

Why Our Spiritual Heritage Matters

Responding to God's Call to Be His People

In Scripture's first mention of mankind, God announced His desire to have children who would be His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). After creating the vast natural universe and our planet earth (Genesis 1:1-30), the spoken word of God formed a combination of dust and spirit into the first person. Man became a living soul, who is able to sense and communicate with both the natural and spiritual realms (Genesis 2:7).

Then God formed a second from the one, so the two could physically and spiritually interact as His reflection and resemblance (Genesis 2:7, 18, 21; John 1:1-4). Their offspring were birthed into existence as further expressions of God and man (Genesis 2:4; 4:1; 5:1-2), capable of communicating with both the natural and spiritual sources of life.

Sadly, the first two people chose to ignore our heavenly Father's directive. They sought wisdom from the "good and evil" experience of natural life (Genesis 3:6; 2 Corinthians 11:3). Refusal to repent and turn back muddled their ability to interact with God and produced a strong lean toward the wisdom gained from natural experience. Nevertheless, God continued to offer insight about their choices and attitudes (Genesis 4:6-7; 4:1), as He does today.

Fundamentally, everyone is a good and not-so-good reflection and resemblance of God's character, attitude, and personality (CAP). Our ability to become better images and likenesses of His heart improves as we learn to sense and be responsive to God and His influencing presence.

God Calls People into Nations

Throughout history, many individuals have responded to God's insightful presence (Isaiah 63:11; 2 Peter 1:21). Longing for even greater expressions, He appeals to us as "peoples." God desires to see enlarged illustrations of His guiding presence in our lives as groups and nations.

While God has a vested interest in everyone as individuals, created to reflect and resemble His character, attitude and personality, He has illustrated over the course of time a parallel purpose in our function as nations. History records three specific times God has called people together as a multifaceted body of believers, to function as My People:

1. From physical bondage
2. Into personal fellowship
3. Out of religious servitude

History records three major times when God called out a "people" to follow His guidance. Each time His call and the people's response were a bit different. Initially, He called a multitude of servants out of physical bondage but they refused to have personal interaction with His presence. The second call focused on a personal fellowship with His presence. The third time was a call out of religious servitude into spiritual, mental, and physical freedom.

Scripture verifies God's interest in national affairs by saying; "*He sets up and brings down kings,*" and "*determines the times nations operate and sets their boundaries*" (Acts 17:26-29; Job 12:23; Daniel 2:21), for the benefit of His people (2 Samuel 5:12). God calls us beyond individual responses to His guiding presence, intending us to do "greater works" as nations (John 14:12).

Historic Transitions

It has been said, all revealed truth passes through three stages; first it is ridiculed, and then violently opposed, before it is accepted as self-evident. How true! When a new product or concept is introduced, it goes through times of transition before full acceptance. While God tends to be precise, He understands how in this natural world, our acceptance involves times of transition that allow us to receive the new while we let go of the old.

Scripture provides three clear illustrations of transition.

- 1) When Israel came out of slavery, they went through a wandering journey so they could learn to accept a new view of life while they let go, dismissed old perceptions (Exodus 13:17-18; Acts 7:39).
- 2) Between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, perceptions of him changed from a man of God to the Spirit of God (Acts 2:36; Matthew 17:1-9).
- 3) The new life of freedom God offers us involves a transformation of our mind, what we believe (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

Through the three historical times, God supernaturally intervened in human affairs to form a people that would respond to His guidance while living in this natural world's good and evil atmosphere. He gathers people into functional nations as a testimony to the whole world.

As we look at a short overview of apparent cycles, keep in mind; changes generally involve a process with beginnings and endings, with overlapping starts and stops, as cycles within cycles (Ezekiel 1:16; 10:10). These dates are approximate, showing 1500 year cycles in God's appeal and 500 year cycles in people's response.

2000 BC – Abram responds to God, to become a father of faith

(Galatians 3:6-9; Romans 4:13-17)

- 1500 BC – God frees slaves out of Egypt willing to accept His call to live as a nation.
- 1000 BC – The nation chooses to be like the world and begins to lose freedom (1 Samuel 8:7).
- 500 BC – Nation falls into full captivity and a remnant returns to await a new visitation.
(Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 10:5-10; Daniel 13-14).
- 00 AD – God-in-Christ comes to invite a fresh response and multitudes respond.
- 500 AD – Faith’s response is condensed into a religion and Sacred writings are removed.
- 1000 AD – The religion takes control over all European societies, Kings, and Nations.
- 1500 AD – A third call sprouts a Reformation and a desire to be free of religious controls.
- 2000 AD – Will people and nations excel or fall again into the servitude of man’s ways?

