

## THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15

EXODUS 19:5-6A

From the moment God established the Covenant with Israel, his people struggled to live it out. In the early years, they turned time and time again to false gods and failed to follow the Law the Lord had given them. After the Exile, the nation's great spiritual renewal quickly turned into legalism. By Jesus's day, the Jews took great pride in being a chosen people, but to them, being "a holy nation" meant living as slaves to a set of rules that did not even resemble God's original design.

In calling the Israelites to become a "holy nation," God set them apart for a special relationship with himself. Yes, they were to live differently, but that holiness was not an end in and of itself. Instead, they were to be a "Kingdom of Priests," chosen and made holy for a special purpose. Just as the priests of the day served as intercessors between Yahweh and his people, Israel was called to stand in the gap between God and other nations so that people from every tribe and tongue would have the chance to be reconciled to their Creator.

But instead of being a light to the nations, they chased idols. Some worshipped the gods of other nations. Others bowed down to legalism, pride, and exclusivity, relishing their special status and lifestyle and cutting off any outsider who did not live up to their standards. They forgot what it meant to be holy.

When Jesus came, he called his followers to a higher standard, challenging them to "be perfect" yet sharply criticizing those who relied on their own righteous deeds. Through his life and death, he demonstrated that the only way to be holy is through a reconciled relationship with the Father and a life dedicated to his service.

The followers of Christ became heirs to the Covenant, sharing in both the privilege and responsibility of being chosen. Perhaps Peter had Israel's experience in mind when he wrote, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

We too are a chosen people. We belong to God, who calls us to a life of holiness. We cannot make ourselves holy, but the more time we spend with him, the more we begin to look like him. Even still, holiness itself is not the end goal. Instead, a holy life is one set apart for proclaiming God's mighty acts to those who remain in darkness.

Does the life we live point others to the One True God? Or, if we are honest with ourselves, are we chasing idols? Some may be following after false gods, living no differently from the rest of the world. Others may be so fo-

cused on our own righteousness that we cut ourselves off from those God wants to save. Let us remember today that God has called us all to true holiness, a life dedicated to pleasing our Heavenly Father and pointing others to the one true source of love.