

Deuteronomy 7:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

Analysis

Israel's Holiness and Election: This verse declares Israel's unique identity and calling as God's chosen people. The Hebrew phrase "ki am kadosh atah l'YHWH Elohekha" (כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַפָּה לְיהָוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ) means "for a holy people you are to the LORD your God." The adjective "kadosh" (קדש, holy) fundamentally means "set apart, consecrated, different"—not inherently morally superior but separated for God's purposes. This holiness wasn't achieved by Israel but declared by God, making it a positional rather than merely behavioral reality.

Divine Choice and Election: The verb "bachar" (בָּחר, chose) emphasizes God's sovereign initiative: "bekha bachar YHWH Elohekha" (בְּךָ בָּחר יְהָוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ) means "you the LORD your God chose"). This choice wasn't based on Israel's merit, as verses 7-8 explicitly state: not because of numerical superiority or worthiness, but because of God's love and oath to the patriarchs. The phrase "lihyot lo le'am segullah" (לִהְיוֹת לוֹ לְעַם סְגָלָה) means "to be to Him a treasured people." The word "segullah" (סְגָלָה) denotes a special possession, treasure, or private property—the same word used in Exodus 19:5 and Malachi 3:17.

Universal Particularity: The phrase "mikol ha'amim asher al-penei ha'adamah" (מִכָּל הָעִמִּים אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאָדָם) means "above/from all the peoples who are upon the face of the earth." This comparative doesn't imply other nations have no value, but that Israel has a unique covenantal role. The election of Israel serves redemptive purposes—through Abraham's seed, all nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:3,

22:18). This verse establishes the theological foundation for Israel's separation from Canaanite nations (verses 1-5), not from ethnic superiority but covenant responsibility. Paul later applies similar language to the Church (Titus 2:14, 1 Peter 2:9), showing the continuity of God's redemptive purpose through a called-out people.

Historical Context

This passage is set in the Plains of Moab, just before Israel's entry into Canaan (c. 1406 BC, traditional dating). Moses delivers these words as part of his farewell addresses to the generation born in the wilderness. The context is crucial: Israel stands on the threshold of conquering Canaan, facing seven nations "greater and mightier" than themselves (verse 1). The command to destroy these nations and avoid intermarriage (verses 2-3) addresses the real temptation to religious syncretism and idolatry.

The historical backdrop includes Israel's covenant relationship established at Sinai (Exodus 19-24) and renewed here in Moab (Deuteronomy 29). The concept of Israel as God's "treasured possession" (segullah) appears first at Sinai (Exodus 19:5-6), where God declared Israel would be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This wasn't arbitrary favoritism but purposeful election for global mission —Israel was to be God's witness to the nations, demonstrating His character and requirements.

The patriarchal promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-21, 17:1-8), Isaac (Genesis 26:2-5), and Jacob (Genesis 28:13-15, 35:9-12) form the foundation of this election. God's oath (shevuah, verse 8) refers to these sworn covenant promises. Throughout Israel's history, this concept of election produced both healthy self-understanding and dangerous ethnic pride. The prophets constantly reminded Israel that election brought responsibility, not automatic blessing (Amos 3:2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities"). Israel's failure to live as a holy people led to exile (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28), yet God's faithfulness to His elect remnant persisted. The New Testament reveals that God's election ultimately centers in Christ, and includes Gentiles who believe (Ephesians 1:4-5, Romans 9-11). The early church struggled

to reconcile Israel's historic election with the gospel's universal scope—a tension addressed throughout Acts and Paul's epistles.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to be "holy" (set apart) unto God, and how does positional holiness relate to practical holiness in daily life?
2. How does understanding election as God's sovereign choice rather than human merit protect against both pride and despair?
3. In what ways was Israel's election meant to serve redemptive purposes for all nations, not just Israel's exclusive benefit?
4. How does the concept of being God's "treasured possession" shape identity, purpose, and ethical responsibility?
5. What continuities and discontinuities exist between Israel's election and the Church's calling as a "holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9)?

Interlinear Text

בָּנִים יְהִי קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה יְהִי אֱלֹהִים בָּנִים
H3588 people For thou art an holy H859 the LORD thy God H0
H5971 H6918 H3068 H430 H3068 H430

סַגֵּל הַבָּנִים לֹא לְהִי וְתַּחֲנִן רְאֵשׁ יְהִי אֱלֹהִים בָּנִים
hath chosen the LORD thy God H1961 H0 people thee to be a special
H977 H3068 H430 H1961 H0 H5971 H5459

בְּאַדְמָה: פָּנֶיךָ עַל אַשְׁר בָּנִים מִכֶּל
H3605 people H834 H5921 that are upon the face of the earth
H5971 H6440 H127

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 14:2 (Holy): For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.

1 Peter 2:9 (Holy): But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

Malachi 3:17 (References Lord): And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

Titus 2:14 (Parallel theme): Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Jeremiah 2:3 (Holy): Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD.

Deuteronomy 26:19 (Holy): And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the LORD thy God, as he hath spoken.

Psalms 50:5 (Holy): Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.

Amos 3:2 (Parallel theme): You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

2 Peter 2:5 (References God): And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;

Deuteronomy 28:9 (Holy): The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways.