

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Church and Last Things, Session 1, The Biblical Story and Key Passages

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on the Doctrines of the Church and Last Things. This is session 1, The Biblical Story and Key Passages.

Welcome to our lectures on ecclesiology and eschatology, that is the doctrines of the church and last things.

I'm Robert Peterson, a retired professor of systematic theology at two evangelical seminaries, currently retired but editing and writing half-time and serving as associate pastor at Covenant of Grace Church in St. Charles, Missouri.

Please pray with me. Father, thank you for your word and its teachings. Give us wisdom, and work through your word to inform us but also to change us more into the image of your son. We pray in his holy name, amen.

The doctrine of last things is the second part of this course, the doctrine of the church overview. We'll begin with the biblical story, which is right where we should begin because theology should be based upon exegesis, and exegesis has to be put into the context of the Bible's storyline, so the biblical story number one.

Secondly, some key passages in both Testaments deal with the people of God. I'm not going to get into a battle as to whether we should call the people of God in the Old Testament the church. In some ways, we should.

There's one people of God throughout the Bible. In other ways, of course, there's newness to the New Testament church, so I'm just going to call them the people of God in the Old Testament. We'll look at some key passages in both Testaments and then biblical pictures of the church.

Again, a biblical theological emphasis, people of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, and so forth. Those pictures are worth our attention. Then, the church in the Old Testament, a more extensive treatment based upon some research I did recently.

The people of God in the Old Testament, I should say, to be consistent with what I've just said. The historical theology. Systematics is based upon exegesis and biblical theology, which stand in a straight line and point toward systematics but not in a straight line, but necessary to do good systematics is to consult the history of doctrine, how the church has understood what the Bible teaches, and we want to do the historical theology of ecclesiology, historical theology of the church, just hitting

some highlights, which nevertheless will get us thinking in different ways as to where certain important expressions came from, ways of talking about the church, different biblical and theological emphases that were highlighted in different periods and so forth, Roman Catholic claims, and on and on.

Then, a brief treatment of the church and the churches, studying how the word church is used and churches, the words church and churches are used in the New Testament, of individual local fellowships, of citywide churches, of churches in Roman provinces, all the churches in a certain province could be called the church, and then in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem Council, the ecumenical church is called the church. So, there's a continuity in those uses of the word church. Then, the historical attributes of the church.

The church is one holy, Catholic, that is universal, and an apostolic church. It comes from one of the early creeds of the church and has become a historical signpost, pointing us in a very fruitful direction as far as the Bible's teachings about the church. The attributes are patristic.

The marks of the church are reformational, and the reformers had, they built upon the attributes, accepted the attributes of the church, and criticized Rome's treatment of some of those things, but they added marks because they had a new situation and that they had to try to distinguish the true from the false. How do you do that? They emphasized the three marks of the church: the proper preaching of the word, the proper administration of the sacraments or ordinances of the church, and the faithful exercise of church discipline. We'll talk about the marks.

From that, we will have an excursus on ecclesiastical separation. When should Christians separate from a church? How do we evaluate truth and error? What is the difference between heresy, apostasy, and schism? Don't we all have errors? Are some errors more important than others? Is there such a thing as a systemic error, a system-wide or systematic error? And if so, there certainly are, then if Christians, true believers in Christ, regard other Christians as guilty of systematic error, which we certainly do, is that the same as heresy? Should we call those who disagree with us, even in systematic ways, heretics? Is that biblical? We'll address some of those issues, and along with that, as far as still the topic of ecclesiastical separation, we will discuss what is the job of pastors in light of some of these things. In light of error, false teaching, and schism, what are the heretics? What is the pastor's job? How does that work? What are some guidelines? Then we'll deal with the church's ordinances because they were commanded by God in the Old Testament, by Christ in the New.

In the New, we have two, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and we'll deal with them in various ways in terms of different views and the meanings biblically of baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the government of the church, there are a number of different

basic views that are reflected in different church bodies and denominations. Where does that come from? What does that look like, the government of the church? Then we'll conclude the doctrine of the church by looking at some core teachings and then the service of the church. What is the church supposed to be doing? What are the most important things of church life, once again, according to the scriptures? So, we start with the church in the biblical story.

