

## Why Did God Choose Israel? (Part 1)

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**According to Scripture, God chose the people of Israel, that is, the people descended from the patriarch Israel, as his chosen people. The people of Israel had a special and privileged relationship with God.**

**"O seed of Abraham His servant, You children of Jacob, His chosen ones" (Psalms 105:6).**

**To many in our modern culture, the fact that God would designate a particular people to be "chosen," separate from other peoples of the earth, would seem grossly unfair, and would make God partial, and a respecter of persons.**

**Why did God choose Israel? Let's explore what the Bible has to say about this question.**

Let's go back now to the beginning of human history. God had created Adam and Eve as the first pair of humans.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26-27).

God gave instructions to the first pair, Adam and Eve, but they rejected his commands, and chose to follow Satan instead (Genesis 3:1-6).

Adam and Eve had children, and their children had children, and the earth's population of human beings rapidly grew:

"This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. After he begot Seth, the days of Adam were eight hundred years; and he had sons and daughters. So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died. Seth lived one hundred and five years, and begot Enosh. After he begot Enosh, Seth lived eight hundred and

seven years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died. Enosh lived ninety years, and begot Cainan. After he begot Cainan, Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died. Cainan lived seventy years, and begot Mahalalel" (Genesis 5:1-12).

So in that pre-flood era people tended to live a long time, for hundreds of years, and they produced sons and daughters, and their progeny produced sons and daughters. So the earth's population grew exponentially.

But the population of the earth, as it grew in numbers, grew further apart from the God who had created human beings in the first place.

"Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years'"(Genesis 6:1-3).

"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:5-9).

"The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch'" (Genesis 6:11-14).

"And [God] did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly" (II Peter 2:5).

For a hundred and twenty years Noah, both through his works and preaching, warned the world of what was coming. "... when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water" (I Peter 3:20 ).

Yet, **no one** listened, excepting perhaps one or more members of his family. Of all the vast population of the earth, which no doubt numbered into the millions, and perhaps even billions of human beings, only Noah and his family, eight people altogether, were saved. Because Noah listened to God and obeyed him, while the rest of humanity would not listen, and rebelled.

After the flood, humans began to multiply once again on the earth.

"So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1).

"Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated" (Genesis 9:18-19).

In Genesis 10 it's related how the families of the earth originated. "These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood" (Genesis 10:32).

The time came when the sons of man sought to develop a **one world government of their own devising**. This system was centered in the person of a powerful leader, a man called Nimrod, reminiscent of the "beast" of revelation. "Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, 'Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord.' And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah ( that is the principal city)" (Genesis 10:8-12).

Gill in his commentary on Genesis 10:8 states: "...the name of Nimrod is usually derived from [a Hebrew word] **drm [marad]**, [meaning] 'to rebel', because he was a rebel against God, as is generally said; and because, as Jarchi observes, he caused all the world to rebel against God, by the advice he gave to the generation of the division, or confusion of languages, the builders of Babel: he seems to be the same with Belus, the founder of Babel and of the Babylonian empire" (*John Gill's Expositor*).

Adam Clarke on Genesis 10:8: "it is very likely he was a very *bad man*. His name Nimrod comes from , *marad, he rebelled*; and the Targum, on 1Ch 1:10, says: *Nimrod began to be a mighty man in sin, a murderer of innocent men, and a rebel before the Lord*. The Jerusalem Targum says: 'He was mighty in hunting (or in prey) and in sin before God, for he was a hunter of the children of men in their languages; and he said unto them, *Depart from the religion of Shem, and cleave to the institutes of Nimrod*.' The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel says: 'From the foundation of the world none was ever found like Nimrod, powerful in hunting, and in rebellions against the Lord.' The Syriac calls him a *warlike giant*. The word *tsayid*, which we render *hunter*, signifies *prey*; and is applied in the Scriptures to the *hunting of men* by persecution, oppression, and tyranny. Hence it is likely that Nimrod, having acquired power, used it in tyranny and oppression; and by rapine and violence founded that domination which was the first distinguished by the name of a *kingdom* on the face of the earth" (*Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*).

