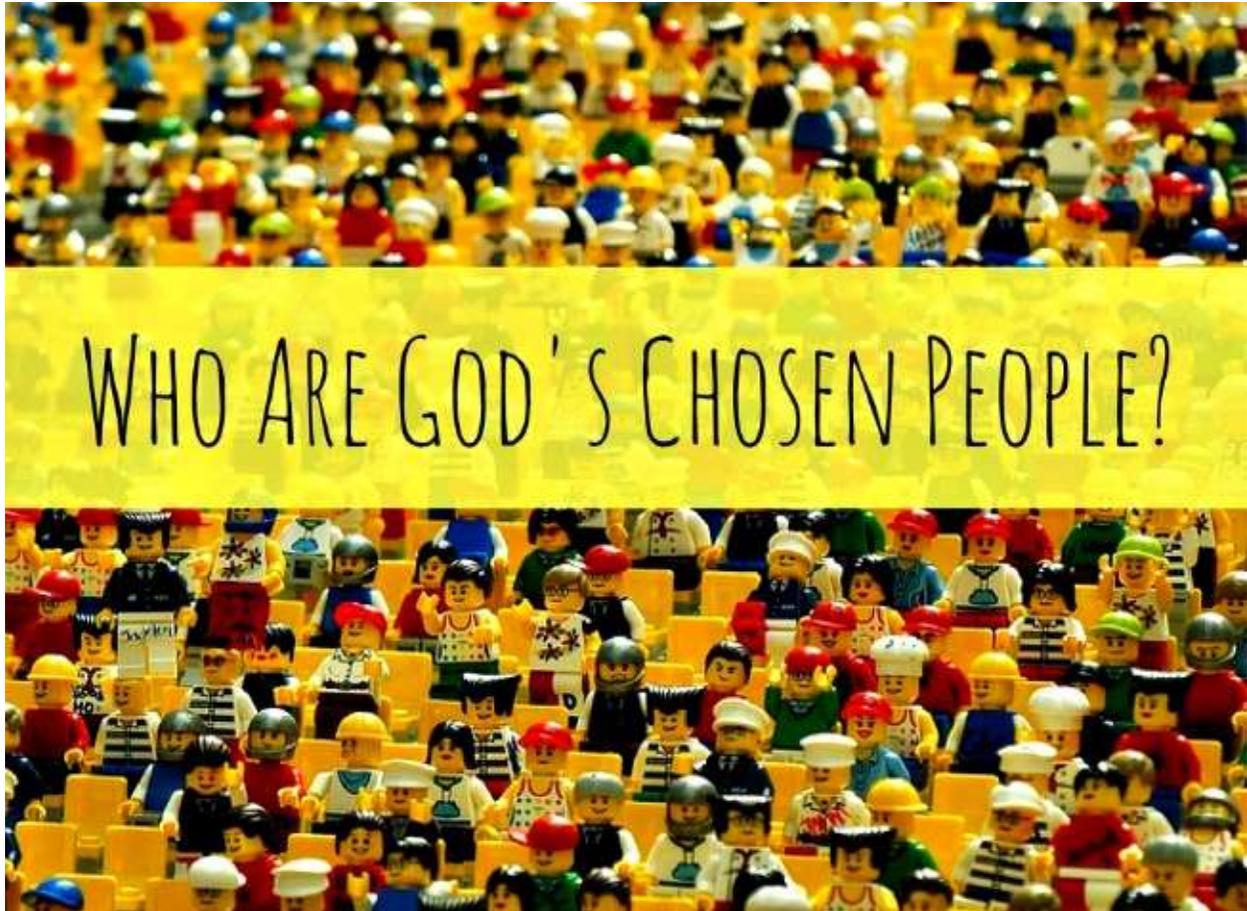


The idea of election, of the special "chosenness" of the Hebrew people

Peter Gogan
February 1977



The idea of election, of the special "chosenness" of the Hebrew people is generally acknowledged as one of the two bases of Old Testament faith (the other being the kingdom of David). In Exodus, Yahweh gives this distinct message to his people: *You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.* (Exodus 19:4-6)

Thus Yahweh's intimate relationship to the chosen nation is clear. However, the nature of the relationship between God's elected people and the other nations of the world has been a point of much discussion. The Old Testament seems to support two views. Deuteronomy indicates that Israel was to rule the nations: *For the Lord your God will bless you, as he promised you, and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; and you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you.* (Deuteronomy 15:6)

The author of Deutero-Isaiah makes the same point when he cries out... *"Behold your God!" Behold the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him.* (Isaiah 40:9-10) Nevertheless, in opposition to this position, Deutero-Isaiah later repeatedly stresses Israel's role as a "Suffering Servant": *But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off."* (Isaiah 41:8)

In a later chapter the prophet repeats the same idea with the words, *Behold, my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.* (Isaiah 52:13)

These are two unmistakably different views, which lead to an interesting problem. Which is the true perspective on the chosenness of Israel -- to rule or to serve?

