

a *collective* entity that would be a people of God.

“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. 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)

Notice that the above verses clearly state that those referenced in these verses are *“...a chosen people ... belonging to God...”* Keep in mind now that it is this *people* — the *collective* entity — not the individuals that have been chosen (or predestined) and belong to God. So if it is a *people* that belongs to God, and being a part of that people is no longer limited to the fleshly descendants of Abraham but is open to all, exactly how would an individual *become* a part of that chosen people that belongs to God?

Titus 2:14 explains that it is *by way of Christ* that this chosen people *becomes* God’s possession.

“Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” (KJV)

This is made even more clear in Galatians 3:29.

“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (NIV)

What does belonging to Christ mean for this chosen people?

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;” (Ephesians 2:19 KJV)

The household of God — the church — the Body of Christ *is* the collective entity that is the chosen people of God. The Body of Christ is a *people* — THE *people* with special status because of the relationship with God. *That people* is God’s own possession and is predestined by Him to be saved. God continues to have a *chosen people* — and that *people is* the Body of Christ — not specific individuals.

Since it is by way of Christ that this chosen people becomes God’s possession, that means the collective entity — the *one chosen people*, is “in Christ.” So any *individual* who wants to be included in that one, predestined group chosen by God would have to be *in Christ* because *that’s* how God purifies that people *unto Himself*.

We want to discuss the idea of *in Christ* a bit more and also take a detailed look at Ephesians 1:4-14. But since we’re at the end of this article, we’ll continue this subject in the next issue.

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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A People Of God

In our English language, we usually use the term “people” to refer to a collection of *individuals* assembled together — thus making up the whole or the mass. For example, we may say “there were a lot of people at the mall yesterday” or perhaps “how many people were at the concert?” We might even use the word “people” to reference the thought that although there are many individuals, each of those individuals may behave in a similar manner. An example of this usage might be the phrase “people will be people.”

In the Scriptures however, the term “people” often refers to a *single* corporate whole instead of a group of individuals making up the whole — a single corporate whole such as a nation or a race described or viewed as a collective entity. With *this* usage, we could truly speak of “one people.” An example of this usage in the Scriptures is —

“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)

Just to be certain that we have an understanding of the difference in the way we are *accustomed* to using the word “people” from the way it is often used in the Scriptures, let’s look at Genesis 11:6 and take note of the way various Bible versions differ in the translation.

“And the Lord said, ‘Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.’” (KJV)

“And the Lord said, ‘Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.’” (NKJV)

“The Lord said, ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.’” (NIV)

“The Lord said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.’” (NASB)

Of these four translations the one that best demonstrates what we are saying
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concerning this Biblical use of the word “people” is the King James Version. Notice the singular verb “is” instead of the plural “are.” The translators of the other three versions all used different wording for this section of the verse that would put them more in line with our English language. So what’s the point, you ask? Well, it actually *does* make a difference in our understanding of some verses in the Bible. For instance, there are some who believe that Ephesians 1:4-14 indicates that specific *individuals* are *predestined* either to be saved or to be lost. Regardless of what he or she does or does not do, God has already *pre-determined* whether or not that individual will be saved or lost. This belief of course is impossible to reconcile with the fact that God gave mankind a free will and each individual therefore has control over his or her *own* eternal destiny. So many Christians find verses like these in Ephesians difficult to grasp. But if we understand that “the chosen” are not individuals but instead is *a people* — a single corporate whole, these verses become much more clear. It is *a people* predestined by God. What’s the difference? Let’s begin in the Old Testament to discuss this in more detail.

From very early in the Scriptures, God established *a* people to be His own. We have recently been hearing more and more Christians saying that *all* of us — Christian or not — are children of God and therefore *belong* to Him. In *one* sense, that’s true. God created every one of us so the *whole earth* and *everyone* in it is His. We see this quite clearly in these verses below. Being a child of God in that sense however definitely does not assure us of salvation because we also see that God had a *special people* that was His treasured possession — *a* people “*unto Himself*.”

“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 house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel:’ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ ‘These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.’” (Exodus 19:3-6 NIV)

Although this people was *specifically chosen* by God and was His own possession, their relationship with Him was dependent on His grace.

“The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His loving kindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; (Deut. 7:7-9 NASB)

The keeping of this covenant by God with this people (or this nation) *kept* them His people. This is brought out even more clearly in these verses.

“That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into His oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day: That He may establish thee to day for a people unto Himself, and that He may be unto thee a God, as He hath said unto thee, and as He hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” (Deut. 29:12-13 KJV)

This of course is all part of the Old Testament — or the Old Covenant God made with Israel. But there would be a New Covenant established and in that Covenant God would *still* have His own people — *a* people that would be His possession. Let’s read a few verses from Jeremiah.

“‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the Lord, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord” for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’” (Jeremiah 31:31-34 NASB)

We all know that the New Covenant spoken of here in Jeremiah was indeed established so let’s move on into the New Testament to continue our discussion as to why it makes a difference whether or not we think of “people” in a collective or an individual sense when it comes to understanding certain Scriptures.

In Luke 1:17 an angel told Zechariah these words about his son John.

“And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous — to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (NIV)

We can see from just this one verse that God *still* would have *a* people of His own. That people however would no longer be limited to the fleshly descendants of Abraham. Becoming a part of that people would be open to all.

“I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:16-17 KJV).

The Old Covenant had been made with *a* particular people — a chosen race — the Israelites. We read in I Peter 2, that this would still be true of the New Covenant. There would still be *a* people — a chosen race (NASB); a generation (KJV); a people (NIV) — that is to say — *a single* corporate whole — a chosen *group* —