

Lesson-1

CHURCH: THE PEOPLE CHOSEN BY GOD



The Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great. So that you will be a blessing. To your offspring I will give this land.” (Gen: 12:1-2, 7). And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be” (Gen: 15:5). “And I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring

after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.”(Gen.17:7-8) This covenant was the beginning of God’s redemptive action to unite all the nations on earth into one family.

The Call of Abraham and the Promises

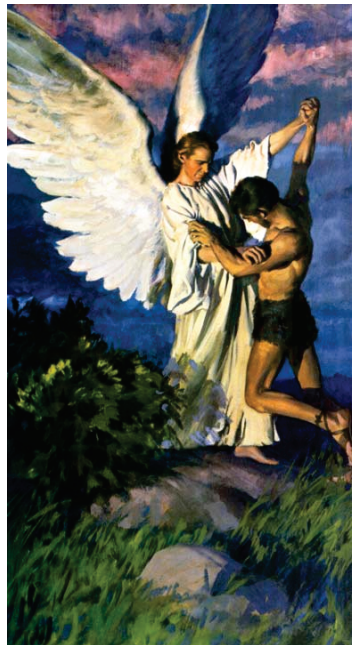
As a result of the sin of man, the children of God were degraded and scattered. But, God wanted to gather them into one flock and lead them on the path of salvation and raise them to the dignity of the children of God. The call of Abraham came in this context as God wanted to give rise to a new generation through him.

Through faith and obedience Abraham responded to God's call.

God's promises came to Abraham at a time when he had no children, and Sarah, his wife had long advanced in years. Trusting in the promises of God, Abraham ventured to leave behind his dear native land and go to the place God had shown him. God was greatly pleased with Abraham's faith and obedience and he blessed him with a son named Isaac, fulfilling His promise.

The Children of Jacob: Israel

God continued to keep His promises with Isaac and then Jacob, the son of Isaac. Jacob, who became the father of twelve tribes, was called Israel (Gen: 32:28), subsequently all the descendants of Jacob came to be called Israel. God made them his chosen people and they became heirs to his promises and blessings. The Bible tells us that the Children of Israel went and dwelt in Egypt when Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, was the administrator there. In the course of time they grew greatly in number.



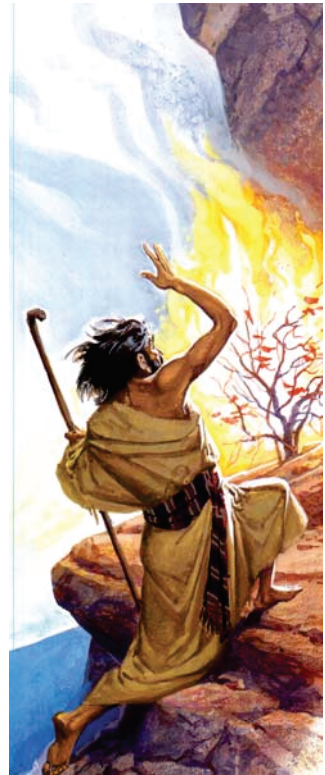
The Call of Moses and the Liberation of Israel

The authorities in Egypt became increasingly jealous and suspicious of the people of Israel as they made steady progress numerically and economically. Gradually the Egyptians began to pressurize and persecute the Israelites. They treated them like slaves and made them work like slaves. God called Moses to liberate the people of Israel from slavery and persecution under the Egyptian authorities and to make them once again God's own people in accordance with the promises he had made to Abraham and his descendants.

God said to Moses, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob... I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt, I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey..." (Ex. 3:6-8)

God's People being Formed

God liberated the Children of Jacob from their slavery in Egypt and led them through the deserts to the promised land. While they were being led under the leadership of Moses, God made a covenant with them on Mount Sinai: Moses went up to God and the Lord called him out of the mountain saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I



did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples; Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” (Ex: 19:3-6).

God liberated Israel from Egypt and made covenant with them in order to make them God's own people. It is clear from what God told Moses. **In the old Testament, the word 'Kahal' (in Hebrew) or 'Ecclesia' (in Greek) is used to mean a people called into one flock by God and who were made God's own people.** Literally, the word 'Kahal' or 'Ecclesia' means the 'assembly of those who are called together. This word received a religious significance when it was used in the Bible (Deut. 4:10, 9:10, 15:10). The word 'Ecclesia' means three things in the context of Israel's history.

1. The people of Israel constitute an assembly called by God.
2. They were called together for a special purpose. **(To worship the Lord, their God and to keep His covenant was the purpose for which they were called.)**
3. Through this election, Israel became God's own people.

A New Covenant and a New People of God

Israel failed miserably to keep the terms of the covenant with God. They were unfaithful to God and worshiped the gods of the gentiles. Yet, God on His part remained faithful and remembered His covenant. God decided to make a new covenant with his people, a covenant that is inviolable in which He will be their God and they will be His people. We read in the book of the prophet Jeremiah: **“But this is the covenant that I will**



make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33).

In the fullness of time, Jesus, the Son of God, through his life, death and resurrection realized this covenant. **Jesus established a new covenant of love by giving the transformed bread and wine as his own body and blood at the last supper.** This covenant was sealed with his sacrificial death on the cross. Thus God forgave the sins of humanity through the death of His own son on the cross. God remembers our sins no more (Jer. 31:34). As Paul, the Apostle says, **“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** (2 Cor. 5:21). St. Paul in Ephesians says: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ.” (Eph. 2:13).



Church: The Chosen People of God

The Church is the assembly of the chosen people of God, gathered together by God Himself for the completion of His salvific work. Jesus established this Church on the foundation of the apostles. Paul the apostle tells us that “God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph. 1:4). **Paul urges us to put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience as we are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.** (Col. 3:12)

St. Peter also highlights our election by God. He reminds us in these words: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.” (1Pet. 2:9).

Therefore the Church is the assembly of God's people chosen and brought together by God Himself. God has called us to salvation and sonship with him and we who are God's people should realize this in our lives.

**Word of God
to Read and
Meditate**

Eph. 1: 3-14

Word of God to Remember

God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love (Eph. 1:4).

Let us Pray

O God, who united us all into our people, give us the good will to think with the church, to love the church and to participate in her work to the best of our ability.

My Resolution

I shall always be thankful to God for making me a member of the Church.

To Think with the Church

Christ instituted the new covenant gathering Jews and Gentiles to be united, not only according to the flesh, but in the Spirit, and to be the new People of God. (Vat. II, The Church, No. 9)

To Know the Mother Church

The people who received their Christian faith from St. Thomas, the apostle, are known as Mar Thoma Nazranies. The name Nazrani has been derived after the name Jesus of Nazareth, meaning the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. The Nazranies dwelt on the Malabar coast in the south western part of India. Later this community was called the Malabar Church. The attribute 'Syro' was also added to them as this community had their liturgical celebration in Syriac Language. Today the Church is known as the Syro-Malabar Church.

Questions

1. How did Abraham respond to God's call?
2. Why did God call Moses?
3. What do we mean when we call the people of Israel "Kahal" or 'Ecclesia'?
4. Write two verses from the Bible that indicates that we, the Christians, are God's own people.
5. How did Jesus establish the new covenant?