Delivered To Live As My People

When God first delivered a gathering of people out of debilitating slavery, He called the mixed multitude “My People Israel” (Exodus 19:4-6). This was four generations after Abraham’s family of 70 people entered Egypt (Genesis 46:27; 1 Chronicles 6:1-3). Of the mixed multitude that came out of slavery, conservatively counting a wife and two children for every man of war listed, there were at least 2.5 million people released into freedom (Exodus 12:37- 38). The Exodus brought a great release from the world’s oppressive system of overlords and servants.

Fifty days after deliverance everyone heard God speak and invite them to respond to His abiding presence as their guide through life. Almost

without exception, they rejected personal contact and appointed Moses to mediate between them and God (Deuteronomy 4:12; 5:1-4, 22-27; Exodus 25:8).

This first invitation into nationhood began with a physical deliverance and a forty year transition of their beliefs, desires, and attitudes. The ingrained concepts of their servant existence needed to change so they were able to responsibly own property and prosper as free people. Although imperfect, the nation learned to function without a ruling class for 500 years. Negating the world's system of rule, the nation of Israel prospered as a witness of God's governing influence, as the Kingdom of God in the earth.

Local elders recognized as wise and discerning men and women were selected to judge disputes. Elected from the people, judges could evaluate, consider motivations and circumstances, and then render rectifying corrections. Their mode of judgement was patterned after God's method of correction, seeking to correct the bad action of offenders and bringing restitution to the offended (Psalm 19:9; Isaiah 26:9). Yes, death sentences were given to those who intentionally took a life since the life could not be restored. Functioning within God's guidance, the nation flourished.

When Israel decided to be like other nations and have a King, they invited a class separation into the Kingdom experience. Choosing to submit to man's system of rule, they strayed from God's oversight and it began curtailing their freedom (1 Samuel 8:7-22). From that time forward, the nation's distress and prosperity largely depended on the action and attitude of the King.

The nation never excelled as a world leader because every third generation forgot God and did wickedly. Their witness of a better way to live, under God's guidance, continued to fall short because they failed to

teach their children (Psalm 78:5-8). Eventually they fell into full bondage. From the first deliverance, it was 1500 years before God revisited with a second supernatural deliverance.

A Second Call to Freedom

When Jesus Christ came into history, the national response had deteriorated into a religion of rules and restrictions with over 600 Laws (The Jewish Torah). It is amazing how men can continually come up with more rules to keep people under control. An extensive list of do's and don'ts tends to overly regulate and obstruct personal response to God's insightful guidance (Ephesians 2:15).

Jesus made it clear; Judaism's stifling oversight of God's people was ending. That generation would see the national representation transfer to a more responsive people (Matthew 21:43; 23:36; 24:34). Leaders of the old order openly opposed this fresh response to God. Being no longer relevant, the sacred places of Judaism, Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed in 70 AD.

During this historic second calling, Jesus reminded people the Kingdom of God is at hand, readily available – within reach (Matthew 3:2). The Kingdom reality is described in Matthew chapter 13 as full of mystery (11), yet, as a hearing and understanding that becomes fruitful (19, 23). It is spread as sowing seed (24, 31) and expands to affect everyone it touches (33), is a costly treasure (44-46) and can appeal to everyone (47).

While our function in the Kingdom includes divisions and stumbling blocks (36-43), our pursuit of its experience brings righteousness, peace and joy (Romans 14:17). God's Kingdom is an ever expanding and improving reality that allows for variables and levels of response. This

gathering under God's guidance demonstrates an earthly territory is not core to the call, just willing hearts.

Jesus promised to always be with all who respond (Hebrews 13:5-8), as the only real mediator between man and God (1Timothy 2:5). Following his sacrificial death and resurrection, Jesus appeared with the look, form and personage of the man they had known, yet as a spirit. His ascension out of natural sight completed their change of perception. Now they could understand how Jesus would always be with them, as the abiding Spirit of God.

