jew of today has a special advantage, perhaps even salvation without Christ, because they believe in the God of the Old Testament, and follow the Old Testament religion. This overlooks the fact that the religion of the Old Testament was based on making sacrifices for sins (Lev. 17:11). It also ignores the statements of the New Testament that there is absolutely NO salvation outside Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:10-12), and that the Old Testament religion was no longer efficacious (Heb. 7-10). The Lord of the New Testament is Jesus. This revelation casts light on who the Lord of the Old Testament is. For example, Peter quotes Joel 2:32 as being fulfilled in Jesus: “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

What shall we answer when the dispensationalist claims the existence of the State of Israel today is “proof” of God’s covenant blessing upon them? With the clear backing of Scripture, we can say, “NO!” We can then point to Deut. 30:1-8 as proof that the Israel of today is definitely not the Israel of the Bible! But, what about the land promised to Abraham?

Paul, in citing the promise of Abraham, does not limit the territory to Palestine: “It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.” (Rom. 4:13). This is an extension of the statement of Jesus in Mt. 5:5, in which the meek shall inherit not merely Palestine, but “the earth.” As you can see, the inheritance is for “Abraham and his offspring.” The dispensationalist believes Jewish people are entitled to the inheritance based on their racial extraction or ethnic heritage. But, Paul counters this idea in Gal. 3:7,29: “Know for sure that only those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham. If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s see, and heirs according to the promise.” In case he hasn’t made it clear enough, Paul reiterates for those who expect some special privilege for physical descendants of Abraham: “Now to Abraham’s and his seed the promises were made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your seed,’ who is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). The only way to inherit anything is in Christ! The Jewish leaders who came to John the Baptist thought the Kingdom was theirs automatically by virtue of their heritage: “Do not think to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones!” (Mt. 3:9).

Apostle Paul states the nature of true Jewishness: “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter...”(Rom. 2:28,29 cf. Rom. 9:6-8; 11:5-7).

“The full scope of Israel’s prophets was not nationalistic, but universal, with an increasing cosmic dimension which took in heaven and earth (Isa. 65:17; 24:21-23).”¹⁴ The writer of Hebrews assures them Abraham was not looking merely to Palestine for fulfillment of the promises. He looked for a “a better country,” and a city “whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10,16). “The continuity of the O.T. terms and Middle East images in Hebrews assures the Church that God’s promise has

neither failed nor been postponed, but is experienced now in Christ (Heb. 6:5)...”¹⁵ And, the land promises made to Abraham are fulfilled in the universal Kingdom of God.

In conclusion, we have studied the subject of who God’s Chosen People are, and have found that, according to the Bible, Israel is now composed of all those who believe in Jesus as Messiah. It is not correct, therefore, to state that the Church has replaced Israel. Rather, the church is the continuity of the Old Testament Israel of God; it has only replaced the Jewish nation “¹⁶ There is no more “Jew and “Gentile” racial distinctions. All nations are now a part of Spiritual Israel in Christ. Christ’s kingdom is here now in fullness. All (who were a part of the true spiritual) Israel were saved and given the inheritance (Rom. 11:26).

With the advent of the war in the Middle East, many people are wondering what is taking place in a prophetic sense, As preterist, we can say with assurance that the events now taking place are NOT a fulfillment of prophecy. We know that all prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70, at which time the New Covenant was fully established, making the Kingdom available to all who would believe in Jesus as Savior (Messiah). Some emotionalism is understandable in time of war. However, we need not fear the Great Tribulation or being “left behind” in the Rapture. We know by the time limitations recorded in the New Testament that these things have already occurred, and we are living in the new spiritual promised land.

Footnotes:

1. As quoted in *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation*, by Hans K. LaRondelle (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), p.81.
2. *Ibid.*, p.86.
3. *Ibid.*, p.90.
4. *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), p.141. Incredibly, on p.184, he says “the Israelites, even though in apostasy at present, are still considered holy because of both their physical and covenantal relationship to the Patriarchs”!
5. La Rondelle, pp.92-93.
6. *Ibid.*, p.102.
7. *Ibid.*, p.103.
8. *Ibid.*, p.106.
9. E.g. *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsye (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970, pp.40-41.
10. Cf. *Dispensationalism Today* by Charles Caldwell Ryrie (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p.86.
11. See: *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, (1967, note to Jer. 31:31, p.804.
12. Cf. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, eds. (Chicago” Moody Press, 1962), p.755.
13. E.g. *The Road to Holocaust* by Hal Lindsey (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), p.92. See also: *Richard’s Complete Bible Handbook* by Lawrence O. Richards (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), p.355.
14. *Ibid.*, p.141.
15. *Ibid.*, p.143.
16. *Ibid.*, p.210

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According to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, a Preterist is "a theologian who believes that the prophecies of the Apocalypse have already been fulfilled."

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