

**The
People of God,
YESTERDAY
TODAY & FOREVER**

**Studies by:
Geoffrey Bingham
Deane Meatheringham
Robert Forsyth**

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STUDY ONE

“ALL THE EARTH IS MINE”

INTRODUCTION.

- (a) Why look back? (or...no, it didn't start with Jesus)
- (b) Shall we go by train or helicopter?

Reading along the story and reading from its fulfilment.

2. THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN THE BEGINNING (GENESIS 1-2).

The beginning is the way it ought to be (Matthew 19: 3ff).

- (a) The people of God = human and his wife.
 - community
 - faith and obedience (the true = autonomy).

(b) The God of the people = the creator of heavens and earth.

- image
- share his rule o He with them.

- (b) The place - the garden
 - The Good Creation o physical
 - the blessing and task.

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People of God,
YESTERDAY**

by Robert Forsyth

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3. REBELLION AND ITS SPREAD(GENESIS 3- 4).

- ❑ The attempt to be God.
- ❑ The loss of some of:
 - ❑ community
 - ❑ fellowship
 - ❑ the garden
 - ❑ blessing'.

4. THE FLOOD - UNCREATION YET COMMITMENT TO CREATION

(a) The flood - return of the primeval ocean (Gen 1). 'an end of all flesh'.

(b) Covenant with Noah - a new beginning?

Genesis 6: 18- 'I will establish (= maintain) my covenant (commitment)'.

Genesis 9:9 - covenant with man, the animals and all living (like Gen 1, except it isn't the perfect world anymore).

COVENANT = that which formalises an existing relationship, e.g. Gen 21:22-32, 26:26-33, 31:43-49. o Here is God 'cutting' a covenant or promising to uphold a covenant.

* God is committed to upholding his created world to preserve man and his world.

This is the beginning of the faithful creator's restoration of his people in his world.

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5. THE ANTI-PEOPLE OF GOD (GENESIS 11).

Together, name the defensive tower against the divine enemy.

Babel is the attempt for human community = significance with God = Babylon the great Evil City.

6. REVERSING THE CURSE - THE CALL OF ABRAM.

- Out of the wanders (chapter 12).
- Reversing the Genesis 3-11 situation: blessing
 - people- Ch. 13-14, 15:5, 17:6
 - place - 13: 14, 15: 7, 18
 - God's - 17:7-8

The Family story and selectivity vs. promises of universal blessing.

NOTES

STUDY TWO

“A PEOPLE FOR HIS OWN POSSESSION”

ELECTION AND ITS RESPONSIBILITY

1. THE FATHERS, NOW THE NATION.

- Exodus 1 - Growth.
- Exodus 2:23-25- God remembers the Fathers also Exodus 3: 13f, Deuteronomy 10: 14-15.
- Isaiah 41: 8-9.
- The name 'Israel'.

2. GOD'S CHOICE AND GOD'S CREATION.

- (a) Not because of anything but love (Deut 7:6-8).
Not because Israel has it together (Deut 9: 4-6).

The Exodus story

- The people cry out (Exodus 2).
- God answers and delivers them - almost against their will!
e.g. Ex 14:11 - typical Israel
e.g. Ex 6:6-9 - typical God.

- (b) The Lord creates that which he chooses.
- as with Isaac Gen 17: 16-21.
 - so with Israel.

NOTES

Isaiah 43: 1 - formed, called by name.
Isaiah 43:6,7- children, created forming glory.
Isaiah 43:15 - your creator vs 20,21 - formed for myself.
Deuteronomy 32: 6-14.

3. CHOSEN TO DO OR TO BE?

- (a) To have the Lord as their God.
- Leviticus 11:45. Saved to be their God.
Also Numbers 15:41, Leviticus 22:33, 26:45, etc.
- (b) To be his people.
- Leviticus 26: 12. God will live among them. 'I will be your God and you shall be my people.' Also Exodus 29: 46.
 - Jeremiah 11:4-5. Saved to obey to be my people.
 - Deuteronomy 29:12-13 - to be.
- (c) To be the Lord's possession, property (*'nachal'*).
- Deuteronomy 4: 20, 9: 26, 29, 32:9
Psalm 33: 12.
- (d) To be his special true one (*'segulla'*)
- Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:18.
- (e) To be the Lord's child.
- Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1.
 - Or wife. Ezekiel 16:32, Hosea 2.

4. FAITHFULNESS TO THE LORD REQUIRED.

- o Exodus 19:6, 20:1ff.
especially Deuteronomy 4:15 and 10:12-22 (more next study).

5. THE LAND - THE PLACE OF BLESSING.

- o Deuteronomy 11:8ff or 7:12ff
- o Exodus 15:13 and 17. God's holy abode.

6. THE OTHER NATIONS,~

- God is over all the earth but only Israel is his as Exodus 19:6, Deuteronomy 32:8.
- No task is given to the nations as such, except
 - the promise of universal rule given to the King (Psalm 2).
 - Israel's salvation and life and witness to God
 - Prophetic promises include the whole earth.

STUDY THREE

THE SHAPE OF ISRAEL

1. LIVING UNDER THE LORD'S INSTRUCTIONS - THE LAW.

- (a) Having been saved by the Lord, Israel is now given the Lord's instruction (Torah), to be his people.
 - 'If you really hearken to my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my own possession among all people'. Exodus 19: 5.
 - 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage you shall have no other gods before me'. Exodus 20: 2-3.
 - 'I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy for I am holy'. Leviticus 11: 45.
- (b) The Instruction is to issue out of love.
Deuteronomy 10:12-13
Deuteronomy **6:4-9**.
- (c) Living in them brings life - unfaithfulness, death.
Deuteronomy 30:15-20.
- (d) Details - extremely wide-ranging, profound and trivial.
Death Penalty - grave sins against purity of worship, sanctity of life, parental authority, adultery.

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Cultic or Ritual law - dominate, e.g. Deuteronomy 12-16, Leviticus.

Agricultural laws, slavery - e.g. Leviticus 19.

(e) Not comprehensive - the place of Wisdom for living in the complexities of individual life.

2. LIVING IN A PLACE - THE LAND.

- (a) Dan to Beersheba (Victor Harbor - past Gawler) the sea to desert (Glenelg to Murray Bridge).
- Fighting flesh and blood enemies.
 - Facing military, political and economic threats.
 - Peace - prosperity, literally, 'earth under vine and fig tree'.
- (b) The Inheritance or Rest.
- Deuteronomy 12:9 - the inheritance and rest which the Lord gives.
 - Joshua 21:44-45 - God gave them rest from enemies. Promises fulfilled.
 - II Samuel 7: 1, 11 and I Kings 8:56 - God gave rest.
- (c) The Chosen Place - God's Dwelling.
- Deuteronomy 12: 10-11. The Lord's name - the glory of wilderness wanderings.
 - 2 Samuel 6 or Psalm 132. The Lord chooses Zion - linked with earth's kingship.
 - God in the midst of his people, symbolic of God's kingship, and ownership of the land. An earthly representation of God's heavenly **dwelling**

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Source of blessing.

Psalm 48. Mt. Zion 'in the far north' / 'like Zaphron'/'where God leads they dwell'.

3. LIVING UNDER THE RULE OF THE CHOSEN MEDIATOR.

(a) Judges, prophets, priests, etc

(b) The King.

2 Samuel 7:8-16 - The Lord's promise to David.

v. 9 a great name, cf. Genesis 12:3) update

v. 10 a place to plant people, cf. Genesis 15:18.

v. 12 a 'house' - 'seed', cf. Genesis 15:3-4.

v. 14 Father-Son relationship, cf. Exodus 4: 22, Deuteronomy 32: 6.

v. 16 Eternal kingdom.

See also Psalm 2, Psalm 89: 19-37.

* David's Response (2 Samuel 7: 18-29) A charter for humanity.

v. 19 ... 'and this is the law for men' (lit.).

RSV - 'hast shown me future generations'

NIV - 'is this your usual way of dealing with man'

GNB - 'and you let a man see this'

S .C . Kaiser, 'and this is the charter for all mankind!'