A few days later, Jesus returned to immerse people in the presence of God's Spirit (Acts 2:33, 41). Acceptance of God's presence with them was a vast improvement over the refusal of the first delivered people. Multitudes responded and allowed God-in-Christ to be an anointing and insightful presence through their varied circumstances.

The character, attitude and personality (CAP) of multitudes went through transformation, becoming more Christ-like. For many generations, believers proclaimed "God is with us." This *upset the world's* concept of relegating God to a Temple or an emblem on a shelf (Acts 17:6).

This call into freedom did not begin with a physical release or a place where they could separate or isolate themselves. It began with spiritual experiences that successfully transformed lives for several generations. Their spiritual wellness spread into the entire known world.

A Second Slip into Enslavement

For over 300 years after this second call to deliverance, people responded to God's presence as their primary guide and principal source of wisdom. Believers sidestepped the world's stifling system and were godly influences everywhere. Local men and women, recognized as wise

elders, functioned like the first judges of Israel, discerning between disputes (1 Corinthians 6:1-5).

Eventually Ignatius, a teacher of the day, began promoting the ways of the world and introduced the idea of appointing bishops as area overseers. He taught: “We should follow a bishop as Jesus followed God, to respect elders as apostles, and bring honor to bishops as unto God.” Initially, his ideas were rejected. However, over the next two generations they were slowly accepted.

Then, in AD 313 the Roman Emperor Constantine converted and made Christianity the religion of the region. He assembled the bishops into councils to form ‘official’ doctrines. Agreement on a centralized statement of belief was difficult because the different opinions and customs of areas caused heated arguments over many days and during several councils. When a general consensus was reached, all other views and experiences were labeled heresy.

Constantine constructed the first buildings of worship which introduced platforms, pulpits, and altars. Gatherings became professional, dramatic, ceremonial, systematized, and a sermon became central to the meeting. Ministers were appointed as official spiritual mediators and a two class system soon formed. Freedom of choice began to fade away again.

In AD 500, officials solidified their control by confiscating and destroying all copies of sacred writings. Public reading of Scripture was restricted to clergy and only in Latin. What a blinding constraint on personal consideration of what Scripture instructs! Additional doctrines to control were introduced in AD 1000: celibacy for priests, purgatory (death’s holding cell), indulgences (pay money to save the dead), and inquisitions (death for disagreeing).

The interactive function of the body of Christ, dependent on ‘*God with us,*’ faded from practice. Personal reliance on God apart from the ‘official religion’ was forbidden and His guiding presence became a forgotten reality. The western world entered what became known as The Dark Ages. Religious slavery ruled over the hearts, minds, and actions of people and nations.

A Third Call Comes In Stages

It was another fifteen hundred years after the second delivering call, around AD 1500, before God intervened afresh to call ‘people of faith’ into the fellowship of His presence. This third call was assisted by the newly invented Gutenberg Printing Press. Printed Bibles made versions of Scripture available in common languages.

Many began to find spiritual, mental, and emotional release from the restricting oversight of official priests and bishops who regulated life and acted as mediators between man and God. Starting to clearly see, people and nations began to break away!

- 1500’s – Protestant Reformation revealed faith is not restricted to one belief system.
- 1700’s – Great Awakening revealed we can repent and “feel” God’s forgiving presence.
- 1900’s – Spirit Baptisms revealed we can “live in fellowship” with God’s presence.

The *Eternal I Am* knows and understands our difficulties, so He patiently calls us into a more in- depth fellowship with His presence. This progressive call into a relational interaction with God reveals the depths of His desire for us to know and experience an intimacy with His presence.

Occurring during the **Protestant Reformation**, the first revealing stage proclaimed faith and obedience did not require submission to a specific religious system. The delivering message was: “Every believer is as a priest before God” (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9). We are free to live as we perceive God leading.

While Protestants dropped the doctrine of purgatory, the assurance of God’s favor in this life still remained a big question. The central message maintained: “Do your best and when you die you will find out.” This is far from an encouraging message and by the late 1600s, interest and attendance in religious services was greatly reduced.

A second revealing stage came in the **Great Awakening** revivals of the early 1700s. This move of God added fresh insight proclaiming: “Sincere repentance will cause you to *feel* the cleansing presence of God and you will *know* His favor is with you.” Multitudes responded to the proclamation; “You can be born again, released from your habitual sinful ways, and become a renewed person in this life.” People found a freeing release from the relentless condemnation.