The people of God begin with Adam and Eve. I find myself being inconsistent. I'm not a big one for arguing that the church is in the Old Testament, unless by that if you mean I'm not saying the New Testament church is in the Old Testament.

If you mean the people of God are in the Old Testament, that's exactly what I mean, but I find myself inconsistent in vocabulary. The people of God begin with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God makes them in his image, which means in part that they are created in fellowship with their maker, Genesis 1:27. So, God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. They know the sound of him walking in the garden, Genesis 3:8. Even after they rebel against God, he does not abandon them but promises to send a Redeemer, the famous Proto-Evangelion of Genesis 3:15. I will put enmity, the Lord says, cursing the devil, between you, the devil, and the woman, Eve, and between your offspring and her offspring, he, the devil, will bruise the woman's, he will bruise your head, you shall bruise his heel.

The woman's offspring will bruise the head of the devil. The devil will bruise the heel of the woman's offspring. It is not crystal clear from the perspective of Genesis, but with 20-20 hindsight, the evil one inspires Judas to betray the Son of God and who was crucified; that is, his heel is bruised.

You say crucifixion? Is this bruising of a heel? Well, it is because it's God's great act to save the world, and it's followed by the resurrection of Christ, but the death of Christ, ironically, is a bruising of the devil's head. It is God, through the Son and the Spirit, defeating the evil one. Church and the biblical story.

Later, God calls Abraham from a family of idol worshippers; the last chapter of Joshua tells us that Joshua 24 enters into a covenant with him, a solemn agreement, promising to be God to him and his descendants after him. Genesis 17:7 is so beautiful. God promises Abraham, 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.

What an amazing promise, part of the covenant that God makes with Abraham. A covenant is a relationship, but it's a formal relationship between God and his people,

often sealed with blood, the blood of sacrifice. God promises to give Abraham a land, in addition to making him into a great nation, and through him to bless all peoples.

Genesis 12:3. I will bless those, I will make you a great nation, 12:2, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. God is speaking to Abram who became, who became Abraham.

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you, I will curse, and in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed. In chapter 22, with the offering up of Isaac, it says all the peoples of the earth will be blessed. All the families, all the peoples.

Abraham could not imagine how that was going to come since he and Sarah were childless and unable to have children, but all things are possible with God. From Abraham come Isaac and Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, and from whom God brings 12 tribes of his people. The rest of the Old Testament concerns God's dealings with these 12 tribes of Israel.

Through great plagues and a dramatic exodus, God calls Israel out of Egyptian bondage to be his people. He gives them the Ten Commandments, claims them as his people, and gives them the promised land, which they occupy after defeating the Canaanites. The summary is too simple, but it is, and it serves its purpose as a summary.

Later, God gives them David as king in Jerusalem. God promises to make David's descendants into a dynasty and to establish the throne of one of them forever. 2 Samuel 7:14 through 16.

In mercy, God sends many prophets to warn his Old Testament people of the judgment that will come if they do not repent of their sins and turn to the Lord. Nevertheless, they repeatedly rebel against him and his prophets in response, and they engage in just open, detestable idolatry. In response, God sends the northern kingdom of 10 tribes into captivity in Assyria in 722 BC, and the southern kingdom does not learn from that but continues in idolatry, even the descendants of David on the throne, bringing idols into God's temple, and so forth.

Just it is disgusting in God's sight, and he follows through on his curses, and the southern kingdom of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, go into captivity in Babylon in 586 BC. Through the prophets, God also promises to send a deliverer, Isaiah 9:6 and 7, for example. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

I'm not going to read Isaiah 53, but I'll just do a tiny taste of it. God promises to send his suffering servant, Isaiah 53:5. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds, we are healed.

All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. God promises to restore his people to their land from Babylonian captivity after 70 years. Jeremiah 25 is one of two places at least that we're told that in this remarkable, but in many ways sad prophecy.

Jeremiah 25:11 and 12. This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, God says through his prophet, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon 70 years. Then, after 70 years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation for the land of Chaldeans for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste.

God restores the people to fulfill that prophecy under Ezra and Nehemiah. The people rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and built a second temple, yet the Old Testament ends with God's people continuing to turn away from him. The book of Malachi is instructive in that regard.