) Abrahamic) promises) update

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STUDY FOUR

DISASTER AND PROMISE

1. DECLINE AND DISASTER.

- (a) Israel's response to the Lord's grace had never been too hot, e.g. Psalm 106.
- (b) From the (idealised) high point of David and Solomon (1,000 - 931 B.C.) a faltering decline ultimate disaster.
 - The kingdom divided into Israel (10 tribes) the north and Judah in the south.
 - Assyrians overwhelm North Kingdom (721 B .C
 - Babylonians overcome South Kingdom including Jerusalem (587 B.C.).
- (c) The rise of (so-called) classical prophecy.
 - Moses in particular - the paradigm prophet, i.e. God's spokesperson.
 - With the coming of Kingship the prophetic role is to send messages from the divine King to the earthly king - Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha.
 - From Amos and Hosea in North new development in prophecy.
 - oracles and visions written down.
 - Word of God to the people of God.
 - Main message - the Lord's judgement on his people for unfaithfulness to the covenant and the salvation beyond judgement.

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(d) Israel's failure to keep the covenant - to be the people of God.

Amos 3: 1-2, 'you only have I known... therefore will I punish'.

- e.g. Isaiah 5:1-7: The fruitless vineyard.
- Jeremiah 2:4-13: shocking desertion.
- Jeremiah 7:2-15: don't trust in the temple.

Unfaithfulness expressed in idolatry, dependence on 'real politik' economic and social injustice, false security. ' ..

(e) The judgement - an exodus in reverse.

Hosea 11: 1-4 - unfaithfulness

5-7 - return to Egypt

8-11 - yet still I will have compassion!

Jeremiah 4:18-26 - Doom!

586 B.C. - King, temple, land, people gone...
cf. Lamentations.

2. PROMISE - THE NEW AGE.

(a) A future after all:

Jeremiah buys a field just as the enemy is about to flatten the city!

Jeremiah 32

- God's word Jeremiah 32: 36-41- 'they shall be my people - I will be their God'.
- The prophetic revelation uses the symbols of the past in picturing God's new future. The symbol intends what God intends. The prophet

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may only partially and imperfectly grasp what God is saying through him.

(b) A New Covenant - a raised people - the Spirit.

Jeremiah 31:31-36	God's instruction on their hearts
	knowledge through forgiveness.
Ezekiel 36:22-36	God will hallow his name.
	Gather, cleanse, new heart, the Spirit.
Ezekiel 37:1-14	God will raise Israel and give them life.
Isaiah 44: 1 - 5	Pour out Spirit.

(c) A new exodus - new land - new Zion.

*** Exodus**

Isaiah 51:9-11, 48:20-22, 40:9-11.

*** Land**

Amos - 9: 13-15- fertility plus.

Ezekiel 47-48 - the ideal allotment.

*** Zion - the centre of the earth.**

Isaiah 2:2-4 - nations flow in to world mountain
Isaiah 60:1-22 - centre of world empire.

*** A new creation**

Isaiah 65: 17-25.

(d) New King

- Isaiah 11:1-9, and 32:1ff.

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-- Jeremiah 23:3-8

- Ezekiel 34:11-13, 23-25. True Shepherd-King.

(e) The Lord's Servant (in Isaiah).

- Israel? (41: 8); Jerusalem?; the King?

- note role to the nations.
- Isaiah 42:1-4, 5-9
- Isaiah 49:1-6
- and of course, 52: 13, 53: 11.

(f) The Nations (a summary)

* God will appear - Isaiah 40: 5.

'And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together'.

* God calls the nations -Isaiah 45:20-25.

'Turn to me and be saved - all the ends of the earth! '

* The Nations will stream into Jerusalem. Zechariah 8: 22-23, and (c) above.

* Worship at the world mountain - temple. Isaiah 56:7, 'a house of prayer for all nations' Isaiah 19:25 - Egypt and Assyria my people!

* Paradise feast.

Isaiah 25:6-8, 'For all peoples a feast of fat things'.

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STUDY FIVE

**JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY-
THE RESTORATION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

'Christ became a servant of the circumcised to show God's faithfulness, in order to confirm God's promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy'. Romans 15:8-9.

1. JOHN THE BAPTIZER.

Mark 1:1-8 - O.T. references (especially Isa 40) show the Gospel is fulfilling prophetic promises (see Study 4).
- Baptizing in the wilderness
to make Israel the people of God ready to be judged, sifted and saved.

**2. JESUS' ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REIGN OF GOD = THE
RESTORATION OF ISRAEL.**

(a) The Reign of God.

- Climactic rule of God over all creation.
- Summary of O.T. hope, e.g. Isaiah 52:7-10.
- Jesus' emphasis -
 - (i) The reign is God's gracious gift.
 - (ii) It is the reign of God as Jesus knows him i.e. as Father.
 - (iii) It is at hand.

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(iv) It involves the restoration and salvation of Israel.
'Your God reigns:'

(b) Jesus' symbolic actions.

(i) Choosing and sending out the Twelve.

(ii) The miraculous signs of restoration and healing, e.g. Matthew 11:5, cf. Isaiah 35: 5-7 (only a couple of times to any non-Jew see Matthew 15: 29ff).

(iii) Table fellowship with the outcast of Israel.

Mark 2:15-17

Luke 19:1-10

(c) Jesus' call to repentance to receive the Kingdom.

- Like a child
- The 'fruits of repentance' - living as sons of the Father.
- Matthew 16: 17-19. The King (Messiah) will build his people (like a temple?) upon those like Simon confess Jesus as King.

3. THE REIGN MEANS A DIVISION WITHIN ISRAEL.

o By the very fact Jesus called for a response to his message and actions.

e.g. Matthew 10:12-15 - shake the dust off

Matthew 11:20-26

Matthew 8:11-12- sons of the Kingdom will miss out while those 'from afar' will join in.

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Luke 14:15-24- the non invited share in banquet.

Luke 13

4. Jesus' Promise to the Nations

The Final Climax

'When I am lifted up I will draw all men to myself.'

**THE
PEOPLE OF GOD,
TODAY**

by Geoffrey Bingham

INTRODUCTION

We have chosen the Letter of Paul to Ephesus to cover elements which concern the people of God, today. This is because (i) The letter looks back to God's plan prior to time, (ii) Looks to the present mode of living and action within the people of God, and (iii) Looks to the future hope of this people.

The letter fairly naturally follows this order. For this reason we will follow the order of the epistle. To do this we use the commentary provided. However, we also realise from the studies which deal with the people of God past, and future, that we do not need to cover that material fully which is covered by them.

Because of this we have abstracted the following five studies which should help us to see the epistle from the vantage point we desire to look at within the total studies of the people of God, yesterday, today, and forever.

STUDY ONE

THE PEOPLE UNDER THE PLAN

1. THE PEOPLE PLANNED BEFORE TIME.

- (a) Chosen before time (1: 4).
- (b) Aim and goal of that choice is that we should be His sons (1:5). That we (both Jews and Gentiles) should be ultimately glorified (1: 11-14). That this glorification should be to the praise of the glory of His grace (1:5-7; 2:5-7).

2. THE PLAN IN TIME.

- (a) The plan in time for time has been revealed (1:9 10). This plan is according to 'the counsel of His will' (1: 11f; 2: 10).
- (b) The plan is (1) To unite all things in Christ in the fulness of time (1:10). (2) To make this unity such that now Jew and Gentile are one, i.e. becoming one (2: 1-11). This becoming one is through the effective work of the Cross (2:11 22).

3. THE HOPE OF THE PLAN.

In 1:17 22 Paul speaks of the revelation of the hope which comes to the church. He also speaks of the power which will fulfil this hope. Cf. 3:20-21. This hope is eschatological, and the Spirit has sealed us for this (1:13; 4:30).

STUDY TWO

THE PEOPLE UNDER THE GODHEAD

1. THE PEOPLE UNDER THE FATHER.

Paul's salutation (as in all his letters) tells us the church is daily dependent upon grace and peace, and both stem from the Father and the Son. (N .B . I Thessalonians 1: i and II Thessalonians 1:1 tell us **the church is in the Father.**) The Father and the Son cannot be separated, but each has a unique work.

That the church is under the Father is seen from 1:2, 5, 17; 2:18; 3:14; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23. If, however, we read in each case 'Father' for 'God' then we see that everything stems from the Father.

The work of the Father is that He predestines us to be sons (1: 5ff), that He gives to us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (1: 17ff), that through the Son He brings us to Himself as the family (2:18, et al.), that He is the fountainhead of all fatherhood and family (3:14-15, cf. 4:6), that is, the unity of the people of God is dependent upon His Fatherhood (4: 6), that praise and thanksgiving are primarily due to Him for all things.

Our conclusion is that we should know our beings as (a) Sons personally of the Father, and (b) Ourselves corporately as the Family, the new true people of God, the new humanity, i.e. 'the third race'.

