

The New People of God

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- ❑ On one occasion, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say I am?” (*Matthew 16:15*) “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” (*16:16*)

📖 “Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock¹ I will build my church²...’” (*Matthew 16:17-18a, NIV*).



- ❑ Those who identify with Jesus Christ through faith become part of his Church – the community of believers (Christians, body of Christ).

📖 Peter later wrote to Christians (including Gentiles³): “...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (*1 Peter 2:9-10, NIV*)

1. What do you notice about the description of Christians given in the above passage? Recall Exodus 19:5-6.⁴

How Do the “New People” Relate to Israel?

2. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. Paul says Gentiles were formerly “excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world.” What did God do to change that situation? What was necessary?

- Jesus Christ died as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, to provide the way for *both* Jews and Gentiles to be reconciled to God (restored to relationship with God). By making peace between them and God, he made peace between Israel and Gentiles. The dividing wall was destroyed.



3. What is the result of the change? How do Gentile believers benefit?

¹ Jesus said, “you are Peter (*Petros*) and on this rock (*petra*) I will build my church” (16:18). Interpretations of “this rock” vary. Does “this rock” refer to Christ, Peter’s confession, or Peter? Grammatically, “Peter” makes sense. However, this does not mean that Peter is the “first pope.” The apostle Peter is the first among equals. On the foundation of such men, Christ will build his church (Ephesians 2:20). However, even the apostles had no foundation other than Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). Ultimately, Jesus Christ is *the* Rock.

² “church” (*ἐκκλησία, ekklesia*) – assembly of people. The “church” refers to the community of believers in Christ.

³ “Gentile” – any person who is not a descendent of Israel

⁴ The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) says, “you (Israel) shall be to me (God) a royal priesthood and a holy nation.” Peter calls Christians in the New Testament what Israel was called in the Old Testament.

- Gentile believers are _____ with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone (*Ephesians 2:19-20*).⁵
- Along with Jewish believers, Gentile believers are part of God's _____, indwelt by God's Spirit (*Ephesians 2:21-22*).⁶

If the "New People" are Now God's People, What is the Status of Israel?

Paul talks about this in his letter to the Romans (chapters 9-11).⁷ Some of his main points follow:

- ❑ "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel"⁸ (*Romans 9:6*)
- ❑ "it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring" (*Romans 9:8*)
 - There is a true Israel within ethnic Israel. "True Israel" is saved by God's grace through faith (in Jesus Christ). Most of ethnic Israel has rejected Christ.
- ❑ Paul uses the analogy of the olive tree. (See *Romans 11:11-24*.)
 - The natural branches that remain on the olive tree represent believing Israel (true Israel, or the believing "remnant").
 - The natural, but broken-off branches represent unbelieving Israel.
 - The grafted-in wild olive shoots represent Gentile believers.
 - The salvation of Gentiles will provoke Israel to envy (*Romans 11:11*).
 - The natural, broken-off branches can be grafted back into the olive tree, *if* they believe in Jesus Christ (*Romans 11:23*).
 - In this manner – the provocation by the Gentiles, "all Israel will be saved" (*Romans 11:26*). "All Israel" does not mean every Israelite, but a representative portion of the people will finally receive their Messiah at a particular time in the future.⁹



The Purpose of God's People

4. In the Old Testament, what was the purpose of God's people? Consider Exodus 19:5-6.¹⁰

⁵ Gentile believers are "no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people. Thus they are "sharers together in the promise" (*Ephesians 3:6*; cf. *Galatians 3:29*).

⁶ They are part of God's building, indwelt by God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit is part of the promise (*Galatians 3:14*).

⁷ After Paul writes about the Gentiles' inclusion and Israel's stubbornness, he asks the question, "Did God reject his people (Israel)?" (*Romans 11:1*). He answers, "By no means! ... God did not reject his people." (*11:1, 2*)

⁸ Paul distinguishes between the mere physical descendants of Abraham and his spiritual descendants. Those who have faith in Christ are spiritual descendants of Abraham (*Romans 4:13-24*; *Galatians 3:29*). Those Jews who are spiritual descendants of Abraham are the *true* Israel (which is a minority of Jews). People do not automatically receive God's salvation because of natural relationship.