After 400 years, God sent his son as the promised Messiah, suffering servant, king of Israel, son of man, Davidic king and savior of the world. Jesus tells the purpose of his coming, quoting that the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. The famous ransom saying of Mark 10:45 is one of two places in the gospel of Mark where the work of the atonement of Christ is explained.

The other place is in the word, in the institution of the Lord's supper in chapter 14 of Mark's gospel. Jesus chooses disciples, spends time with them, teaches them about the kingdom of God, cast out demons, performs miracles, and more than once predicts his death and resurrection. After he is raised, he directs his disciples to take the gospel to all nations to fulfill God's promise to Abraham to bless all peoples.

On the day of Pentecost, Jesus and the Father send the Spirit who formed the church as the New Testament people of God. The spirit empowers the disciples to spread the gospel to the world. Paul and Peter often describe churches in Old Testament terms.

Galatians 6:16, Paul calls the church the Israel of God. Philippians 3:3, we are the true circumcision, Paul says, who glorify Christ and worship in the spirit and put no confidence in the flesh. Bad paraphrase.

1 Peter 2:9 and 10 have a litany of Old Testament texts from Exodus 19 and other places that are directly applied to the New Testament people of God. There is continuity between the people of God of the Old Testament and the New. 1 Peter 2:9 and 10.

But you, in contrast to those who stumble over the stumbling stone who is Jesus, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once, you were not a people, quoting Hosea, but now you are God's people. Once, you did not receive mercy, but now you have received mercy.

There is continuity and discontinuity between Old Testament Israel and the church. On one hand, the church, as the people of God, is spiritual Israel, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles. On the other hand, Paul teaches that quote since God's gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable.

Romans 11:29. Verse 28 of Romans 11 explains the anomalous situation of first-century Israel and ongoing Israel until the return of Christ. As regards the gospel, they are enemies for you, Gentile's sake.

But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers, for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, God has called Gentiles because the Jews rejected the gospel. So, they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you Gentiles, the Jews also may now receive mercy.

Mercy for God has consigned all to disobedience that he might have mercy on all. This is the occasion for his explosion. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways for who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? Uh, no one, no one, no one, no one for from him and through him and to him are all things. The sum of the matter is this: to him be glory forever. Amen.

There's continuity between the old and new sets of peoples of God. There is still a future for ethnic Israel, blood descendants of Abraham and Sarah.

God is bringing and will yet bring many Jews to salvation through a different gospel, a different way of salvation. There is no such thing, but he is bringing the natural olive tree and the branches, and he's grafting them back into their own olive tree. After he grafted the wild olive branches, the Gentiles, in the way that the figure shows and the progressive dispensationalists agree, show the overarching unity of the people of God in both testaments.

Christians disagree as to whether there's a future for national Israel, but Christians should not disagree as to the fact that there is a future for ethnic Israel. Uh, as we'll see later on when we discuss the signs of the already and the not yet, I should say, uh, every major feature of last things has been fulfilled in part, and we will be fulfilled in a greater way. So, in between the comings of Christ, many Jews are coming to Christ and will come to Christ, but then it looks like a great harvest of Jewish believers in Christ toward the time of the second coming of Jesus.

Already, Jews were saved in between the comings, not yet a final big harvest so that Paul could say, and in this manner, all Israel will be saved. Every Israelite, of course not, but a large harvest toward the end of the age. When God joins us to Christ in salvation, he also joins us to everyone else joined to Christ.

The New Testament depicts the church in union with Christ in many ways. Union with Christ is an individual soteriological principle. When I believed in Jesus as a 21 year old, I was joined to him by God's grace and God's spirit.

But immediately, although I didn't realize it, although I was already loved by God's congregation of God's people, I was brought into a fellowship with others who had been joined to Christ, and we were fellow members of his body. We were brothers and sisters in Christ and so forth. The New Testament depicts the church in union with Christ in many ways.

He's the vine, and the church is the branches, John 15. He is the groom, and the church is his bride, 1 Corinthians 6:15 through 17, Ephesians 5:22 to 32. Since you're going to look at these pictures in a bit, I'm not going to read the passages now but later.