2. THE PEOPLE UNDER THE SON, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

When we look at the terms 'in Christ', 'in him',

'in the Lord' (etc.) we see that everything is in Christ. Whilst it is true that the Father is the Initiator of all things, yet it is in and through the Son that He does all these things. Thus we are chosen in Christ (1:4), destined to be sons through Christ (1: 5). God's purpose is in and through Christ (1:9).

In Christ we are destined to glorify God (1: 11f). He (the Father) has brought us to life in Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenlies (2: 4-6), and has created us in him for (current) good works (2: 10). In Christ we have been freed from our former enmity and made to be one (family) so that both Jews and Gentiles are (equally) partakers of the promise (of being one people) in Christ.

Christ is also in us (3:16ff). Hence his power works in us (1:19-22; 3:20-21). This power flows from and through the gifts Christ gives the church so that it may be upbuilt in love (4: 7-16). The church is subject to Christ who is its Husband as it his Bride. For spiritual battle the church derives its weaponry and ability from Christ (6: 10ff).

Our conclusion is that under the Lordship of Christ (4: 5; 5: 24) the church - redeemed through him and loved by him - has its life in him, sharing what is him and his. It is working with him as the people of God in what he is about.

3. THE PEOPLE UNDER THE SPIRIT.

Although the Spirit seems in the background, yet, typical of him, he relates to the work of the Father and the Son. We see that his are the following works: -

(a) On believing the Gospel the people of God are sealed by the Spirit (1: 13 - 14).

(b) The work of bringing together Jew and Gentile is related to the Spirit. By Christ and through

him the people of God are brought to the Father (2: 18). This people is then unified, i.e. Jew and Gentile. Even more, they are built by the Spirit into a spiritual shrine in which the Father dwells (cf. Rev 21:1-5).

(c) Through the Spirit the people of God are strengthened in their hearts to receive and contain the person of Christ the Lord (3:16-17).

(d) He is the 'one Spirit' of the 'one body', i.e. he is the Spirit of the Church, and hence we speak of 'the unity of the Spirit' (4:3-4).

(e) He is the Spirit who guides the inner life of the church, and the ethical action of the people of God. They must remember this because it is by him that they are sealed for (and unto) the day of redemption. They must not grieve (vex) him (4:30 et al., cf. Isa 63:10).

(f) The people of God are to be filled habitually and continually with (or in) the Spirit (5: 18). Note that from 5:18 - 6:19 all that happens flows from this continuous infilling by/with the Spirit.

(g) Spiritual battle is by spiritual weapons (cf. II Cor 10: 3), and so this weaponry relates to the Holy Spirit, especially the Word of God which is the Sword of the Spirit (6: 17).

(h) Prayer is undoubtedly by the Spirit (6: 18, cf. Rom 8:26-27), but then so is worship (5:18-20, cf. Phil 3: 3, John 4: 20ff).

The Spirit is the ever-present person and power by which the people of God experience and express their daily living.

4. CONCLUSION: THE PEOPLE OF GOD UNDER THE GODHEAD.

We see that this material is so profuse as to require steady and detailed study and personal and

corporate application and experience of its truths. We now understand why the church is called 'the people of God'. Reference back to Pentecost shows us the principle of the Spirit bringing the promise of the Father, the gift of the Son, and the Spirit himself revealing the works of the Father and the Son.

STUDY THREE

THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN UNITY AND LOVE

1. INTRODUCTION.

We have seen the plan of God to unify all things in Christ. This must mean the unity of His people no less. We know that it is the love of God which draws His people to Him, through the Cross. We also know the Spirit is the Spirit of love (Rom 5: 5, 15: 30, Gal 5:22-23). He shows us the love of Christ (John 16: 12-15). He shows us the love of the Father. Love and unity, then, are in the one bundle. This helps us to understand that one must not be seen apart from the other.

2. THE UNITY.

We saw in 1: 9-10 God's plan to unify all things. In 2:1-10 we saw (a) How evil is man, and how dead in his sins, yet how great is God's love to redeem him. (b) In 2:11-22 we see it is the work of the Cross which brings about the new race - the third race - the people of God in unity. This unity is made practical by the work of the Spirit. In 3: 1-11 we see Paul spell out the unity in that the new true people of God are Jew and Gentile but with none behind the other, but both co-heirs, members of the same body, and equally partakers of 'the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel'. Paul shows that this unity of God is salutary for the heavenly powers which see the wisdom of God in this His plan. In 3:14-19 Paul shows that this unity is expressed in the experience of love,

so much so that all are exhorted to be filled 'unto all the fulness of God', which is surely that love-unity. Thus in 4:1-16 Paul enjoins maintaining this unity of the Spirit, saying that there are many elements which create and sustain this unity (vs.4-6). He then shows that the gifts of Christ aid in the growth to maturity and fulness of the people of God.

In 4:17-32 Paul shows that the life of the people of God must be an ethico-moral one, which in practice means the living together in purity, concern for one another, and in a life of caring for one another. 5:1 6:19 shows the walk in holiness, the life of worship, and the working out of relationships (being subject to one another). He also stresses the unity of the people of God in spiritual warfare.

3. THE LOVE.

This is an epistle of love. We see the following:-

(a) God's plan is devised in love. In love He predestines the people of God as His family (1:4-5).

(b) His love is shown in salvation and grace (2:4-7).

(c) That love is also the love of Christ (3: 19) by which we are brought to the fulness of God (3: 19). This love of Christ is shown by his death (5: 2). It is also shown to the people of God as the Bridegroom who loves the Bride (5: 25). There can be no doubt then that the Father (1: 5, 2:4) and the Son love the people of God.

(d) The people of God must love one another (5: 1-2), and in fact they do (1: 15). This works out in the forbearing of one another in love (4:2), in the unity of the Spirit. It also works out in kindness and forgiveness (4:32 - 5: 2).

(e) Especially does love within the body cause it to grow in maturity (4: 15-16).

(f) Love is expressed in the relationships of the family, i.e. husband-wife, parents-children, servants-masters (5: 21ff).

(g) The love of the Father and the Son causes the true people of God to love 'our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying' (6:24),

4. CONCLUSION: LOVE AND UNITY.

Knowing the relationships between the members of the Triune Godhead are our paradigm for unity and love - they being that ontological reality - we would expect the plan God has for His people to be one of love and unity, i.e. love-unity. This is the case. We should not then see love and unity as different things, or merely commendable elements. We should recognise that to be to the praise of the glory of God is to reflect God's glory in His essential Being, i.e. love - unity.

STUDY FOUR

THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE HOLY

1. INTRODUCTION: HOLINESS IS INDISPENSABLE.

In both O.T. and N.T. holiness is one of the marks of the people of God, for God is holy. In fact He is holiness itself. So His people must be holy. This is demanded of Israel and it is taught to Israel through the law, and its sacrifices, etc. Ephesians 2: 11f shows Gentiles were considered as uncircumcised, and so unclean. One of the basic themes of the books of Acts is the inclusion of the Gentiles as the now sanctified people of God (cf. Acts 15:9, 26: 18). Galatians is the epistle which fights this battle against the legalizing Judaizers. Ephesians 2: 11- 3:11 makes it clear that the Gentiles are as much a part of the new people as are the Jews. This is underlined in Galatians 3:26-29.

Holiness in the N.T. has to do with (a) The inclusion through the Atonement of the former Gentiles with the people of God (cf. I Peter 2: 9-10/Exodus 19: 5-6). (b) The personal cleansing of those who come to God through Christ (I Cor 6:9-11, Titus 3:35, cf. Heb]:3, 9:14).

2. THE ELEMENTS OF HOLINESS IN EPHESIANS.

The fact of holiness is not simply thematic. for holiness involves many elements treated in this epistle such as conformity to the image of God, to His will the rejection of former ways of evil (uncleanness), the positive ways of walking in light and love, true relationships,

and so on. When the following elements are considered the full picture of holiness as the people of God relate to it, emerges.