The tendency of most biblical scholars is to trace the idea of chosenness from the exodus period, a point that John Bright makes in his study of Israel's history: "As for election, we can find no period in Israel's history when she did not believe she was the chosen people of Yahweh, and that her calling had been signaled by his gracious acts toward her in the exodus deliverance. For later periods the statement is so obvious as to require no reinforcement. One has only to recall how the prophets and the Deuteronomic writers, to say nothing of the virtual unanimity of later Biblical literature, continually hark back to the exodus as the unforgettable example of the power and grace of Yahweh calling a people to himself." This idea is also supported by Bernhard Anderson and many other biblical scholars.

Some authorities trace the origin of Israel's election to an earlier period -- the call of Abraham, as Georg Fohrer maintains. In his work on the Old Testament he refers directly to this event as the starting point of the chosen people, "The blessing of Abraham, which is transferred to Isaac (Genesis 22: 17-18), is interpreted in such a way as to emphasize the religious aspect of Israel's election more strongly."

Divine Principle, on the other hand, presents a view of chosenness in the context of universal history that is capable of combining these seemingly disparate opinions. Both ideas of election -- rulership and servitude -- have their origins in earliest man, with Cain and Abel. These dual aspects of chosenness can be applied from this beginning point through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, up until the present time.

After the first sin of our primeval ancestors it was the desire of God to restore His fatherhood, His rulership, over man, and to return to mankind dominion over the creation, guaranteed by the blessing given to Adam (Genesis 1:26). Because of the human fall, however, neither God nor man could retain this position of rulership. Paul makes a reference to "the god of this world," a being in opposition to the God whose glory is reflected in Christ (II Corinthians 4:4). The author of the Fourth Gospel also speaks of "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31). The strong implication is, therefore, that God has lost His relationship with His children, with man, and no longer rules the world.

In order to regain His position as ruler and parent of man, we see that God works His election through the children of the first parents. Cain and Abel are each asked by God to prepare an offering: "Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions." (Genesis 4:4) After each had made his offering God begins the process of chosenness by accepting Abel's offering and rejecting Cain's offering. The reason given by the author of Hebrews and also suggested by Divine Principle is a difference in the quality of faith.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking. (Hebrews 11:4)

So Abel is the first "chosen" individual, but still the question remains as to the nature of his election. His responsibility as God's elect is to return rulership to God and to re-establish dominion for man. There is great difficulty inherent in this situation -- the rulership belongs to Cain, rejected by God and standing in the objective position to Satan, "the god of this world." Cain, rejected and bitter, must give this rulership to his younger brother, thus returning it to God, as a voluntary act of his own will. Cain must see Abel through God's eyes, he must love his brother, obey him, and spread good words to compensate for the evil words which led to the fall. In the position of being loved by Satan, Cain thus becomes responsible for returning man's rightful position through his brother.

This is obviously a painful and difficult path for the older brother, the one already possessing rulership. It is an impossible situation unless Abel takes a vital step -- the step of service. In order for Abel to receive the blessing from his brother he must be humble, taking the position of a servant. As long as Abel is below Cain, then Cain will not kill Abel. After all, Abel is loved by God and, as such, is Cain's link to God. If Abel serves, then certainly Cain will eventually turn over rulership, placing himself under the dominion of his younger brother's love. The fact that Cain becomes enraged at Abel and becomes angry enough to murder his brother may reflect on Abel's fulfillment of his responsibility to serve.

Thus we see the two-fold pattern of rulership and service emerging at the beginnings of the human race. Cain is powerful, externally strong and cultured; while Abel continues to live by his faith, seeking a way to serve his older brother. Abel is responsible for gaining rulership of the creation (the nations), while Cain longs for the love of God.

This pattern is followed by Noah, the man of faith chosen by God to create a new world. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph are each called for the same type of service, while attempting to restore rulership. Jacob and Esau exactly follow these prototypes, with Jacob successfully winning his older brother and establishing a foundation for God's family.

Not surprisingly, Moses also fits this same plan. He is sent to Egypt to lead and rule the Hebrews on the foundation of his proven enormous faith. Yet to gain this position he continually serves and protects them, by feeding them and interceding for his people before Yahweh. It is in this context that he gains and maintains leadership of his nation, by being first chosen by God, then serving his people, ultimately attaining the rulership required by his God.

On this foundation of Moses' faith, Israel came to inherit the position of a "chosen people" in exactly the same pattern on a national level. Moreover, this level of election has yet to be fulfilled. It is the function of this chosen nation to serve the world, as the object of the love of God. The chosen nation or people is thus that which can bring about world-level restoration, the kingdom of God, finally establishing God's personal rulership of His children.

Servitude and rulership can be shown as not contradictory, when viewed from this aspect of God's providential history. Just as Abel needed to serve Cain in order to accomplish unity and, finally, rulership centered on God's parental heart, so all the chosen individuals, tribes, and nations must proceed along these same lines. An individual providential figure must demonstrate his faith, and then sacrifice himself to serve God's universal purpose. It is only in this way that a truly godly rulership can take place. Along with Deutero-Isaiah, we eagerly await this day: *It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*