Overview as part of our biblical-theological sketch. He's the head, and the church is his body, Ephesians 5:23, 29 to 30, Colossians 1:18. The church abides in the father and the son, John 17:20 and 21, 1 John 4:16.

The church is a living temple. Excuse me. The church is a living temple.

1 Corinthians 3:16, 17, Ephesians 2:19 to 22, 1 Peter 2:6 through 8. The church is in Christ, which not always, but frequently denotes union with Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:30, 2 Corinthians 5: 21. The church participates in Jesus' story.

We were, we died with him. We're buried with him. We're raised with him.

We ascended with him. We sat down with God with him. And there is even a sense that scripture teaches in Romans 8 and Colossians 3 around verse three, perhaps that there's a sense we're coming again with him.

We're so joined to him spiritually that our true identity will only be manifest when he appears, and then we will appear with him, Colossians 3 early on. The church participates in Jesus' story, Romans 6 through 8, Colossians 2:20, and Colossians 3:1 to 4. Jude rejoices that the church comprises, quote, those who are called, loved by God, the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ. I'm using a different translation sometimes.

He rejoices that, all right, who took Jude and Adam? Oh, there, there's Jude. The church is those who are called, beloved by God, the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ. As God's people, we belong to him.

And amazingly, he belongs to us. That's what a covenant means. God pledges himself to his people.

This will be fully realized only in the, not yet, the new heavens and new earth. After God raises us from the dead, glorifies us, and dwells among us, outwardly and openly, Revelation 21:1 through 4. That is our biblical story. Key passages.

Genesis 12:1 to 3. Exodus 19:4 through 6. Matthew 5 through 7, Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 16:16 to 19. I will build my church, Jesus said.

Acts 2:37 to 47. 1 Corinthians 12:14 to 31. Ephesians 2:11 through 22.

The church in selected passages introduction. In the following passages, good, good, good. In the following passages, by God's grace, Abraham knows him, and God promises him a land, which ultimately means the new earth on which all God's redeemed, resurrected people will spend eternity.

As he promises, God gives childless Abraham and Sarah a son who is the father of Jacob, whose name God changes to Israel, and from whom springs the promised nation. God promises to bless all peoples through Abraham. This promise is fulfilled ultimately in Christ, for Abraham is the father of all believers, regardless of ethnicity, and all believers are his sons.

After freeing Jacob, Israel's descendants from Egypt, God meets Moses on Mount Sinai and tells him to remind Israel of God's deliverance of them and of his covenant with them. God promises to make them his own people who worship him and serve him among the nations and to make them a godly nation. God is on a mission, and he plans to reach the nations through his covenant people.

I'm summarizing the content of the special passages briefly before looking at them in more detail. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sets forth his vision for his new kingdom community. In the Beatitudes, Jesus associates God's kingdom with spiritual poverty, mourning, meekness, hunger for godliness, mercy, peace, and persecution.

Jesus says that for those who embrace such things, the kingdom of heaven is now, and greater blessings will come in future consummation. His disciples are not to withdraw from the world or be contaminated by it but are to pursue a mission of holy living and gospel witness. After Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah and God's son, Jesus declares that Peter will be a key leader in building Jesus' church.

Jesus is the Lord and Messiah who builds his messianic community, which he will cause to triumph over its enemies, including death. By preaching the gospel, the disciples will invite believers into God's kingdom. When Peter preaches Christ crucified and risen on Pentecost, 3,000 people believe and are baptized.

Luke explains that the early church was dedicated to the apostles' instruction, fellowship, Lord's Supper, and prayer. The church is characterized by joy, praise, a good reputation, and growth. In salvation, the spirit unites all believers to Christ, making us a part of his body so that we belong to him and one another.

God designed the church to be unified and warrants members to share each other's suffering and joys. Paul orders gifts according to importance and shows something better than gifts: love. God sent his son whose death and resurrection made peace between God and us.

His reconciling work unifies believers, believing Jews and Gentiles, into one new humanity, and together, they enter into a relationship with the Trinity. Genesis 12, one through three. The history of redemption, this is a quote, like that of creation, begins with God speaking.