- (a) The current and ultimate holiness of His people is what God has planned from eternity (1: 3-4).
- (b) Holiness is first the transformation of persons from the pollution, power, and penalty of sins. This is seen in 1:7, 2:1-8, 4:17-24. In 2:11-18 we see Gentiles are delivered from their former lostness into being members of the (holy) family of God. Elsewhere in the N.T. this cleansing is spoken of in more explicit terms (e.g. I Cor 6:9-11, I Peter 2:9-10, Titus 3:3-5, Heb 9:14, Acts 15: 9).
- (c) Holiness is being renewed to a new way of life. This is clearly set out in 4: 17-24. The renewal of the person, in his mind, by the Spirit is seen in the O.T. and other parts of the N.T. The practical ways of holiness are then set out in 4: 25-32. One not only desists from former evil ways, but one lives positively in the antitheses of those former ways. This is positive practical holiness.
- (d) To live a holy life is (1) To walk in love (5:2ff), and (2) To walk in light (5:2ff). 5:3-14 must be studied in detail, but the main points are that evil and impurity are to be consciously rejected and the way of purity to be constantly espoused. Walking in light one exposes darkness and causes it to be lightened.
- (e) Holiness (as in John's first Epistle, cf. Heb 12: 14-15) has to do both with love and light (as we have just seen), and so is a matter of relationships, first with God and then with man. This is seen in 4:25-32, and particularly in 5: 21- 6: 9. Notice that idolatry (covetousness) is an unclean relationship in contradistinction to love of God which is a pure relationship (5: 5-6).

- (f) The holiness of the church is executed by Christ the Lord, who is the Bridegroom of the Bride (5:25-27). The plan of God for His people's purity is carried out by Christ the Son. His ultimate goal (eschatological) is to present the church purified to himself and the Father, but is also to keep her (currently) purified. In this sense we can see Christ is continually cleansing the church, and in a way we can speak of 'current corporate cleansing'. Cf. I John 1: 7, '...the blood of Jesus Christ His Son goes on cleansing us from all sin'.
- (g) Holiness demands and involves spiritual warfare (6: 10-19). As this is the subject of our next study we will not pursue it here.

3. CONCLUSION: THE HOLY PEOPLE.

When we can see that the inclusion of all people (Jew and Gentile) into the new true people of God (cf. Gal 6: 16) is by grace and that which sanctifies them, we can also see that actual cleansing of the defilement of sin is required to make that people holy and establish them in the same. It is this which preserves and fulfils the plan of the holy Father for His holy people. Cf. 1:3-5, I John 3:1-3.

STUDY FIVE

THE PEOPLE OF GOD LIVE IN CONFLICT

1. INTRODUCTION.

We have seen that the people of God live in a conflict because the elements of hatred and impurity war with those of love and light. In this sense there is need for the constant renewing of the mind (4: 20ff). Yet in 5: 3-14 we see that the people of God not only battle against evil in order to win out against it, but also they battle in order to defeat it. This is the theme of 6: 10-19.

2. THE PEOPLE IN CONFLICT.

- (a) Ephesians 6:12 says, 'For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present-darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.' This shows us where the battle is joined. Romans 8:31-39 shows that a battle is continually waged by hostile forces against the people of God. Some of these forces are powers and authorities which operate now in what are called 'the heavnlies'. See 1:3, 20-21, 2:2, 6, 3: 10, 4: 10, 6: 12. For the defeat of these powers see Hebrews 2: 14-15, Colossians 2: 14-15.
- (b) The first understanding we must have is that Jesus is Lord (Acts 2: 36, 10: 36, Rom 10: 9, Rev 19:16, cf. Col 2:6, I Cor 8:6). In Ephesians

1:19-23 his Lordship is primary in the universe, and over the principalities and powers here nominated. We must also see that he is over the church (Ephes 5: 24), and for the church (1: 22). This Lordship must be understood in the light of I Corinthians 15:24-28 (cf. Rev 11: 15) and related passages. Christ is now working out the plan of history in the power of his Cross (Rev 5:1ff). The battle to destroy God's people, as also to render them ineffective, is what evil is about.

(c) Christ as Lord - as we have seen - has already delivered sinful man from the powers of darkness. They are a resurrected and renewed people, espousing holiness and love, and opposing the forces of evil. In order to fill out this battle in the conflict they must be strengthened (Ephes 6: 10). Note the various words used for power here. See also 1:19-20, 3:16, 3:20. This power also relates to the gifts (4: 7ff). What must be understood is that it is the power of love and the power of purity which defeats the evil of impurity and darkness (hatred, enmity, etc.). We must not think of metaphysical power as such. The weaponry available to the people of God is spiritual and so not carnal or worldly. This is seen if we look at the sword of the Spirit (6: 17), for this sword smites the nations (Rev 19: 15, 1: 16). Likewise prayer is a powerful weapon. Note that the battle is spiritual (6: 12), for one is not fighting 'flesh and blood' but principalities and 'powers which are (evil) spiritual forces.

(d) In order to fight we must understand the whole range of weaponry (6: 11-18). We must see this is not fanciful imagery, but every part of the armour is practical, i.e. (1) The provision of God through salvation, and (2) In the way we live our lives (cf. 4:25-32, 5:3-13).

(e) We see (above) the power we need. We must examine 6: 10. We are responsible for getting the power, whilst Christ is the one who gives it. Yet we only have this power in union with Christ. We do not obtain power in order to use it, but we are powerful as participators in his conflict. We can see the practical ways of this principle in the Book of Acts, i.e. as they followed the Spirit and the will of the Lord they defeated their enemies.

(f) One of the most powerful principles is vigilance (6:14, 'loins girded', cf. I Peter 1:13, 5:8). Such vigilance is prophylactic against evil. He who fights this battle-before-the-battle, then wins the battle.

(g) The unity of the people of God is devastating to evil (cf. Phil 1: 27-28). Such unity is terrifying to evil powers.

(h) The battle can be carried to the camp of the enemy, victory can be achieved, and having done all the people of God can still stand (6: 14, cf. I John 2:13-14, 4:4, 5:4-5).

3. CONCLUSION: THE BATTLE IS ASSURED.

In Romans 8:37 Paul says, 'We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us'. In Philippians 4:13 he says, 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me.' What is thrilling is to see the goal, the fulfilment of the plan of God, i.e. the ultimate people of God, the true family of God - conquering sons of the Father - victorious by grace in the ultimate but also victorious by grace in the present.

THE PEOPLE OF GOD, YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER

NOTES

THE PEOPLE OF GOD, YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER

**THE
PEOPLE OF GOD,
FOREVER**

by Deane Meatheringham

STUDY ONE

THE PEOPLE OF THE NEW AGE

1. INTRODUCTION.

'I will be your God and you shall be my people' is the recurring promise to Israel. Israel refused to be God's people and a passage like Hosea 1:9-10 not only speaks of her present apostasy but of a future salvation (Hosea 2: 23), where the situation will be changed. Paul, in Romans 9: 24-26, applies these words not only to Jews, but also to the Gentiles. Both Jew and Gentile are the new people of God who know God and relate to him in a special way. This is the 'one new man', the 'one body' who has access to the Father through the Cross and the Spirit, and who, joined together in Christ, 'grows into a holy temple in the Lord' (Eph 2: 11-22).

The church is the new people of God, 'Abraham's offspring', or 'the Israel of God', 'the true circumcision, who worship God in Spirit' (Gal 3:29, 6:16, Phil 3:3, cf. Col 2:11ff). In I Peter 2:9-10, the royalty of God's people as a priest nation is now applied to all who call God 'Father' and have been 'born anew' by the Word of the Gospel (I Peter 1: 17, 22-25).

What we will see in these studies is that far from the church being a parenthesis in the purpose of God, she is an eschatological people, the people of the new age, the new community of saints, who, living in the 'powers of the age to come' as Messiah's members, are on the move to the final outworking of the new age in the new world: 'Then comes the end, when he delivers the Kingdom to God the Father after destroying every

rule and every authority and power (I Cor 15: 24, cf. Eph 1: 19-23, Rev 21: 1-4).

2. THE PEOPLE OF THE NEW COVENANT.

(1) In Christ all the promises of God have their affirmation (II Cor 1: 20). This would include God's creational purpose of sonship (Eph 1: 3ff, Isa 43: 5-7), man's victory over Satan (Gen 3: 15), and the especially explicit covenant passages revealed to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 (cf. kindred passages). We will see that the Abrahamic covenant and the New Covenant are the working out of the one covenant promise. The prophets, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel, announce that God is making an 'everlasting covenant'. See, for example, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 16:59-63, 22, 37:27.

(2) The New Covenant is the entering into the New Age, i.e. Jesus saw his death in these terms (Matt 26:26-29). As the Shepherd of the sheep, Messiah has led us out of death into life (Heb 13:20, cf. John 5:24-29). This is the new Exodus (Luke 9:31), which Jesus was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Paul interprets the Supper of the Lord in this light (I Cor 5:7, cf. 11:25-26), i.e. as our participation in the new age of liberation.

