

## Chosen People --- For What?

Exodus 19:1-6

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What God began with Abram in 2150 BCE finally came to fruition 650 years later with Israel brought out of slavery in Egypt and on the move to a land they did not know. 650 years is forever in these times. To put it in perspective, it would mean something happening today was put in motion in the 1370's. I doubt anyone here can name their ancestors from 1370, much less what was going on in your family's life. But, we have a Biblical record of what God was doing, and it includes a history of a special man, a special family, and a special clan—Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who became Israel after he wrestled with God's angel. We also have a history of Jacob's family and how they ultimately ended up in Egypt.

Today, we're going to look into the promise to Abram when he was 75 and its fruition almost 700 years later in about 1486 BC when Israel began its move to the promised land. On their own they had ended up being slaves in a foreign land, not the land God had led Abraham to. God rescued them from their slavery by sending Moses to lead them and toward the "promised land." In the beginning of this generation spanning plan, Abram was chosen by God and told to leave his home in Haran in modern Iraq and go to a new place God would show him. Abram was told that there he would be blessed, have a great posterity and that the land would ultimately be owned by his descendants. God had a plan, which was not clear to the casual observer, but 650 years later the promises were happening. And God chose a man —Abram—to get the ball rolling.

The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament is full of God's choosing people and giving them a job to do. In the New testament this idea of choosing shifts. God has chosen, God has sent Jesus, now it's our turn to choose. Every one from Jesus on preaches:CHOOSE!

Chosen- elected: these are big theological words, but they aren't hard to understand. We believe God chose Israel, but chosen for what? Were they just to sit and enjoy the agrarian life style as god's favorites? Or, were they chosen for a purpose? Scripture tells us the answer in Exodus 19:1-6. Let's listen for God's word for us!

Exodus 19:1-6

The Word Of The Lord!

Abraham was a chosen man. God called him to leave all that he knew, all of his family, and move to a land that was foreign to him but destined to become special. It was a promised land, the promised land. But when Abram came to Canaan, it wasn't so special. It didn't have a mighty river that would give life protecting water. It didn't have natural borders, except for the Mediterranean. It had a big desert area on the south and a rocky, mountainous ridge that ran

from north to south, It was dry for most of the year, and crops were difficult. It wasn't a wonderful place, but it did have something special about it: it was the land in between the two great river systems that produced world empires like the Hittites, Assyrian, Babylon, Persia and Egypt. It was also the land that sat in the middle of the great trade routes of the world. From Western Europe to China the world was in contact and traded. From the Indian Ocean and Africa to Russia and the countries with the name "stan" on their ends, the world traded and knew of each other. The one place that touched all of these routes was what was to become Israel, a crossroads that was on both sides of the Jordan. And, within that land, at the north end of the Sea of Galilee was the cross roads cross roads—the world passed by and through this area daily. Why do you think Jesus went to this very spot first to preach and why did he stay there 3 years preaching and living the Good News?

Chosen man, chosen family, chosen clan, chosen land!

And our story of God's plan picks up on the passage we just read. They were free of Thutmose IIa, the short lived Egyptian Pharaoh. They had made it to the dry wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula and they had come to the edge of the mountains in the south, one in particular, Mt. Sinai. They had walked several hundred miles. God had their attention as they camped there. And Moses went up to the top of the mountain, about 7500 feet high, higher than anything in the Appalachian chain, but Moses went up and met with God and there God revealed why God had chosen Abraham in the first place. Year 650 of God's specific plan for humanity!

There, and then, God told Israel ---as Abraham was chosen for a purpose, you too, as his descendants, have been chosen for that same purpose. You are a special people for me. Not to sit in luxury and do nothing! Not to rule the world or any great part of it! Not to impose God's will on anyone! Instead they were chosen to be servants—sound familiar? Sound like the Christ who was later promised by God? They were chosen to be a Holy Nation and a Priestly Kingdom. Two nouns and two adjectives! The two nouns are kingdom and nation. The words meant sovereignty, power, dominion, politics. The two adjectives —priestly and holy — described the kind of kingdom they were to be—a priestly kingdom, and the kind of nation they were to be—a holy nation. Holy means set apart, given a special job. Priestly meant being a servant, it meant bringing God to the world and bringing the world to God. It meant knowing God, listening to God, following God, sharing God, and praising God. It meant being faithful to God and learning how to do their job.