God’s third revealing came as baptisms in the **Holy Spirit** during the 1900s. All who experienced these immersions realized this added something to the forgiving “born again” experience. Although not widely understood; baptisms are immersion experiences in God’s Spirit that invite us into a daily spirit-to-Spirit fellowship with His abiding presence.

Our communion with the presence of God enables the “spirit of life” in us to receive insight, gifts, and anointings He wants to share. The immersions in God’s presence amplified His desire to be closely involved in our daily lives. These times in His presence allow us to absorb (like a sponge) aspects of the character, attitude, and personality

(CAP) of God. Our fellowship with His guiding presence helps us become better reflections and resemblances of His CAP.

Our Natural and Spiritual Heritage Matters

The abundance of unpopulated land in the new world (western hemisphere) added fuel to the concept of freedom from restricting oversight. People began to insist on the right to live, worship, and excel according to the dictates of their own heart. In 1776, the newly formed United States of America began to emerge as a leader around the world in forming constitutional republics, where freedom loving people could elect their own governments.

People and nations began to live free from the historic norm of elevated and devalued class societies. The unparalleled freedom to live and prosper inspired the creation of many new products and services. Capitalism burst forth upon the world as people followed the Scriptural concept that providing for others brings levels of peace and prosperity. The rule of kings began to lose credibility and now 250 years later, kingships are almost non-existent.

The emerging prosperity created a new middle class. Recent research by British Economist Angus Maddison illustrates that until 1820, 94% of the world's population lived in abject poverty. In 2015, however, only 9.6% still remain poverty stricken. As people of faith prosper, everyone benefits, just as God promised our faithful father Abraham (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:8).

Freedom to Excel and Be a Blessing

The loving mercies of God are boundless, beyond our ability to exhaust (Romans 11:33). Previous illuminating insight can remain relevant as new 'light' adds to and builds on earlier experience and understanding. A noon day sun does not deny the morning dawn but adds to it.

All revealing insight prepares us for fresh awareness. This is why an understanding of God's historical visitations is essential today. Most believers have experienced one or more of the three revealing insights about God's guiding presence that have come over the last 500 years. 1) An insightful renewing faith in God. 2) A repentant sense of God's favor and fresh beginnings. 3) Experiences in God's presence and an anointing peace that passes understanding.

We cannot repeat the previous patterns of ignoring and walking away from God's guiding presence. Spiritual releases and living conditions of millions throughout the world can continue to improve despite the strong efforts of extreme ideologies like Fascism, Socialism, Communism, Globalism, and Career Politics. We are still relatively free to hear and respond to God's guidance as individuals, fellowships, communities, states, and nations.

Many believers today seem to be complacent and this brings grave concerns. Surveys say only 50% of evangel Christians in the U.S. are registered to vote and only 25% of those registered actually vote. Our faith in God is as dead, useless, if not accompanied with our righteous works (James 2:20, 26). We must be involved, countering bad policies and supporting improvements or we may complicate God's blessings.

Can the freedom to perceive and follow God's leading, as revealed in Scripture and afresh over the last 500 years be our guide in this season? Or will we repeat the decline of the first two cycles and slip back into the darkness of slavery under man's stifling rule? In multiple efforts to establish control during the last 100 years, the 'isms' noted above have destroyed millions of lives. Will we proactively choose to prosper under God's guidance?

We need to ask: How well are we *hearing* and *seeing* God's involvement in our nation? Are we *feeling* and *living* the freeing truth that **God is with us**, among us and in our midst? While life can be better, let's acknowledge how far we have come and continue to press for the best that is can still come. This requires focusing more on what God 'is' doing and less on the shortcomings of His instruments. We should contend against attempts to restrict our ability to function as free nations.

Let us exercise our right to choose the better and let our influencing voice be counted. This is a peaceful and powerful way to counter the efforts of all enemies of God bent on division and destruction. Let us not repeat the errors of the first two calls to live as God centered people and submit to the slavery of overlords that want to 'take care of us.' We must teach our children lest they slip into accepting the deception.

God calls believers into daily spirit-to-Spirit fellowship with His abiding presence. The fresh spiritual revealing for our day can bring us into a greater Kingdom reality as brighter personal and national witnesses of God's light! We can be more responsive to His guidance and rise to be more effective examples of His character, attitude and personality (CAP). May we continue to hear and respond to God's guidance and greatly impact today's world!

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