(3) God's covenant remains with his people. See Revelation 11: 19. The context is the final consummation of Christ's victory (verse 15) and the worship of the elders (verses 16-18). With the shrine being opened the ark of God in the holy of holies is seen. The ark of the covenant was God's promise to be with his people, to give them victory and forgiveness. John sees that in the midst of all the conflicts and judgements God's promise stands. God's forgiveness stands unchanged. It signifies God is still working out his covenant, and the people of the covenant are

in the action of Christ now.

3. THE PEOPLE OF THE RESURRECTION.

(1) Resurrection and the end-time. In the O.T. there is the anticipation and the hope of the resurrection. Paul could say to the council, 'with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am on trial' (Acts 23:6). Passages such as Isaiah 25:8, 26: 19, Daniel 12:2, Ezekiel 37, Job 19:25, Psalm 16:10ff, 49: 16, 73: 26, 17:15 indicate the hope of Israel.

Christ foretold his resurrection (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34).

On the day of Pentecost Peter quotes from Psalm 16, indicating that the end time had come (Acts 2: 22-36). Paul also sees this as in accord with the prophets (I Cor 15:4), while Jesus, after his resurrection, upbraided the disciples for not believing all that the prophets had said (Luke 24: 25ff, 44-47).

(2) The resurrection is an eschatological event, i.e. death has been defeated (Heb 2:9, 14-15, I Cor 15: 56), and therefore sin has been judged (Rom 4: 25). This means that the enemies have been stripped of their power for ever (Col 1: 15), the world has been judged (John 12: 31), and the new age has dawned (II Tim 1:10, II Cor 4:6).

Christ's resurrection is the basis for the resurrection of believers who are raised anew in him as the new community of God (Rom 6: 1-14). All of his people are in Christ (Gal 3: 26-29, II Cor 5: 17). They have been freed from this present evil age (Gal 1: 4), and are living in the resurrection life of the age to come.

(3) The people of God are already in the new age. To be 'in Christ' means to be in the new age and to experience its life and powers. The events of the

eschatological consummation are not merely detached, in the future, but rather they are the events which have already begun to unfold in history. The believer lives in the tension of the old and the new with the new still to be completed. But the new people of God are the body of Christ, under the authority of his headship over all things and living in the vitality of his resurrection (Eph 1:18-23, 4:7ff, I Cor 12:27, cf. Phil 3: 10).

4. THE SPIRIT AND THE LAST DAYS.

Joel's apocalyptic words forecasting the last days of judgement and salvation are seen as being in the age of the Spirit (Joel 2:28- 3:4). In the light of the Messianic actions of Christ, especially those of the Cross, resurrection and reign of Jesus, Peter can say that the new day of the last days has come (Acts 2:16ff, 33ff, 3:17-21, 4:2, 5:30f, etc.). Hebrews 1:2 calls these 'the last days', and speaks of the gift of the Spirit as partaking in the 'powers of the age to come' (Heb 6:5).

The people of God are a community produced by the Spirit of the age to come. These are the 'saints', the holy people (e.g. I Cor 1:2, I Peter 1:2), those who in the new age inherit the Kingdom of God (Dan 7:22). The church is the people of the Kingdom (Col 1: 13), therefore it is eschatological, destined to inherit the Kingdom, or the earth (Matt 5:5, Rom 4: 13, Rev 21: 24ff), and this is because they have already experienced the reality of the Kingdom (Gal 4:24f, Phil 3:20).

From another view the saints are the new temple of God. In Mark 13:4 the destruction of the temple indicated the end of the age for the disciples (cf. Heb 9: 26). Jesus spoke of his body as the temple (Mark 14: 58). This could be understood as the establishing of the new messianic community. Stephen realized

the irrelevancy of the temple for Christians (Acts 7: 48f), and the letter to the Hebrews is an exposition of this theme. However, the local congregation is God's temple (I Cor 3: 17, cf. Eph 2: 19-22).

5. CONCLUSION: THE FIRST FRUITS.

The emphasis being made is that the people of God are the people of the new age, living in the powers of that age now as a community of the resurrection. It is as a renewed community having a foretaste of what is still to come, that the people of God face the world.

Christ's resurrection is seen as the first fruits, and thus an anticipation of the full harvest (I Cor 15: 23). James 1:18 speaks of those given new birth by ~ the word, 'that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures' (cf. Rev 14: 4). She is the first fruits of God's purposes, in the new humanity. In Ephesians 1: 22f Christ is seen as head over all for this new humanity which within the destiny of the world is already known and being experienced. The full harvest is yet to come. The church is a model of God's gracious intentions and in her life decisions happen that have a bearing on the whole world.

STUDY TWO

A PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

1. INTRODUCTION.

Keeping our general theme - "The People of God Forever" - in mind, we could introduce this study from a variety of directions.

(1) Called by the grace of God, father Abraham obeyed God and travelled, looking toward a future final city (Heb 11:8-10, cf.. Acts 7:2ff, Gen 12:1ff). His travelling had to do with his own peoplehood and through them all the peoples.

(2) Israel, after the Exodus, followed God in the cloud by day and the fire at night, moving toward the promised land (Ex 13: 21ff). With Abraham they were a people of destination and moved toward it. The ancient people of God were called to be a priest nation and witness to the nations. Often in the O.T. these nations are seen as coming up to Israel, yet God had something further in store for them, which, through all the vicissitudes of life, they were moving towards (e.g. Heb 11:39f).

(3) In fulfilment of the promise and in continuity with Israel's unique peoplehood, Christ says he will build his *ekklesia* (Matt 16: 18). This is God's 'New Thing' (Isa 43:19, Ephes 3:4-6), the New Community which is also on the move. She lives in the present and is on the way to the future. 'For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come' (Heb 13: 14). The pilgrim people are a people of hope

and faith that moves to the fulfilment of what is promised (Rom 8:24f), and what is eternal (II Cor 4:18).

(4) Sometimes the church is figured as the ark on the stormy and hostile waters of the world. But the ark of Noah was to land as soon as possible so that the earth could be repopulated and recultivated. The New Community of the first fruits is depicted in Revelation 14:4 as those 'who follow the Lamb where ever he goes'. The command to 'go into all the world' in Matthew 28: 18ff is dependent upon the reigning Lord being with his people to the close of the age.

(5) The people of God, then, are not static, nor insular, but are in perpetual movement till the 'earth is filled with the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea'.

2. THE APOSTOLICITY OF THE CHURCH.

(1) Built upon Christ and the apostles. (Ephes 2:20, I Cor 3: 11, Rev 21: 14). Christ says he will build his church (Matt 16: 18f). With Peter it is the community which confesses Christ, yet it is by men who have the keys that people enter the Kingdom. The church is one with Christ her head. She has been born out of the proclaimed word of Christ (Rom 10:17, I Pet 1:23-25, I Thess 2:13, Acts 2:38, 42). The people of God live in continuity with Christ and under the authority of his apostles. Thus the apostolic church recalls the past (e.g. I Cor 15:1ff, Col 1: 23, 2:6, I Tim 6:20, II Tim 3:14, I Cor 4:6, Phil 3:16, II John 9, Jude 3, cf. Jer 6:16).

(2) Enduement with power. Lest the apostolic nature of the church mistakenly be thought of as deriving her present glory from her collective origin, or illustrious past, apostolicity has to do with the present power, or authority, of Christ (II Cor 5: 20,

I Thess 1:5, I Cor 3:5, Gal 4:4, Mark 9:37, Acts 3: 6ff, 4: 33). This power is never at the disposal of the people of God apart from the Lord himself.

(3) Apostleship and sending. The word is linked with a definite mission so that the one sent represents the authority of the sender. In the N.T. empowerment contains a being sent, and a bearing fruit that rules the whole life of the church (Heb 3: 1). Christ builds and leads his people through this empowerment.

Apostleship has to do with the nations. From the O.T. God's redemptive acts have to do with the nations praising him (Psalm 67). This recurring theme is expanded in the N.T. , both in the commissioning passages in the gospels and in Paul's understanding of apostleship. See Romans 1: 5, 15: 18f, 16: 25f.

(4) The apostolic people. It is in the context of Jesus speaking of the Kingdom that Jesus says that the Spirit will empower his people to be witnesses to all nations (Acts 1: 8). The church is the community of the gospel and for the gospel (Ephes 3:9-12). In so doing the people of God participate in the goal and purpose of God in redeeming the creation. When this is done 'the end will come' (Matt 24: 14, Mark 13: 10). It is the gathering into one the children of God scattered abroad (John 10:16, 11:52, 17:20f, Eph 1:9-10). What God has planned he will do (Rev 7: 9ff, 21: 24ff).

