

## God Chose to be God to the Descendants of Abraham

### A Series on Election: Part 5

God's choice / election has long been a source of confusion and controversy. What exactly did God choose of human beings?

1. The earliest record of God choosing something involving a human being is found in the covenant that God makes with Abraham. This unilateral unconditional covenant that God makes with Abraham is of great significance. Here the omnipotent God of the universe is committing Himself to be God to Abraham, because of Abraham's faith in Him:

I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant, **to be God to you and to your descendants after you**. And I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land where you live as a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and **I will be their God**." (Gen 17:7-8)

Moreover, not only to Abraham, but God promises to be God to Abraham's descendants for all eternity. Moses attempts to convey this significance of God's choice of the nation of Israel to be their God after the Exodus:

Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet **the Lord set His affection on your fathers, to love them, and He chose their descendants after them**, you over all the other peoples, as it is this day. So circumcise your heart, and do not stiffen your neck any longer. For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe. (Deut 10:14-16)

In choosing to be God to Abraham's descendants, God makes the conditional Mosaic covenant with the children of Israel to teach them how to be a people of God – to learn what sin is and how to atone for it. If He is to be God to Abraham's believing descendants, His own possession among all the peoples, then the children of Israel must be a sanctified people, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation in God's holy land (Ex 19:4-6).

When speaking to Gentiles, the apostle Paul alludes to the covenant God made to be God to Abraham and his descendants:

Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the people of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, **having no hope and without God in the world**. (Eph 2:12)

Regarding one's salvation, God's choice of a person comes after one chooses to have faith in Him; as promised in the Abrahamic Covenant, God will be God to Abraham's descendants (Gen 17:7-8). Just before the Mosaic Covenant is made, God makes a conditional statement, "now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6). In the New Testament, Jesus defines what is a descendant of Abraham:

They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. (John 8:39-40)

2. In loving commitment to His covenant promises to Abraham, God chooses who will fulfill His promises and carry out His covenant plan. As Paul, the former teacher of the Law, defines who the "children of the promise" are to the church of Rome, he makes clear that God's sovereign choice of instruments of the covenant is based on love for the one who has faith in Him:

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants ...(continues)

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shall be named." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but **the children of the promise are regarded as descendants**. For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah will have a son." And not only that, but there was also Rebekah, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." (Rom 9:6-13)

Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Jesus are examples of principal faithful individuals, whom God loved. Because of their faith, they were all chosen to carry out God's covenant promises. In contrast, Esau forsook his birthright and rejected the privilege of receiving and carrying the covenant, which God foreknew and hated him for.

Associated with "election" and "foreknowledge" is the term "predestine." The relationship of these three terms can be seen in the following two verses:

To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **who are chosen** according to the **foreknowledge** of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure (1 Pet 1:1-2).

For those whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Rom 8:29)

Though "not yet born and had not done anything good or bad" (Rom 9:11), God foreknew that Esau would not choose to have faith in God, which gave cause to hate him (Rom 9:13). The writer of Hebrews explains:

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that there be no sexually immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. (Heb 12:15-17)

Through this foreknowledge of whether one will choose to have faith in Him, Believers are predestined to "conform to the image of His Son." Just like Jacob and Esau, through God's foreknowledge of who will choose Him and obey before one is born, God already chose to be God to that person and actively becomes God to that person when one comes to faith:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He favored us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:3-6)

These examples establish the fact that God elects and predestines based on His foreknowledge of people; foreknowledge governs God's elective work of fulfilling His covenant promises to Abraham. The apostle Peter attests to this and indicates that God's choice of human beings includes non-Believers to carry out His covenant promises:

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know--this Man, delivered over **by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.**" (Acts 2:22-23)

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The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you handed over and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers also did. But the things which God previously announced by the mouths of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, **He has fulfilled in this way.** (Acts 3:13-18)

Regarding one's role and purpose in God's plan, God's choice and election of a person is determined by who is best suited to fulfill His promises to Abraham according to His plan and schedule, all the while as an instrument of God's all encompassing goodness – God's glory.

3. God's covenant work is to cause human beings to believe in Jesus Christ:

Therefore they said to Him, "What are we to do, so that we may accomplish the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." (John 6:28-29)

When one knows Jesus Christ, one meets and knows his God:

"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves." (John 14:7-11)

The apostle John recognized Jesus' representation of the invisible God in heaven:

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:18)

In Jesus Christ, the image of God, the nature and being of God is perfectly revealed. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah prophesied of the virgin birth of Jesus naming Him "Immanuel," which means "God with us" (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:22-23), and Jesus was given the Hebrew name "Y<sup>e</sup>hōšûa'," which means "Yahweh is help" or "Yahweh is salvation" (Matt 1:21; Luke 1:31). The significance of Jesus Christ as the image of God is that it reasserts the image of God as the power and authority over earth (John 14:9). Only through Jesus Christ can human beings recover their original created purpose as the image of God (Rom 8:29-30; Phil 3:20-21).

When God made the covenant with Abraham to be his God, it was part of a greater plan to restore the created image of God. While the nation of Israel failed in their Old Covenant promises to be a sanctified people, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation, God does not abandon His promise to Abraham to be God to the descendants of Abraham.

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Lord God says: "It is not for your sake, house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I show Myself holy among you in their sight. (Ezek 36:22-23)

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Notable is that God's choice and election is not whether one is saved, but, whether He will be God to you – if you meet the qualifications of a descendant of Abraham. The promise to be God to Abraham and his descendants is made with the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis and specifically affirmed at its fulfillment and conclusion in the last book of the Bible Revelation.

I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. (Gen 17:7)

And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give water to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life, without cost. The one who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (Rev 21:5-7)

Through the New Covenant, all the nations know that God is Lord and shows Himself through His Son Jesus Christ. God's choice of being God to the descendant of Abraham is being fulfilled. The immensity that the living God who exists, YHWH - I AM WHO I AM, has chosen to be our personal God cannot be taken for granted or understated. But the choice is yours whether you want to be of God's possession among all the peoples of the earth or not (Ex 19:4-5; 1 Pet 2:9).