Derek Kidner says the same thing in his Genesis commentary in the Tyndale Old Testament commentary series. The history of redemption, like that of creation, begins with God speaking. Genesis 1 says God speaks creation into being, and here he calls Abram, exalted father, whose name God later changes to Abraham, father of a multitude, Genesis 17:5. God commands him to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldeans, of the Chaldees, and go to a land God will show him, 12:1. Unlike his

father, Terah, who worshipped idols, Joshua 24:2, Abraham knows the true God because of his gracious initiative.

In God's plans, Abraham will become the father of God's people. Along with God's one command to Abraham, God makes amazing promises to him. The idea of blessing pervades the promises, occurring five times.

These promises are foundational to all of God's dealings with his people. God promises 1, to give Abram a land, 2, to bring a great nation from him, 3, to bless him and make his name great, 4, to protect him, and 5, to bless, quote, all the peoples on earth, close quote, through him, Genesis 12:1 to 3. These five foundational promises warrant our attention. First, God promises Abraham a land.

This is the promised land that Israel will finally enter after 40 years of wilderness wandering. Under Joshua, Israel displaces the Canaanites, pretty much, and possesses the land, and we will live in the new earth, Romans 4:13, on which all the resurrected people of God will spend eternity. You say, Romans 4:13, new earth? Oh, yes.

Oh, yes. Of father Abraham, the father of the faithful, we read, the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he should be heir of the world did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. The promise is that he will be heir of the world, of the land, becomes, in the New Testament, of the world.

We will live in the new earth, Romans 4:13, on which all the resurrected people of God will spend eternity, Hebrews 11:10, both Old and New Testament people of God. Second, God promises to bring a great nation from Abraham. This was humanly impossible because Sarah was barren, Genesis 11:30. Bruce Waltke comments, quote, through this childless couple, God will bring into being a new humanity that is born not of the will of a husband, but by the will of God, close quote.

Waltke, Genesis commentary, page 201, of course, referring to John 1, around verse 12. Second, God promises to bring a great nation from Abraham, which I just said. God gives Abraham and Sarah Isaac, whose father did Jacob, whose name God changes to Israel, and from whom God brings the promised nation.

Ultimately, Christ comes from Israel, and he is the head of the new humanity comprising believing Jews and Gentiles, and rooted in God's promise to Abraham, Galatians 3:7-9. Third, in contrast to those building the Tower of Babel, who seek to make a name for themselves, Genesis 11:4, that's a quote, God promises Abraham a great name. That's where greatness comes from. It's a gift from God.

We don't seek it. This is remarkable, for scripture ascribes greatness only to the name of God, with two exceptions in the whole Bible. One is David, I will make a great name for you, 2 Samuel 7:9. The other is Father Abraham.

Incredible. Oh, my goodness. Fourth, God promises to protect Abraham.

God will bless his people who bless Abraham and curse anyone who treats him with contempt. That is a nice insurance policy. Fifth, God promises to bless, quote, all the peoples of the earth through Abraham, Genesis 12:3. Gordon Wenham shows that there's a buildup in God's blessing.

First, only Abraham is blessed. Then, he'll be a blessing, he'll be a blessing. Next, those who bless him are blessed.

Finally, all families are blessed through him, through God's original promise to Abraham, though God's original promise to Abraham is, in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed, Genesis 12:3. Later, we read that all the nations of the earth will be blessed, Genesis 18:18, 22:18, 26:4. I sound like the Missouri Lottery guy. I'll do it again. All the families become all the nations.

Both are true in Genesis 18:8, 22:18, and 26:4. This promise is fulfilled ultimately in Christ, for Abraham, as quoted, is the father of all who believe, Jew and Gentile, Romans 4:11 and 12. He is our father in God's sight, 4:17. Therefore, believers in Christ are Abraham's sons, Abraham's children, Galatians 3:7, actually sons, and Abraham's seed heirs according to the promise, that's a quote, Genesis, Galatians 3:29. In sum, God promises Abraham, quote, I will make you a great nation, I'll bless you, I'll make your name great, and God commissions him, be a blessing to the nations. I will bless you so that you will be a blessing to the nations.