3. THE PEOPLE OF GOD & THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST.

(1) By his acts of redemption Jesus has secured the Kingdom of God. In Study No. 1 [3. (2)] we saw that Jesus finally defeated sin, death, Satan, world powers, etc. By the Cross God has reconciled all things (II Cor 5:19, Col 1:19-20, Rom 3:23-24). Satan's power has been broken (I John 3:8), as guilt

and its accompanying fear/power has been judged (I John 3: 5, 4: 18, Heb 2: 14f). Our rebellion has been defeated in the Cross, freeing men, women and peoples to repent, believe the Gospel, be reconciled to God and be renewed by the Holy Spirit. Hence it is Jesus who is currently Lord over all, and has all authority (Matt 28:18ff, Phil 2:11, Heb 1:3, II Cor 4: 5, Eph 1:19-23).

(2) Christ's present work has to do with the nations. Revelation 5:1-14 shows that the Lion of Judah, the slain Lamb reigns over the events of history and that the seals in chapter 6 have to do with going out to conquer, as well as judgements in the earth. In Revelation 19:15 (cf. 1: 16) he defeats with the sword of his mouth, and in chapters 2-3 he is in the midst of the churches.

I Corinthians 15:22-28 says Christ must reign until all his enemies are brought into subjection (cf. Psalm 2, 110, Gen 49: 10, etc.). We know that this subjection is the outworking of the Cross, and is linked with the preaching of the gospel. The light shines in the darkness which is passing away (I John 2: 8) until the Kingdom of the world becomes the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev 11: 15).

It is for this reason that the Book of Acts begins with 'I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach... ', implying that what Luke is now writing is an account of what Jesus is now doing. Repeatedly we read, 'The Lord added daily to the church such as would be saved'. And by the Spirit of the Lord the gospel wins the obedience of Jew, Samaritan and Gentile, the Spirit being the gift and action of Christ's Lordship.

The people of God, then, are under the authority of Messiah, Lord. By his authority they have themselves been liberated and empowered, by his authority they are taught, and under his Lordship they

embrace the nations with the service of the gospel.

4. THE PEOPLE ON THE MOVE.

(1) The church is in Christ, and in his action. As the body of Christ and under his headship the people of God is-gifted for a ministry of edifying and love, and simultaneously follows her Lord, in the Lord's mission (John 20:21ff).

She conserves the truth of the apostolic gospel without the tyranny of fossilization. As the body of Christ she is ever moving along and continually changing as she indigenizes herself with the peoples whom she serves (I Cor 9: 19-23, cf. John 1: 14, Matt 1:23, Mark 10:43-45, Phil 2:1ff, etc.). While not ignoring the homogeneous principles of peoples, she crosses cultural barriers without religious or political imperialism.

(2) Moving in proclamation. By the Spirit the people of God bear witness to Christ (Acts 1: 8, 2: 11, 14ff). By the Spirit, Christ himself witnesses effectively in the lives of those who hear (Rev 19: 10). Such witness is the active word of God that brings life from the dead. In this vein the keys of the Kingdom are opening and closing, so that with Paul people are taken captive willingly by the gospel (II Cor 10: 3ff). Thus Christ shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied (Isa 53: 11). People shall offer themselves freely (Psa 110: 3). And all that is done apostolically in love contributes to the climax, the ingathering, the completed family of the nations, and the heavenly Jerusalem.

STUDY THREE

THE TWO FAMILIES

1. INTRODUCTION.

The people of God are engaged in a conflict with the people of the world. Jesus says, 'I will build my church and the powers of death shall not prevail against it' (Matt 16: 18). Christ has 'the keys of death and Hades', having stripped them of their power in his death and resurrection (Rev 1:18). The picture Jesus uses is that of two buildings which have strong gates, the keys giving entrance. With the fear of death, Satan and all of man's enemies gain their hold over him. It is with these powers that the people of God do battle, but these powers will not thwart them.

From the larger view, the battle can be traced to Genesis 3: 15, the conflict between the seed of the woman and Satan. In Genesis 4 it is the conflict of Cain and Abel, the two humanities. John says Cain was of the evil one (I John 3: 12), whereas Abel was a man of faith (Heb 11: 4). It is the conflict of those born of the flesh with those born of the Spirit (Gal 4: 28-31). One family is that of the promise of God and lives in his grace, whereas the other establishes itself as an alternate family of self-accomplishment.

Behind the alternate counter-family is one who energizes it so that the family of God contends not against flesh and blood, 'but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Eph 6: 12, cf. 2: 1ff, John 8: 44).

What we will do in this study is see this conflict from the Apocalypse, seeing the suffering, the often seeming defeat, yet their testimony and purity and how they overcome through the Lamb.

2. THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON.

The Dragon of Revelation 12 is shown as one having immense vitality (verse 3). It is very hard to kill. Opposition to the people of God is persistent, as he who hates the people of God seeks to destroy Messiah. Messiah defeats Satan (verse 5, cf. I John 3:8, John 12:31, Col 2:15, Luke 10:17ff). The accuser and deceiver gains his power by finding fault and denouncing the people of God (Job 1:6, Zech 3: 1). 'Devil' means 'slanderer' so that it is not far from 'accuser' to 'slanderer'.

With Satan's defeat the family of God conquers Satan by (see verse 11), (a) The blood of the Lamb, i.e. his vicarious death which has judged guilt and cleansed the conscience (Heb 2:14-15, I Cor 15:56, I John 4: 18). (b) The word of their testimony. No longer crippled by the fear of death, they prophesy, and by the proclamation of the word of God, fell Satan (James 4:7, I Peter 5:8f). Furthermore, by the proclamation of Christ, those who are bound are freed by the word (Acts 26:18, Col 2:13ff, Gal 4:9).

Revelation 12:13-17 shows the woman being attacked, yet she is protected by God. She lives in the world but is not part of it, she wrestles with the flood of evil but like some water courses it plunges beneath the earth.

3. THE LAMB AND THE BEAST.

Just as the beast in Revelation 13: 1-10, is in league with the dragon (Satan), so too is 'the man of

lawlessness' in II Thessalonians 2:3-12. He appears as Satan incarnate.

The 'son of perdition' in II Thessalonians 2 is finally to be revealed with 'pretended signs and wonders'. Unbelievers, deluded by this mimic, are carried away, while he himself vaunts himself in the place of God.

This one's identity is closely linked with the four beasts of Daniel 7: 2-7, but now constituted as one figure. Again we may compare his identity with 'the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be' prophesied by Jesus in Mark 13: 14.

John's epistles should probably be interpreted in their statements about the antichrist, in the light of Paul. He says that the believers have heard that an antichrist will come, but that now we are confronted with many antichrists as a present reality (I John 2: 18). ~he one and the many are identified as those denying the Father and the Son (I John 2: 22, II John 7). The antichrists may be 'forerunners', but central in their message is the ultimate heresy which is the great lie.

The spirit of antichrist is the denial of the Son (I John 4:3). This denial means one does not have the Father, i.e. the 'NO' of the false teachers stands in opposition to the 'YES' of God in Jesus Christ (II Cor 1:20, I John 4:1).

The spirit of antichrist shows itself in the guise of good, i.e. under a religious cloak (II Thess 2:4). His 'anti' is an imitation motif. But we are not given a photographic representation in the N.T. He is active throughout the last days. While linked with Satan and the demonic, the spirit of antichrist manifests itself on a human level which is well-known to our day-to-day existence.

The beast from the sea in Revelation 13: 1-10 is a parody of Christ's death and resurrection. It arises

out of the national and moral sea of evil. It has great power over the peoples of the creation and wages war on the family of God. The present stress is projected, in the Revelation, against the screen of fulfilment, yet the martyrs (Rev 13: 15, 6: 9ff) overcome by their faith (Rev 11: 7, 11-12).

It is by the word of Christ's mouth that the 'anti' is slain (II Thess 2:8), and John says that he that is in us is greater than he that is in the world, so that by the victory of our faith we overcome the world (I John 5: 4-5). These are the people of the Lamb that was slain (Rev 13:8).

4. THE MARKS OF THE TWO FAMILIES.

One Family bears the mark of the Father, the other has the mark of the beast (Rev 13: 16, 14: 1).

The beast from the earth (Rev 13:11-18) as a lamb is a parody of the truth. It would seem, in its relationship to the first beast, to be a counterpart of the relationship between the Father and the true Son. It is in league with the first beast and the dragon, so that it also has similarities with the 'anti' in II Thessalonians 2:9, Mark 13:22. Its signs contrast with those of Jesus in John's Gospel, and the fire from heaven contrasts with that of Elijah (I Kings 18: 36ff). Such impress a 'supernaturally' starved society. The purpose of this beast is to impose worship of the 'image' of the first beast.

This beast expresses itself as the false prophet (Rev 16: 13, 19: 20, 20: 10). So it is tied in with the whole system of evil, whether 'religious' or 'secular' (e.g. Jer 7:4, 8:8, 23:9-40, Matt 24:11, etc.).

The family of the beast identifies itself by the mark imposed (Rev 13: 16). A totalitarianism, the collective ego is at work as the kingdom of man or the system of Babylon (Rev 14:8-9, 17:4, 18:1-24).

Within Babylon 'was found the blood of the prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth' (Rev 18: 24). The mark is 666 (see Rev 13: 18). There is much conjecture about the identity of the number, especially when it is thought of as an esoteric riddle. However, John meant the number to be understood so that the people of God would be alert and mobilized. It is a human number, being short of 777, the number of man, rather than of a man.

The family of God is also marked (Rev 14: 1). This could be similar to their being sealed by God (Rev 7:1-8, 9:4, cf. I John 5:10, II Cor 1:22, Eph 1: 13, I John 3: 14). These are those who do not worship the beast or the image. They serve God and bear testimony to Jesus as prophets (Rev 11: 1-3). These are pure from idolatry, and only they can sing the new song of God. They are the first fruits of God's creatures and are in the work of the Lamb.

This people has had their names in the Lamb's book of life from eternity (13:8, Cf. Eph 1:4, I Peter 1:19f). They participate in God's purpose. They are what they are by God's calling, and a graced people.

5.CONCLUSION.

The people of God persevere, not in a dreary way but in the gladness of obedience. They endure to the end. Called of God, they are kept by the Lamb. In the midst of evil and death they overcome.

As the holy first fruits of God they work toward the ultimate full harvest. Like the Lamb whom they follow, they overcome the world in the midst of suffering. They are more than conquerors (Rom 8: 31-39), who triumph in their weakness.

'Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the

knowledge of him everywhere...' (II Cor 2: 14f)

STUDY FOUR

THE PEOPLE OF GOD & THE END EVENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.

'For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed, the night is far gone, the day is at hand' (Rom 13: 11f). These words speak of progression and continuity of salvation up to 'the day' of the end. The people of God live in the history of this continuity. All history moves to a summing up, a polarization, and a climax. See Romans 8: 18-25, where Paul speaks of the world being subjected to futility in hope of the future liberation. This condition of the world can be compared to pregnancy and the pain of labour. The Spirit and the people of God 'groan' with the creation for the crowning reward. But there is also a discontinuity which stands, as it were, in the framework of this continuity. 'The Day' breaks, a break with the darkness. The creation will be set free at the revealing of the glorified sons of God. It is the Day of the Lord. The day of judgement. The day of the appearing of the Son of man.

There is a finality about Christ's work (John 17: 4, 13: 1). His purpose was to accomplish the purpose of his Father (John 4:34, 5:36, 10:18). The mandate ended when the work was completed (John 19: 30, Rom 6: 10, Heb 9:26). Now he reigns, i.e. in the outworking of that victory. 'Then comes the end when he delivers the Kingdom to God the Father...' (I Cor 15: 24). This end does not come until all of his foes have been subjugated. Meanwhile, as we saw in Study 3, this process is working out in history under Christ

and with the people of God.

Therefore the end things are not some extraneous events divorced from all else, which are tacked onto an appendix of history. It is the fulfilling of the Father's creational purpose. It is his bringing it to consummation through Christ, by the Spirit, and not without the ministry of the church. The N.T. does not speak of the destruction of the world, but its renewal, and as we shall also see, judgement has much to do with righting things, of putting right disordered relationships.

2. ISRAEL AND THE FUTURE.

(1) Israel's unbelief. This was cause of anguish for Paul (e.g. Rom 9: 1-5, 10: 1-4). Officially as a people they refused the risen Christ (e.g. Acts 4: 18ff, 5: 17f, 33ff). Yet the first believers were Jews, and many priests also became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7). Paul's pattern was always to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles. Before his death Jesus warned that the Kingdom would be taken from them and given to others (Matthew 8:5-13, cf. Luke 13:23, Luke 13:6-9, Mark 12:1-12, Acts 7:51-53).

The question which Paul especially deals with is 'has God rejected his people?' (Rom 11: 1, 7, 11).

(2) The elect of grace (Rom 11:4-7). Jesus indicates that the final Kingdom would come while they were still preaching to Israel (Matt 10: 23, cf. 24: 14). The remnant is the prospect of the nation. This perspective is the basis of Paul's prayer for their salvation (Rom 10: 1). The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Rom 11:29) which means that the transition from Jews to Gentiles did not create a cul-desac for the Jewish people. Their fall is not a mere accident of history but a factor in God's history of salvation (Rom 11: 11).

(3) The full inclusion of Israel. See Romans 11: 11-12 where 'full inclusion' means 'plenitude' or 'totality'. It is only by 'jealousy' that Israel can learn the meaning of electing grace and thus - in the election of the Gentiles - learn to understand its own election. Jealousy is a means of realizing and rediscovering the Father's grace.

A key passage is also Romans 11: 25-27. This could be taken as meaning only that fraction of Israel which exists at the end. Or it can be taken as a more comprehensive Israel through the centuries and up until the climax of history.

The effect that their progression and finale will have upon the Gentiles is vast (Rom 11: 12, 15). Thus the people of God's covenant promise are also related in salvation history to the peoples of the earth right up to the end.

'And when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is not yet' (Mark 13: 7). 'And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come' (Matt 24: 14, cf. Mark 13: 10).

3. THE COMING OF CHRIST. (REV 22:20, I COR 16:22)

(1) The Christ who is coming has already come. Acts 1:11 should not be taken to mean that Jesus has abdicated since his ascension. As we have seen in previous studies, it is the Jesus who has defeated sin, death, the world, Satan, etc., who contemporaneously reigns as Lord, and brings to completion the Father's plan. It is this one who will appear, or be revealed, at the end of the age (Acts 3: 18, 21).

(2) 'Unveiling' - *apokalypsis* (I Peter 5:1). This means unveiling something which was previously

hidden. The opposite of unveiling is concealment, not absence or sojourn (I Cor 1:7, I Peter 1:7). This describes Christ's coming as something which is unmistakably seen (I John 3:2, Matt 24:27).

The revelation of Christ is an irresistible reality enveloping the entire creation (Matt 24: 30). People will see what is already a reality.

(3) 'Appearing' - *epiphaneia*. This is similar in meaning to apokalypsis. By his 'appearing' Christ will destroy the lawlessness (II Thess 1:7-8, 2:8). In I Timothy 6:14 it is viewed as something wonderful for the people of God (cf. II Tim 4: 1, 8, Titus 2: 13).

(4) 'Coming' - *parousia*. In Greek it means presence or arrival (I Cor 16: 17, II Cor 7: 7). It can be used to denote the arrival of a king or ruler. In contrast to the *parousia* of the man of sin is Christ's coming, his manifestation, which is at the heart of the church's expectation (Matt 24:3, 30f, 16:27, I Thess 2:19, Phil 3:21, I Thess 3:13, 4:15, 5:23).

What the coming of Christ means is that what the Father has been doing for millenniums will suddenly be seen, as in the twinkling of an eye (I Cor 15: 52). He will bring with him the people of God (I Thess 4: 13-18), as well as gather those who are still alive. Paul bases this confidence in the resurrection of Christ (v. 14).

4. THE JUDGEMENTS OF GOD.

(1) The God of holy love cannot be slack about judgement (Rom 2:15f, 3:5ff, cf. Hab 1:13, Nahum 1: 2, Ex 34:7, etc.). The nature of the judgement could be summed up in Abraham's confession, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do righteously' (Gen 18: 25). Judgement involves (a) Assessing the virtue or otherwise of an act and delivering a verdict; (b) As

a result to declare either sentence or acquittal; (c) It also carries the meaning of righting things, and of setting straight disordered relationships (Psalm 72, 75:8, Isa 11:4, Luke 1:51ff, 6:20-26, 16:19-31, James 5: 1-11).

There is no salvation except through judgement. Hence the judgement is good tidings, as the coming judge will act against evil and set things straight.

We should also add that the final judgement is the end of all the judgements which have been taking place through history.