At the foot of Mt. Sinai Israel received its marching orders: God has chosen you, rescued you, preserved you, protected you, and now God is commissioning you and sending you. A priestly Kingdom---a Holy Nation. Of course they asked how, and almost immediately they were given help. We call the most visible part of that help the Ten Commandments. The first three commandments are about the best way to serve God. The last six the best way to take God to

the world and to bring the world to God, with one in the middle –Worship, telling them how it was all to come together. In worship they learned that followers of God must worship. Must give worth to God, must breathe in God and then must exhale, and then come back for more breathing in. The rest of Exodus after the Ten Commandments is a further equipping of them of how to do this job God had given them!

The covenant they made there with God was a covenant of being chosen and being special, but it also carried responsibilities. They had to love God and stay committed to God, they had to serve God and let the world know what Jesus would later tell Nicodemus—“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believed in him would not perish but have everlasting life.” With their covenant came a vocation they would be joining God in a unique partnership, they would be expected to live and work in community with God and with each other, they would be expected to serve in a special way, a way no people in history ever did or were asked to do, they were to be servants in the Kingdom of God and they were empowered to serve and to do what God asked them to. But, there’s always a but,--- BUT--they had to be obedient to God, to follow God, to listen to God. God was the way, the truth, the light, the life. They were to take God to the world as given to the world as and to bring the world to God.

Then, they were ultimately led to the promised land, this land Abraham had been sent to, this land of the Canaanites and Amorites, this land that was a land bridge to the world, a land where the highways crossed, languages intermingled, cultures exchanged values. It wasn’t a land within one of the great empire locales; it wasn’t fertile, it wasn’t watered well, it wasn’t highly sought after by empire builders, but it was slap dab in the middle of everything. It was a bridge. What better place in the world could you have chosen? China---too far East and often insular. Egypt---too far south. Iraq and Iran today---too contentious. Israel, with a little river, more a stream than river, and a world collection of rocks and ridges, Israel was the right place, from which service and ideas could be sent to the world and given to the world as the world passed through.

In time Israel waxed and waned in doing this vocation they were called to do, Many turned away from God. But many did do what God asked.

The Canaanites and Amorites learned this God was serious when their land was taken by Joshua. Jonah went to Nineveh in Assyria, to tell them of God’s coming judgment, and they repented. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and later Cyrus of Persia about God and showed them both the power of God.. Esther told Xerxes II, the Persian king about God. Solomon told the Queen of Sheba. The world learned, but God’s plan was not finished. What had been started at the foot of a mountain in the Sinai was ready for the rest of God’s plan. We call that rest of the plan --Jesus--the Messiah. God wasn’t through reaching out to the world. Jesus was sent and Jesus spent three years preaching and teaching in Galilee. Why there? That’s where the crossroads were—in Jesus’ time they went through Capernaum to go east and west

and north and south. The Good News bubbled forth in the chosen land's crossroads and the world heard.

While Jesus was with us, he taught and trained disciples and among his last words is our second reading. The risen Jesus is back in Galilee and in Matthew 28:16-20 he continues the charge given to God's chosen at Sinai.

Matthew 28:16-20

The Word of the Lord!

Listen to how Jesus phrased the same job God gave to Israel: Therefore, GO and MAKE DISCIPLES of all nations, BAPTIZE them, TEACH them all of what I ask, and I will be with you, as you go.

Chosen? Yes. They were chosen and so are we. We are God's special people today. And, if we say we believe, if we who are God's chosen commit to God, then we too must serve as priests for God, bringing God to the world and the world to God, and we must live differently, living with God in us, loving our neighbors and loving God, so that the world can look and say, this one loves and serves his or her God.

I want to close with words from Peter, written long after the Day of Pentecost, written near the close of his public ministry. The twelve got it.

Listen as I read it:

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:9-10

The theme of being chosen continues— Do you see how much God loves you? You have been chosen, all of us have, and together, we have a job to do. We're not through yet. God is still finding ways to send us and to use us, but only if we gather figuratively at the foot of Sinai and say yes, we will. Are you ready?

**Matthew 28**

16 Then, the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

17 When they saw him, they worshipped him; but, some still doubted.

18 Then Jesus came to them and said,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father

and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit,

20 And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Exodus 19:1-6

- 1 On the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt----on that very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai.
- 2 After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert Of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.
- 3 Then Moses went up to God and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said:  
“This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel.
- 4 You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagle’s wings and brought you to myself.
- 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession.  
Although the whole earth is mine,
- 6 you will be for me a **kingdom of priests and a holy nation**.
- 7 These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”