Why God Did Not Elect Calvinists

The Biblical Concept of Election Never Means Predestined to Salvation and Commonly is a Reference to Israel

By Douglas Hamp

www.douglashamp.com

Costa Mesa, CA

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The biblical usage of "election" has absolutely nothing to do with salvation contrary to the teaching of Calvinism. Calvin summarizes this foundational doctrine in his book *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book 3 chapter 21): "Of the eternal election, by which God has predestinated some to salvation, and others to destruction." He qualifies his summary by stating:

> The predestination by which God adopts some to the hope of life, and adjudges others to eternal death, no man who would be thought pious ventures simply to deny…By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. **All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation;** and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death. (Calvin Institutes 3:21:5, all emphasis in this article is mine)

The good news, however, is that "election, elect, chosen" (and the derivatives) are terms that have nothing to do with one's eternal destiny. Scripture does speak at length of "the elect" and "the chosen" but these terms are devoid of the Calvinistic sense of someone who has been chosen to receive eternal life. The term elect and its derivatives therefore are **not salvific** in meaning but simply refer to persons or things that are chosen for a particular purpose and **the purpose has nothing to do with eternal life**. Once the definition of the word is established biblically, the foundation of Calvinism

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will be undermined and will collapse and arguing the tenants of TULIP will become inapplicable.

The word elect (Greek verb: *eklegomai* ἐκλέγομαι; Hebrew verb: *bakhar* בָּחַר) means to choose, select. The elect or chosen (as nouns or adjectives) are those people or things that have been elected, selected, or chosen for a particular purpose by someone. Scripture bears witness that elect and its derivatives have nothing to do with someone being chosen specifically to eternal life.

The Election of Priests, Kings, and Disciples

In the Old Testament, we see times when God chose and people chose. God chose Levi to minister forever "… the LORD your God has **chosen** [*bakhar* בָּחַר Greek LXX *eklexetai* εκλεξηται] him…" Deut 18:5 (see also 1 Chr 15:2) .

God chose Saul to be the first king of Israel. What is fascinating about King Saul is that he was chosen both by God and the people: "…Samuel said to all the people, 'Do you see him whom **the LORD has chosen** (Hebrew and Greek are the same roots as above)…'" (1 Sam 10:24) Two chapters later he was chosen by the people: "…here is the king whom you have **chosen** *and* whom you have desired. And take note, the **LORD has set** a king over you." (1Sam 12:13) Saul's election by God had nothing to do with eternal life. Saul was chosen, elected by God for the purpose to be king over Israel and with that he had all of the potential to be a good king and for his lineage to be the lineage of the Messiah.

Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? ... Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. **Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you** from being king." (1 Sam 15:19, 22-23)

It is only after repeated disobedience is Saul rejected and David chosen to take his place. Saul's election by God to be king had nothing to do with eternal life and his removal from being king likewise had nothing to do with eternal life – he was simply removed from his post. Saul is analogous to Judas in many ways because both he and Judas were chosen yet they both forfeited their election. "Jesus answered them, "Did I not **choose** [*eklegomai* ἐκλέγομαι] you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70)

God elected David to be king and passed over the other seven sons of Jesse. "The LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him' ... Neither has the LORD **chosen** this one…the LORD has not **chosen** these." (1 Sam 16:7-10). The choosing or election had nothing to do with eternal life according to the Calvinist definition: God chose David because of what He saw in the heart and He chose him to be king – not for the purpose of eternal life. See Luke 6:13; John 13:18, 15:16, 19; Acts 1:2, 24, 15:7 concerning Jesus choosing of the disciples, one of whom was a devil (John 6:70).

The Election of Messiah and Angels

God's election of Messiah further demonstrates that the term election is devoid of the Calvinistic concept of eternal life. Jesus, the Messiah-God-Incarnate, certainly has no need of salvation or eternal life; He is the source of life! "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My **Elect** One [LXX: *eklektos* εκλεκτος] in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him… (Isa 42:1, see also Isaiah 49:7) This very title was used of Jesus on the cross "…the rulers with them sneered, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the **chosen** of God.'" (Luke 23:35). Peter further confirms God's election of the Messiah: "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but **chosen** by God and precious" (1 Pet 2:4, see also 1 Pet 2:6). Jesus was unquestionably chosen, elected, predestined by God to be the Messiah but His election was not for His salvation. He was chosen by the Father to give **us** eternal life! In a similar fashion we find that angels can be elected – demonstrating that "elect" does not mean chosen to eternal life (see also Heb 2:16 regarding the fact that God only offers salvation to mankind): "I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the **elect** angels…" (1 Tim 5:21)