(2) Christ's appearing is for judgement and salvation (Heb 9:27-28). God is the Judge (Heb 12:23, Psalm 9:7-8, Rev 20: 12, James 4: 12). The Father has given authority to the Son to judge (John 5: 22ff). Sometimes Christ is spoken of as judge (Acts 10:42, 17:30-31, II Tim 4:8), and sometimes the judgement seat is that of both God and Christ (Rom 14: 10, II Cor 5: 10, Rev 20: 11ff).

The important truth for us is that judgement has already taken place in this world (John 12:31, Rom 8:1ff). The final judgement will be a pronouncement and execution of what has taken place (John 3: 19, II Thess 1: 7, Gal 5: 5).

The judgement for the people of God is one of losses and rewards (II Cor 5: 10). This does not affect the truth of there 'being no condemnation'. The rewards have to do with entering fully into the world to come (II John 8, I Cor 3: 1-15, Phil 3: 11, Gal 6:8, II Peter 1: 11).

(3) The Judgement to come has to do with the final sentence on evil. This too is the work-out of the Cross. It is in the hands of the Lamb. There is irretrievable loss for the impenitent (Matt 25:46, Rom 2:6-10, etc.). Satan, death, the second death, the beast, the false prophet are all thrown into the lake

of fire (Rev 20:7-15, 21:8, cf. II Thess 1:9).

(4) The judgement brings a new creation. The eschatological promise of the O .T . of a new heaven and a new earth, fulfilled in Christ's coming and reign, comes to be through the struggle with evil and the love which never fails. II Peter 3: 10ff does not speak of the destruction of the world we know but its purification. It is the 'form' of this world that is passing away (I Cor 7: 31). The coming world is the renewal of this one (Rev 21: 1ff) and into it will be brought the cultural riches of history (Rev 21: 24, 26).

5.CONCLUSION.

The final fulness and life of the people of God in the new world will be developed in the next study. For now we see this world as the home for God's people renewed with the final glorification of his new people. Motivated with such hope we take account of our lives, 'waiting for and hastening the day of his coming' (II Peter 3: 12).

STUDY FIVE

THE NEW COMMUNAL WORLD

1. INTRODUCTION.

Revelation 21:22 - 22:5 pictorially depicts the communal relationship between God's people, who together dwell in God. The peoples will be there as peoples, yet communally as God's own people. There will be no boundaries, all will live by the water of life and the fruit from the tree of life, with its leaves giving life and health to the nations.

This is the completion of God's purpose when man is called to multiply and family the earth (Gen 1:26ff). All of history contributes to it. There could be no end without the beginning and the process.

2. A GLORIFIED PEOPLE.

(1) **God's purpose is to glorify** (I Cor 2: 7, cf. Heb 2: 10, Eph 1:4). Created in the image of God's glory, man was designed to reflect the glory of God. Choosing to reject his glory as a son, man has experienced loss (Rom 3: 23). Yet now through the revelation of his glory in the redemptive actions of Jesus Christ the true Son has been glorified, and is the elder Brother of many brethren.

(2) **Raised to glory.** The elect will ultimately be glorified by Christ 'who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body' (Phil 3:21, cf. I John 3:2). As we have seen in previous studies, the people of

God are already raised in Christ and now live power of the resurrection. By the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead (and who now indwells the people of God), God will give life to our mortal bodies (Rom 8:11). In Romans 8:23 this is called 'the redemption of our bodies'. Our bodies which are being worn down will be ultimately transformed into a body of glory (I Cor 15:43). This mortality puts on immortality (I Cor 15: 53f). This is a process begun now by the Spirit of Christ (II Cor. 3: 18), but completed on death or at the final resurrection of the dead (II Cor. 4:16-5:5, cf. I Thess 4:13-18).

(3) A people of God's glory. See Isaiah 43:5 7 where God's sons are seen as coming home from afar, those whom he created for his glory.

God's glory is the manifestation of his character as it is, his love, holiness, righteousness, etc., 'his glorious grace' (Eph 1:6, 12). Created in his image man reflects the glory of God: so too is the creation a revelation of God's glory (1 Cor. 11:7, Psa 19:1, Isa 6:1ff., Rom 1:19ff). The redeemed family shows the glory of God in all that they are and do, with he being present with them. This will be the glory of the people of God being fully matured and as the body or bride of Christ together being all that he is.

This glory is seen quantitatively. The great multitude which no man can number, from every tribe and people, together (Rev 7:9ff). The partitions have fallen away, so that there is a complete oneness amongst all. Yet the oneness is not sameness, but all the riches of the diversity in character and culture is what will contribute to the glory of the one family. This is the qualitative nature of the glory of God's people. Revelation 21:24-26 implies that the variety of the peoples and their cultures help provide the building materials for the eternal Kingdom. While there is much we do not know, at least we can say it

will not be less than this and at the manifestation of God's sons the cultural development of the peoples of the creation will be shown to be meaningful.

3. THE INHERITANCE.

(1) *The promise to the saints.* Daniel 7:22 speaks of the saints inheriting the Kingdom. This is amplified in the N. T. where Jesus speaks of those who inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from before the foundation of the world (Matt 25:34). Jesus says it is his 'Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom (Luke 12:32). The children of God have entered the kingdom now through the new birth of the gospel, yet they wait to inherit its fulness (I Cor 15:50, cf. 6:10, Gal 5:21).

(2) *The inheritance of the earth.* From the creational mandate given to man to family the earth and to have lordship over it to the promise that Abraham's descendants would inherit the earth, we can link this with the point above about the saints inheriting the Kingdom. Jesus says it is the meek who will inherit the earth, and in Revelation 21:7 those who conquer will inherit all things, and in Revelation 5:10, 22: 5, the inheritors 'shall reign on the earth'. This is the new earth in which righteousness dwells. We could also trace it back to passages in the O. T. about the rehabilitation of the earth (e.g. Isa 11:1-10, 35 :1-10, 44: 1ff, 66: 22ff, Micah 4: 1ff, and many others).

It is here that the saints, the people of God will *reign*. They will serve God and have responsibility over all things under him. It will be the service of love, and the worship of adoration.

But the inheritance is more!

(3) *God himself will be inherited by his people.* Paul speaks of 'the glorious inheritance of the saints'

(4) God dwelling with *his people*. This too is the repeated promise of the O.T., It was when the cloud descended upon the tabernacle in the wilderness that God spoke to his people, also showing that he dwelt with them. In Ezekiel 37, following the prophecy of renewed Israel, their unity under one Shepherd, and the promise of God's making an everlasting covenant with them, God says, 'My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people' (Ezek 37:27). This is God making his sanctuary in the midst of them for eternity (v. 28).

The church is the dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2: 22, 4:6, I Cor 3:16f). The people of God have entered the presence of the Father (Eph 2:18) and this through the blood of Christ (Heb 10: 19f).

Now God himself who has triumphed over all evil, who has shown himself as the Father of the covenant, and a faithful Creator, tabernacles with his people (Mal 2: 10, 1 Peter 4: 19). Revelation 21: 22f says there is no need for a sanctuary (*naon*) for God is that sanctuary, and it is in this light of God's presence

that the nations shall walk.

The glorified people express the glory of the Father, and the Father's glory is revealed in his people, by a people who are in the completed family- home of the Father, the new Jerusalem of the-free, where there is room enough for all (John 14:2, 1Cor 15: 28).

4. THE PEOPLE OF GOD FOREVER.

We have seen that God's purpose for his creation was to fill it with families who would all ultimately be his family. Christ's work is the gathering into one the children of God scattered abroad. Under Christ's reign and through the proclamation of the church the enemies are subdued, evil is destroyed, the creation regenerated, and the nations reign on the earth in the glory of God. Thus forever people will: -

(1) *Serve God day and night* (Rev 7:15). Unimpeded by sin, temptation, sickness or the enemies, the people of God will fill out the scope of their ministry.

(2) They will be a Kingdom *of priests* (Rev 1: 6, 5:10, 20:6, 22:4f). They will be priests to God, and for God, but corporately and as a Kingdom (cf. I Peter 2:9). It is not an egotistical religion in which God merely becomes a means to an end - salvation. God's glory includes, not excludes, the glory of man, but man only knows that glory as he serves God.

All is more than just a restoration of what has been lost. It is restoration plus the final and completed glory of grace. The glory which has traversed the pages of history redeeming man, and bringing him with all of his saved brethren into that new world where all things are new. It is new worship, new service, new glory, new praise, the new family, the

new creation, and the God 'whose mercies are new every morning'.