⁹ It should be noted that there are various interpretations of *Romans 9-11*. According to the interpretation given here, ethnic Israel still has a part in God's program. This interpretation is widely held, though there is disagreement concerning the significance of ethnic Israel in the future. Some other interpretations do not recognize ethnic Israel as having a part in God's future program. See the ICF website (Articles and Studies, *Romans: Good News for the World*) for a more detailed study of *Romans 9-11*

¹⁰ As God's "treasured possession" and a "holy nation" (*Exodus 19:5-6*), they were set apart to know God and reflect his holiness, As a "kingdom of priests" (*19:6*), they were to represent God, mediate His grace to others, and be a channel of blessing to the nations. In general, they were to know God and make Him known, that He may be glorified in all the earth.

5. What is the purpose of God's people today? Consider 1 Peter 2:9, Romans 10:12-15, Acts 1:8, Matthew 5:13-16, and Colossians 3:12-17. How should this affect the Christian's life goals and daily activities? Be specific.



- 📖 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV)
- 📖 “Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:12-17, NIV)
- 📖 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39, NIV)
- 📖 “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14-16, NIV)

Reflection/Application

- Are you one of “God's people?” Are you a citizen of heaven? (Philippians 3:20) This citizenship is received through faith in Jesus Christ. Everyone is invited. Do you need to trust in Jesus Christ, and commit your loyalty to him?¹¹
- If you are a true Christian, you are one of God's people. You are a citizen of heaven. As a citizen, you have tremendous privileges! You also have responsibilities. Reflect on question 5 above. Reflect on the Scripture passages listed. Ask yourself these questions:
 - What am I doing to fulfill God's purpose for His people?
 - To be a better representative of God's people, what changes are needed in my life?

Remaining Questions

- ? Questions remain from Lesson 13. It seems that God's promises still need further fulfillment. It seems that some prophecies have not been fulfilled. What about Israel's restoration to “the promised land?” Where is the kingdom of righteousness, peace and harmony, under the visible reign of the Messiah, the King of kings? Where is the perfect relationship with God?
- We will consider these questions in Lesson 15.

¹¹ “Citizenship in heaven” is just one description of the Christian's status. A person who trusts in Christ also becomes a “child of God” (John 1:12) and heirs of God the Father (Roman 8:17).

Practices of the New People of God

Note: A person does not become a Christian by adopting particular rituals, religious exercises, or ethical practices. A person becomes a Christian by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In any case, the following practices should be part of the Christian life.

- ❑ **Baptism** – Baptism (in water) is a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ, symbolizing the believer's repentance and new life in Christ. Baptism is an act of obedience to God. The New Testament knows nothing of an unbaptized Christian.



📖 When the Philippian jailer asked, "what must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas responded, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household." They spoke the word of the Lord to him and all the others in his house, and "then immediately he and all his family were baptized" (*Acts 16:30-33, NIV*).

- ❑ **Bible** – The Bible is God's primary communication to us, and is the sole authority for faith and practice. Thus the Bible should be read, studied, internalized, taught, preached, and obeyed.



- ❑ **Prayer** – Prayer is communication with God, and is necessary for a vital relationship with God. The believer should pray regularly and sincerely, both privately and corporately.

- ❑ **Fellowship** – Fellowship involves the Christian's relationships with other believers. Believers are to love and encourage one another, help one another, and meet together on a regular basis.

📖 "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together ... but let us encourage one another" (*Hebrews 10:24-25, NIV*)



- ❑ **Outreach/Evangelism** – Outreach/evangelism involves the Christian's relationships with others who are *not* believers. Believers are to love their neighbors. They are to be "salt and light" (*Matthew 5:13-16, NIV*). They are to share the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ at home and throughout the world (*Matthew 28:18-20, NIV*).

- ❑ **The Lord's Supper** – The Lord's Supper is a regularly practiced commemoration of Christ's atoning death on the cross. The bread and cup symbolize the body and blood of Christ, given as an atoning sacrifice. Concerning the Supper, Jesus said, "do this in remembrance of me" (*Luke 22:19*). The Lord's Supper is a time of reflection and intimate worship, and participation in the bread and cup is appropriate for believers only.



📖 "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (*Acts 2:42, NIV*).