Keil and Delitzsh on Genesis 10:8-12: "Nimrod 'began to be a mighty one in the earth.' נמרד [Nimrod] is used here, as in Gen. 6:4, to denote a man who makes himself renowned for bold and daring deeds. Nimrod was mighty in hunting, and that in opposition to Jehovah.

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"The name itself, Nimrod from [MaRaD] , 'we will revolt,' points to some violent resistance to God. It is so characteristic that it can only have been given by his contemporaries, and thus have become a proper name.

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"Nimrod the hunter became a tyrant, a powerful hunter of men. This course of life gave occasion to the proverb, 'like Nimrod, a mighty hunter against the Lord,' which immortalized not his skill in hunting beasts, but the success of his hunting of men in the establishment of an imperial kingdom by tyranny and power. But if this be the meaning of the proverb,... 'in the face of Jehovah' can only mean in defiance of Jehovah, as Josephus and the Targums understand it.

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"And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel,' the well-known city of Babylon on the Euphrates, which from the time of Nimrod downwards has been the symbol of the power of the world in its hostility to God." (*Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*).

According to Josephus: "Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah, a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it were through his means they were happy, but to believe that it was their

own courage which procured that happiness. He also gradually changed the government into tyranny seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence upon his own power. He also said he would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach! and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers!" (*Ant. l: iv: 2*).

The descendants of Cush inhabited the land of Shinar (Genesis 10:10; 11:2), "which most scholars consider to be Sumer" ("Who Was Nimrod?" biblearchaeology.org, first published in *Bible and Spade*, Summer 2001). It's suggested in this article that Nimrod was the same as Gilgamesh, known from clay tablets found in the ruins of Nineveh and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Nimrod, it is suggested, was not his given name, but a derisive epithet, descriptive of his character and behavior.

"Our English translation of the Hebrew of Genesis 10:8-10 is weak. The author of this passage of Scripture will not call Gilgamesh by his name and honor him, but is going to call him by a derisive name, what he really is, a rebel. Therefore we should translate Genesis 10:8-10 to read:

Cush begat Nimrod; he began to be a tyrant in the earth. He was a tyrannical hunter in opposition to the Lord. Thus it is said. 'Nimrod the tyrannical opponent of YHWH [Yahweh].'" (*ibid.*)

Babylon after the flood became the font of rebellion and hostility toward God, through a system of idolatry and deception. That same system has deceived mankind through the ages. In Scripture it's called: "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Revelation 17:5).

God was not pleased with this. So he confused their tongues and scattered them abroad over the face of the earth.

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth'" (Genesis 11:1-4).

"Often attributed to Nimrod, the Tower of Babel (Gn 11:1-9) was not a Jack and the Beanstalk-type of construction, where people were trying to build a structure to get into heaven. Instead it is best understood as an ancient ziggurat (Assyrian 'mountaintop').... A ziggurat was a man-made structure with a temple at its top, built to worship the host of heaven" ("Who Was Nimrod?" biblearchaeology.org, first published in *Bible and Spade*, Summer 2001).

"But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 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. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth" (Genesis 11:5-9).

Mankind had rebelled against God, rejecting his message. Nearly all the population of the earth had been destroyed by a flood. The rebellion continued after the flood, and became an organized system at Babylon.

Out of the God defying world of humanity, God called a man named Abraham.

"Now the Lord had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran" (Genesis 12:1-4).

Abram, or as he was later called, Abraham, proved faithful to God. And his son Isaac, also proved faithful, and the promises were passed down to him and to his son Jacob, or Israel.

"There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. Then the Lord appeared to him and said: 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply

as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.'" (Genesis 26:1-5).

God promised to reward these patriarchs who proved faithful to him by blessing their descendants. The faith of Abraham, manifested in his obedience to God, became a model for anyone who wants to have a positive relationship with God.

"Even as Abraham had faith in God, and it was put to his account as righteousness. Be certain, then, that those who are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham. And the holy Writings, seeing before the event that God would give the Gentiles righteousness by faith, gave the good news before to Abraham, saying, In you will all the nations have a blessing. So then those who are of faith have a part in the blessing of Abraham who was full of faith" (Galatians 3:6-9, Bible in Basic English version).

The faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is a starting point for those who are to be chosen by God. As a physical nation God chose the descendants of Israel because of the faith of their forebears, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Moses spoke to the people of Israel, as they were preparing to enter the land of Canaan God had promised to them in the days of their ancestors.

"For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard. Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? Or did God ever try to go and **take for Himself a nation** from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? **To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him. Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire. And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power,** driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day. **Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the Lord Himself is God in heaven**

**above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.** You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time" (Deuteronomy 4:32-40).

There are several reasons given here as to why God chose to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt. (1) Because he loved their ancestors. God had a special affection for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, because in a faithless, God defying world, they proved faithful. (2) He chose Israel because working with them he would reveal himself as the only true God, and there is none other. (3) He chose them to reveal his statutes and commandments, laws which would promote peace, health, tranquility, happiness, prosperity and longevity.

God proposed a covenant with the nation of Israel. Which they entered into of their own free will.

"And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: "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 indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; 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.' So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. [8] Then all the people answered together and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do.' So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord" (Exodus 19:3-8; cf. Exodus 24:3).

Note that God told them if they were faithful to the covenant, by obeying his words, that they would be a **kingdom of priests**. This will be discussed in further detail in part 2 of this series, as it is a key reason God chose Israel.

God emphasized to the people of Israel that **he did not choose them because of any special merit or greatness on their part**. But it was because of the promises to their forefathers. He made it clear that their continued favor with God would hinge on their faithfulness to the covenant in keeping his commandments.



"For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. **The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;** but because the Lord loves you, and **because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers,** the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them. Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers" (Deuteronomy 7:6-12).

Before they entered the land of Canaan, God had seen the stubbornness and faithlessness of the people of Israel. God had determined in his righteous judgment that the peoples of Canaan had become so wicked that they must be punished by being driven out of their land. But he made it clear to Israel that he had not been pleased by their conduct since leaving Egypt.

"Hear, O Israel: You are to cross over the Jordan today, and go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourself, cities great and fortified up to heaven, a people great and tall, the descendants of the Anakim, whom you know, and of whom you heard it said, 'Who can stand before the descendants of Anak?' Therefore understand today that the Lord your God is He who goes over before you as a consuming fire. **He will destroy them and bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly, as the Lord has said to you. Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land';** but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out from before you. **It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.** Remember! Do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day

that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. Also in Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, so that the Lord was angry enough with you to have destroyed you. When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. Then the Lord delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, that the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant. Then the Lord said to me, 'Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly; they have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them; they have made themselves a molded image.' Furthermore the Lord spoke to me, saying, 'I have seen this people, and indeed they are a stiff-necked people. Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.' So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire; and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the Lord your God--had made for yourselves a molded calf! You had turned aside quickly from the way which the Lord had commanded you. Then I took the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was angry with you, to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me at that time also" (Deuteronomy 9:1-19).

"Though the Canaanites were expelled for their wickedness, it does not follow, that the Israelites were established in their room on account of any distinguished virtue, or because they deserved it. On many occasions, it may be seen in the history of the world, that God punishes the wicked by the instrumentality of other men, who are as wicked as themselves. Not the Israelites' righteousness, but the wickedness of the inhabitants, and the promise of God to their fathers, was the cause of their obtaining Canaan" (comment on Deuteronomy 9:5 *Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge*).

What were the sins of the Canaanites that merited such drastic treatment? The are given in a summary fashion in Leviticus 18. They include incest, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, idolatry and child sacrifice. This is not a complete list of their transgressions, but only the most egregious of them. They had not only

descended into gross immorality in terms of idolatry and sexual sins, but in their depraved worship of idols were regularly murdering innocent human beings.

God told them: "Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you" (Leviticus 18:24-28).

God is not a respecter of persons. He promised Israel that if they committed the same abominations as the Canaanites they too would be cast out of their inheritance. In the next and final article in this series this discussion of why God chose the peoples of Israel, and how it directly affects you and the rest of mankind, will continue.

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