The Election of Jerusalem

God also elected (chose) Jerusalem to be His city proving that election has nothing to do with eternal life. "Yet I have **chosen Jerusalem**, that My name may be there, and I have **chosen David** to be over My people Israel." (2 Chr 6:6) "…the city which You have **chosen**…" (1 Kgs 8:44) "…and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have **chosen**…" (1 Kgs 11:32), "…the city which I have **chosen** for Myself, to put My name there." (1 Kgs 11:36) **"**For the LORD has **chosen** Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place." (Ps 132:13) In all of these verses we see that God has chosen or elected Jerusalem for a purpose and the word election does not entail eternal life.

The Election of False Gods and Foolish Things

In Corinthians we learn that God has chosen foolish, weak, base and despised things: "But God has **chosen** the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has **chosen** the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has **chosen**, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are," (1 Cor 1:27-28; see also James 2:5) Not only is election used to describe God's choosing of people, places, and things for His special purposes, it is used for men's choosing of the true God and of false gods. "So Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have **chosen** the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him…" (Josh 24:22) "Go and cry out to the gods which you have **chosen**; let them deliver you in your time of distress." (Judg 10:14) Jesus points out others who chose poorly in the Gospel of Luke: "Jesus noticed how the guests **chose** the places of honor, He told them a parable. He said to them…when you are invited…do not take the place of honor." (Luke 14:8)

Our conclusion from the above verses is that **election has nothing to do with predestination to eternal life**. God chose priests, kings and Jerusalem for His purposes and man chose both God and idols. We would be wrong to try to insert the concept of predestination into the term election.

The Election of Israel

While election is made by God and men of people and places, there is a usage that stands out uniquely in Scripture: God's chosen people, the elect, are the Israelites. The title "chosen/elect" is in no less than eight verses in Scripture. The use of the title "elect" to describe Israel becomes very important when we venture into the New Testament because it clears up many theological, soteriological, and eschatological issues.

1. Seed of **Israel** His servant, you children of **Jacob**, His **chosen** ones! (1 Chr 16:13)
2. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, The people He has **chosen** as His own inheritance. (Ps 33:12)
3. Seed of Abraham His servant, you children of **Jacob**, His **chosen** ones! (Ps 105:6)
4. He brought out His **people** with joy, His **chosen** ones with gladness. (Ps 105:43)
5. For the LORD has **chosen** Jacob for Himself, **Israel** for His special treasure. (Ps 135:4)
6. For **Jacob** My servant's sake, And **Israel** My **elect**… (Isa 45:4)

7. I will bring forth descendants from **Jacob**, And from Judah an heir of My mountains; My **elect** shall inherit it, And My servants shall dwell there. (Isa 65:9)
8. For as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My **people**, And My **elect** shall long enjoy the work of their hands. (Isa 65:22)

The verses above demonstrate how God has specifically called Israel, Jacob, the Seed of Abraham His chosen. Thus the term "the chosen" or "my chosen" and "the elect" is a reference to ethnic Israel. This point is proven by Paul who, in a synagogue on the Sabbath day in Antioch, read from the Law and Prophets and then spoke to his fellow Jews: "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: 'The God of this people Israel **chose our fathers**…'" (Acts 13:16, 17) Thus, the election of Israel was true in the Old Testament and the New Testament as well.

The "Few Chosen" Are Israelites

With the definition of "the elect/chosen" established, we are now ready to proceed to the teachings of Jesus Whom we must remember was Himself Jewish. In Matthew 22 Jesus, speaking with the Pharisees, compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a King who prepared a wedding feast for His Son. Those that were invited to the wedding feast were not interested in coming so the King sent His servants out calling everyone who would come. That the invited guests to the wedding were the Israelites is certain. Jesus Himself confirms this in His rebuke to the Pharisees: "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 8:11)

There are also many passages in the Old Testament that speak of the Messianic age in which the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be God's special people (See for example: Isaiah 2, 4, 11, 60-66). Therefore, Jesus' statement "For many are called, but few are **chosen,**" (Matt 22:14; see also Matt 20:16) must be interpreted in light of who are the chosen – that is the Jews! The chosen, elect (the Jews) were the ones to whom the promise of the Messianic Age was first given. However, when the bridegroom came they were not willing to come and therefore God the Father gave instruction for all (the many) to be called to the feast. Understanding who the elect are unlocks the passage for us. Knowing that the elect are the Jews completely rules out any Calvinistic interpretation of the passage. Note that both the called and chosen still needed salvation as indicated by the wedding garment and he who was found in the feast without a garment was cast out.