Abraham is chosen for the sake of mission, as Dr. Wright has shown Christopher Wright has shown in his wonderful book, *The Mission of God*. Exodus 19: 4 through 6, our second select passage. Three months after leaving Egypt, the Israelites come to Mount Sinai in fulfillment of God's promise to Moses, Exodus 3:12. He goes up to meet with God, who speaks to him and tells him what to say to the people, as in Exodus 19:1 to 3. God told Moses to remind the people what God had done to the Egyptians.

He defeated the gods of Egypt and Pharaoh, one of their gods, in the Ten Plagues and destroyed Pharaoh's army in the sea. God remarks, quote, I carried you on eagles' wings, Exodus 19:4. The metaphor of an eagle's flight highlights God's deliverance of his people in the Exodus. The care of eagles for their young underscores God's abundant protection and care.

In love, he has powerfully redeemed them from 430 years of slavery in Egypt. When the Lord says, I brought you to myself, Exodus 19:4, he speaks of entering into covenant with the Israelites. A covenant is a formal relationship between the living God and his people.

I want to acknowledge considerable help from Douglas K. Stewart, Exodus, New American Commentary. It is outstanding. It shows me how much I don't know about the Old Testament, but I can rely on people who do.

Here, God's covenant is expressed in the words, I will be your God, and you will be my people, Leviticus 26:12, Jeremiah 7:23. Previously, God told them who he is. Now he tells them who they are.

He sets forth the terms of their relationship. He charges the people to obey him and to be faithful to their covenant with him, Exodus 19:5. In return, God makes three great promises to the Israelites. First, although he is the creator of the whole earth, he will make them alone, quote, his own possession, verse 5. Although all the nations belong to God, only the Israelites will be his own people.

Philip Ryken, *Exodus, Saved for God's Glory*, in the Preaching the Word series of Crossway, notes the word used for treasured possession designates property belonging to a king. He explains that because of God's grace, Israel was God's royal property, his most prized possession. Of course, the king owns everything in one sense, but his very prized possessions are expressed by the word used of Israel as the prized possession, the treasured possession of the great King with a capital K. Second, the Israelites will be a kingdom of priests.

This focuses both within and without Israel. Within the nation, each Israelite is to worship and serve God. Outside Israel, the Israelites are to be dedicated to God's service among the nations as priests.

God's people are not to be people who cut themselves off from the rest of the world. Rather, as priests stand between God and the people, the Israelites are to represent him to the nations. How is Israel to do this? Paul House answers, quote, this priestly ministry included teaching God's word accurately.

Hosea 4:1 to 14. Malachi 2:7 to 9. This priestly ministry included praying for others. Jeremiah 15:1 to 2. The priestly ministry of Israel included helping people worship God by offering sacrifices appropriately.

See Malachi 1:6 through 14. Third, Israel will be God's holy nation. Exodus 19:6. As befits a people in fellowship with the holy God of the covenant.

The Israelite's covenant responsibility, as laid out in Exodus 21:2-17, embraces all of life, including dealings with God, neighbors, and other nations. If the Israelites lived in light of these three promises, they would have helped to pass God's blessing on to Abraham. All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Genesis 12:3. Peter shows continuity between the people of God in the Old Testament and the New when he applies Moses' words from Exodus 19:4 to the church. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own possession. 1 Peter 2:9. Peter adds, quote, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Close quote. Living out our identity as the people of God matters. It brings glory to God and is central to the mission of God.

In sum, God expresses his choice of Israel. There is covenant people, his treasured possession, his kingdom of priests, his holy nation. The peculiarity is striking.

The particularity, that's a Freudian slip. There are peculiar people who are all right, and the particularity is striking. Out of all the nations, you are mine, God says.

Even more striking is that God's particularity is the basis of universality. Out of all the nations, you are mine, and the whole earth is mine. So, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

God is on a mission, and he plans to reach the nations through his covenant people. They will witness to him in his ways through their distinctiveness as his holy nation. And they will witness to him through their proclamation as a kingdom of priests, quote, bringing the knowledge of God to the nations and bringing the nations to the means of atonement with God. Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*.

Sadly, of course, as the Old Testament story unfolds, they largely fail in that mission. In our next lecture, we'll continue looking at these very special passages concerning the people of God next time in the New Testament.

This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on the Doctrines of the Church and Last Things. This is session 1, The Biblical Story and Key Passages.