

• Four other titles to describe the people of God

Peter wants his Christian friends to live up to their high calling. They are God's new temple; God wants to dwell in them. They are God's priests; God wants them to offer sacrifices of worship and intercession. Now in 2:9–10 Peter confirms his description of the people of God with four other titles. *'But you are a chosen family, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's possession, so that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'*¹.

¹ 2:9

1. God's people are a chosen family

1. **God's people are a chosen family.** The word that I translate 'family' means 'a clan of descendants from a common ancestor', a 'progeny', an 'offspring'. Certain clans have special characteristics. They may all have brown eyes; or they may all be tall. We recognize them as coming from a particular clan because of something characteristic of that clan. Christians are people who take after their Father. God chose us to be like Himself.

2. God's people are a royal priesthood

2. **God's people are a royal priesthood.** At one stage in the story of Israel God spoke of the whole of His people being a nation where every citizen was a priest. Actually in the story of Israel that did not precisely happen. Only the members of the tribe of Levi became priests. But God now wants His people to fulfil that ancient offer of Exodus 19:6. Every Christian is to offer sacrifices of worship. We offer up our very bodies as 'a living sacrifice'. We are the living temple; we are the priests; and we are the sacrifices as well! We offer ourselves and our praises and all our activities to God in adoration and gratitude. We pray. A priest is a person who intercedes. We are priests. Unlike people in the nation of Israel we are priests and kings at the same time!

3. God's people are a holy nation

3. **God's people are a holy nation.** A nation has its own king, its own customs, its own language, its own national identity. Christians have all of these things. Our king is Jesus. Our language is our happy talk about the things of God. We love to talk about praise, about serving God, about conquering sin. This is our language every day. We have our own customs. We like to pray, to read our Bibles. We are all ambassadors telling the world what heaven is like. The outstanding 'national' characteristic of God's people is their spirituality and dedication to God! A nation!

4. God's people are 'a people for God's own possession'

4. **God's people are 'a people for God's own possession'.** God wants them to specially represent Him in this world. No one else does. We are the only people in this world to represent God. When people are abroad it is amazing how they like to tell people about their own nation. Often I have sat in a café in Nairobi overhearing tourists tell the waiters how wonderful their country is! Every nationality tends to boast about the good points of their home country! But our home country has good points as well, and we are to boast about them! We boast about 'the wonderful deeds' of Him who has called us 'out of darkness into his marvellous light'. We talk about our wonderful King – King Jesus. We get excited about our heavenly homeland. 'You would love it in our country', we say. Of course, I am not speaking of any earthly country but of 'the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God'.

• We get excited about our heavenly homeland

• *God takes us out into the world to talk about our wonderful new citizenship*

• *We are a people who have 'received mercy'*

• *Phrases about Israel applied to mainly Gentile Christians*

• *The church has not replaced Israel*

• *The church has been grafted into God's true Israel*

• *The church is God's true Israel*

• *Heirs of the promises to Abraham*

• *Show forth God's wonderful deeds*

What a sense of citizenship and of togetherness we should have. Our 'holiness' is not some lonely isolated, monastic sanctimonious Pharisaism. God takes us out into the world to talk about our wonderful new citizenship. 'Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy'¹. How desperate was our condition before God took hold of us. We were 'no people'. We had no identity as God's people. We were not specially conscious of God's working in our lives. Our lives were relatively futile; we had no sense of destiny. But now, says Peter, we are a people who have 'received mercy'. Our sins have been forgiven; God is at work in our lives. We have a sense of peace and purpose.

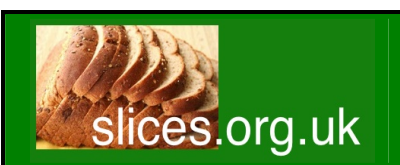
1 2:10

There is something about this passage that we ought to specially notice. These phrases in 1 Peter 2:4–10 are taking phrases that were originally written about Israel and applying them to mainly Gentile Christians. The interesting thing is that Peter does this quite casually and unselfconsciously. He simply addresses these Christians as 'Israel', using descriptions of Israel taken from the Old Testament and applying them to these Christians.

What is the significance of this? It does **not** mean exactly that 'the church' has replaced Israel. It does **not** mean that Israel was simply a 'pattern' for the church, but remains everlastingly different from the church. It implies, as I see it, that the church has been grafted into God's true Israel. God's 'Israel' consists of all believers. God started with Abraham and many of his physical descendants. The first believers were Jews, and Jewish people were the starting-point of the church on the day of Pentecost. But Gentiles have been grafted into God's spiritual people 'Israel'. The church is not God's **new** Israel; the church is God's **true** Israel.

What privileges are here for all the people of God, all believers in Jesus. They are heirs to everything that was promised to Abraham. Even physical territory will be theirs for we wait for new heavens and a new earth.

The point of it all, right now, is that we live in such a way that we visibly and audibly show forth 'the wonderful deeds' of Him who has called us 'out of darkness into his marvellous light'.



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