The Elect in the Tribulation

We next come to the references to the elect in Matthew 24 in which Jesus is telling the disciples of what the days of the tribulation would be like. Armed with the knowledge that the elect are the Jews, we can consistently interpret the passage; the elect in Matthew 24 are not Gentile believers in the tribulation, but are God's chosen, that is the Jews. "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the **elect's** sake those days will be shortened… For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the **elect**. (Matt 24:22, 24) Mark's Gospel adds "…for the **elect's** sake, whom He **chose**…" (Mark 13:20) emphasizing those whom God chose: the Jews. If the elect are interpreted as those whom God has predestined to eternal life, then a conundrum arises, in particular, for those of us of a pretibulational perspective; who exactly is being gathered at the end of the tribulation? "He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His **elect** from the **four winds**, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matt 24:31) There can be no question that this gathering happens after the events of the Great Tribulation and yet, if it is referring to the same catching up of believers in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, then the teaching of the pretribulational rapture would be nullified. However, once we realize that the elect here are not believers in general but specifically the Israelites/Jews then the matter is resolved. Two-thirds of the (up to then non-believing) Jews will tragically perish and the one-third (Zech. 13:8) remaining will be gathered at the end of the Great Tribulation. It also fits in with Revelation 19 where the believers return with Jesus to the earth because they have already been caught up to Him.

The Old Testament proves that the gathering of the elect in Matthew 24 must be speaking of the Jews. Jesus used the language of Isaiah 11 to describe the gathering of the elect, an obvious reference to the Jews: "He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of **Israel**, and **gather together** the dispersed of **Judah** from the **four corners** of the earth." (Isa 11:12) The gathering of the Jews is further predicted in Isaiah 43:5, 54:7, and Zechariah 2:6. When we realize that the usage of "chosen" or "elect" has nothing to do with (predestined to) eternal life then many of the difficult Bible passages are easy to interpret.

The Elect in Peter's Epistles Are Jewish

Peter likewise uses the term elect to describe the Jews. We know so because Peter says as much: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the **pilgrims** of the **Dispersion** in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **elect** according to the **foreknowledge** of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ…" (1 Pet 1:1-2) The word "dispersion" (Greek *diaspora* διασπορά) was used to describe the scattering among the nations that God had promised to the Jews (Israel) if they would not follow Him (Lev 26:33; Deut 4:27; Neh 1:8, etc.; the LXX uses the same Greek word as the NT). James, in his epistle, could not be any clearer that the diaspora is Israel when he says: "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad [*en te diaspora* εν τη διασπορα]: Greetings." (James 1:1). The twelve tribes are of course Israel (the Jews) and they are in the diaspora – the same group to which Peter was addressing his letter.

At the end of his first epistle, Peter further establishes that the elect were none other than Jewish believers, who were also in the diaspora. He writes (in the NKJV) "She who is in Babylon, **elect** together with [*you*,] greets you."(1 Pet 5:13) Now at first glance it appears that Peter might be referring to some woman by the use of the word "she" (*aute* αὐτή) – which by the way, is absent from the Greek text. The word in the text is the feminine article (*he* ἡ) which is referencing back to something that was already addressed in the letter. We know that the something in question is also elect and is an adjective modifier to the something because "elect" is feminine singular (*suneklekte* συνεκλεκτὴ). The question is, however, what is the something that the article and adjective refer to? The answer is to consider to whom the feminine something is sending greetings. That takes us back to the first chapter where Peter established already that he was writing to the pilgrims who were in the diaspora. Diaspora is a singular feminine word and hence it fits the bill perfectly. Certain translations, like the NET Bible for example, have translated the feminine article in 1 Peter 5:13 not as "she" but as "the church". Their selection at first appears justified since Peter is obviously writing to believers in Jesus and of course, the word (*ekklesia* ἐκκλησία) is singular feminine. The weakness of the translation, however, is proven by the fact that the word *ekklesia* does not appear even once in either of Peter's epistles. The word diaspora does appear and fits both in number and gender.

Lastly, we must acknowledge two important points: 1) Peter was the apostle to the Jews. In Galatians 2:7-9 Paul states that he "was entrusted with the gospel to the

uncircumcised just as Peter was to the circumcised" (Gal 2:7). 2) Babylon was the third largest Jewish center in the ancient world. When the Jews were given leave under Cyrus to return to Israel in 536 BC, only a small remnant returned while many thousands stayed in Babylon. The writing of the Babylonian Talmud gives concrete proof to the fact that Babylon was a major center of Jewish life and culture. Since Peter was the apostle specifically appointed to take the Gospel to the Jews, then finding him in Babylon (not Rome!) in the company of Jews is simple enough to grasp. Whether or not Peter ever ventured to Rome as church history would have us believe is therefore in question though it remains outside of the scope of this brief study. Nevertheless, we see that Peter is writing from Babylon, in the company of other Jews (the chosen) to fellow chosen ones who were also in the diaspora (that is, not living in Israel).

Realizing that Peter is the apostle to the (elect) Jews and is writing from Babylon to other (elect) Jews facilitates the interpretation of the two epistles. In 1 Peter chapter two Peter writes concerning his Jewish (believing) brethren: "you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a **holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But you *are* a **chosen** generation [note: the Greek word is *genos* (race) not *genea* (generation) see: NASB], a **royal priesthood**, a holy nation, His own **special people**, that you may proclaim the praises of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (1 Pet 2:5, 9) These same words were used repeatedly in the Old Testament to describe the Jewish people:

- Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then **you** shall be a **special treasure** to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. (Ex 19:5)
- 'And you shall be to Me a **kingdom of priests** and a **holy nation**.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel. (Ex 19:6)
- "For you are a **holy people** to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has **chosen** you to be a people for Himself, a **special treasure** above all the peoples on the face of the earth. (Deut 7:6)
- "For you are **a holy people** to the LORD your God, and the LORD has **chosen** you to be a **people** for Himself, a **special treasure** above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Deut 14:2)
- For the LORD has **chosen Jacob** for Himself, **Israel** for His **special treasure.** (Ps 135:4)

He continues speaking to these Jewish pilgrims: "You once were not a people, but now you are God's people. You were shown no mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet 2:10) The passage is taken from Hosea 1:9 where God, speaking to Israel, states "Then the LORD said: "Name him 'Not My People' (Lo-Ammi), because you are not my people and I am not your God." (Hosea 1:9) Peter is demonstrating that their previous condition has been undone in Jesus Christ. This truth is given by God through Hosea "However, in the future the number of the people of Israel will be like the sand of the sea which can be neither measured nor numbered. Although it was said to them, "You are not my people," it will be said to them, "You are children of the living God!" (Hos 1:10, see also Hos 2:23)

Elect but Not Saved

Thus when we read in 2 Peter: "Therefore, **brethren**, be even more diligent to make your call and **election** sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble" (2 Pet 1:10) – we know that Peter is talking to Jews and that their election has nothing to do with salvation. Therefore, this is not a Calvinistic call for us to somehow make sure that we have been chosen to eternal life! It is rather a reminder to the chosen people to embrace the fact that they were elected, chosen by God to be His special treasure. However, their election is by no means an absolute guarantee that they will inherit eternal life. Paul corroborates this fact so clearly in 2 Timothy: "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the **elect**, that **they also may obtain the salvation** which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." (2 Tim 2:10) Note well that Paul must endure for the elect, the Jews, so that they too might be saved. As we have seen, election has nothing to do with salvation. Furthermore, election is generally a term used of the Jews, who are of course, the chosen people. This is confirmed yet again in Romans 11, where Paul, who is speaking about the Jews, states "Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the **election** they are beloved for the **sake of the fathers**." (Rom 11:28)

The Elect in Romans Are Israelites

Part of the challenge of understanding Romans is to recognize that Paul is speaking to the believers in Rome who are both Jewish and Gentile (non-Jewish). We learn that from the way that he addresses his readers: "…the gospel of Christ … is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." (Romans 1:16) "Jew and Greek" is a combination that he uses throughout the book, see for example Romans 2:9, 10; 10:12. Romans 2:17 Paul speaks specifically to the Jews "Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God,

(Romans 2:17) Paul then asks what advantage the Jew has (Rom 3:1) and he answers his question with "Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God." (Rom 3:2) In chapter four Paul speaks of Abraham who was their father according to the flesh "…Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh… (Rom 4:1 KJV). Thus, Paul was essentially describing Abraham as: "our genetic (birth) father." The NET Bible confirms that translation "Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh" (Rom 4:1 NET) Finally, Paul bridges the apparent polemic between the Jews and Greeks of the Roman church with the following conclusion "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him." (Romans 10:12)

Having seen that the book of Romans was written in large part to the elect, the Jews, (see also Acts 18:2 and Romans 16:3 concerning Roman Jews) as well as Gentiles, we can now see that the many uses of the word "elect" are not references to salvation, predestination etc. Rather they are reference to the Israelites (elected by God) "to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came…" (Rom 9:4-5) Therefore, Paul's question "Who shall bring a charge against God's **elect**?" (Rom 8:33) is not Calvinistic (predestined to eternal life) but is a reference to the elect Jews (see above: 1 Chr 16:13, Ps 33:12, Ps 105:6, Ps 105:43, Ps 135:4, Isa 45:4, Isa 65:9, Isa 65:22). This concept is consistent throughout the book.

Romans 9-11 is the great defense of Scripture, par excellence, that God has not cast away His people. Paul begins the section by showing how God began with Abraham and then chose Isaac over Ishmael, and then Jacob over Esau. Speaking of the two nations in Rebecca's womb, Paul says: "for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to **election** [*ekloge* εκλογη] might stand, not of works but of Him who calls." (Rom 9:11) The election has nothing to do with Calvinistic predestination but with God choosing Jacob rather than Esau to be the one who would receive the oracles of God etc.

Election of Grace

Paul continues in Romans 11 "Even so then, at this present time there is a **remnant** according to the **election** [*ekloge* εκλογη] of grace." (Rom 11:5) This was spoken of the encounter of Elijah and the 400 Israelite prophets of Baal. Just when Elijah thought all was lost, God informed him that He had reserved 7000 that had not followed the evil

ways of Baal. And thus in like manner, most of Israel, who had been chosen, elected by God to be the conduit of blessing to the world, had rejected that special calling. This concords with what Jesus stated in Matthew 22:14 that "few [the Jews] are chosen" and that small group had for the most part rejected the special RSVP that God had sent to them to come to the wedding feast. Paul continues "What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the **elect** [*ekloge* εκλογη] have obtained it, and the rest were blinded." (Rom 11:7) It must be noted that the word elect here is in fact feminine singular– demonstrating that it is not speaking of "the elect ones" (masculine plural *eklektoi* εκλεκτοι) but "election". This means that in both Romans 11:5 and 11:7 the term is "election" – thus God's action of selecting Abraham, Isaac, Jacob to the be the recipients of the promises (Rom 9:4-5). (The Wesley translation properly maintains the nuance of the noun "the election [*ekloge* εκλογη] hath obtained…" Rom 11:7 Wesley) The entire context of the elect and election has to do with Israel as evidenced by Paul's following statement of how they, the Jews, "have not stumbled so as to fall… On the contrary, because of their stumbling, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make the Jews jealous." (Romans 11:11)

The biblical "election of grace" is not Calvin's idea of God choosing some to eternal life and others to eternal damnation; it is rather God choosing the Jewish race, which was based purely on God's grace and not their righteousness. Moses plainly stated that early in their national history: "It is **not** because of your **righteousness** or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may **fulfill the word** which the LORD **swore** to **your fathers**, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." (Deut 9:5)

That the election of grace is referring to God's choosing of the fathers is further established in chapter eleven: "Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their fall means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" (Rom 11:12, 15) Israel, nationally speaking, rejected the invitation to come to the wedding feast when the Bridegroom came which thereby translated into riches for the Gentiles. However, the election of grace, that is God's making promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their seed, was an irrevocable call which is why Paul says about the unbelieving Jews: "Concerning the gospel they are

enemies for your sake, but concerning the **election they** are beloved for the **sake of the fathers**. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Romans 11:28-29) Paul probably had Jeremiah 31:35-37, among other passages, in mind when speaking of the irrevocability of God's promise. God had called Israel to himself and would never let them go completely. "God has not cast away His people whom He **foreknew**." (Rom 11:2) Peter also confirms that God foreknew the Israelites: "to the pilgrims of the **Dispersion elect** according to the **foreknowledge** of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:2). God chose Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants for a special purpose. His choosing them (election) had nothing to do with the Calvinistic idea of predestination to eternal life and eternal damnation. Though the Jews were elect, they were not automatically saved. They for the most part had rejected the invitation to the wedding feast and as such were blinded but they would be restored in the end.

Foreknowledge

Foreknowledge is a companion of election – but just like election, foreknowledge is a general reference to God having known the Israelites beforehand. Consider Paul's definitive statement: "So I ask, God has not rejected **his people**, has he? Absolutely not! For I too am an **Israelite**, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away **His people** whom He **foreknew** [*proginosko* προγινώσκω]." (Rom 11:1-2) The word foreknow, like election, has nothing to do with having predestined someone to eternal life or eternal damnation, as Calvin suggested. "Foreknow" and "foreknowledge" are simply a verb and noun of the same basic stem. Look at the following verses that demonstrate that knowing something ahead of time is not only possible for God but for man as well and it does not entail the Calvinistic concept whatsoever: "They knew me **from the first** [*proginosko* προγινώσκω], if they were willing to testify…" (Acts 26:5) "You therefore, beloved, since you know [*this*] **beforehand** [*proginosko* προγινώσκω], beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness..." (2 Pet 3:17) In both of the verses, the word is the same – foreknowing and neither is God's foreknowledge; it is simply man's. Certainly neither of those two examples carries any sense of Calvinistic predestination.

Peter speaks of Jesus being foreknown before the beginning of the world and is just now made known "He was **foreknown** [*proginosko* προγινώσκω] before the foundation of the world but was manifested in these last times for your sake" (1 Pet 1:20 NET) We witnessed before how Peter was addressing the Jews in his epistle whom he states to be

elect according to God's knowing beforehand: "…to the **pilgrims** of the **Dispersion…elect** according to the **foreknowledge** [prognosis πρόγνωσις] of God the Father…" Therefore, when we come to Romans 8 we ought **not** to jump to the Calvinistic definition, but to the God-foreknew-the-Jews definition. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are **the called** according to His purpose. For whom He **foreknew** [*proginosko* προγινώσκω], He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined these He also **called**; whom He **called**..." (Rom 8:28-30) Even the act of calling we find spoken of concerning Israel in the book of Isaiah "But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, **O Jacob**, And He who formed you, **O Israel**: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have **called** you by your name; You are Mine." (Isa: 43:1; see also: 54:6; 1 Pet 1:15, 2:9, 5:10) Insofar as we Gentiles are grafted into the olive tree, then we share in the common purpose that God has for His elect, the Jews. "You, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree," (Romans 11:17)

The Remaining Verses of Election

There remain a number of verses that speak of the elect in the New Testament. In light of all that we have studied we can confidently know that they have nothing to do with the Calvinistic idea of predestined to salvation or damnation. Furthermore, in almost all of the cases, understanding them to be a reference to the Jews, God's chosen people, is warranted. Let's briefly consider those remaining. When Jesus spoke of God avenging "His own **elect** who cry out day and night to Him," (Luke 18:7) He was talking about the Jews.

"Rufus, **chosen** in the Lord," (Rom 16:13) may be speaking of him being Jewish. This would make the most sense given that of the many other (obviously) believing brothers and sisters in the chapter, only Rufus is called elect. Why would Paul refer to only him as being elect, if the Calvinistic definition of election were true? Were the others not also heirs of eternal life? Understanding that elect/election is not salvation and is generally a reference to the Jews the passage makes complete sense. It must be noted that Priscilla and Aquila, from Rome, were also Jewish and yet were not called elect. Could it be that because Paul had nothing else to say about Rufus that he simply stated that he was chosen/elect in the Lord?

Ephesians 1:4 ought to be viewed in light of the chosen people, Israel: "just as He **chose** us in Him **before the foundation** of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, (Eph 1:4). We know that Paul traveled to Ephesus and there spent three months reasoning with the Jews in the synagogues (Acts 19:1-8). Thus, Ephesians seems to be once again, for "the Jew first and then the Gentile" paradigm.

The mention of elect in Colossians is probably also a reference to Jews: "…as the **elect** of God, holy and beloved…" (Col 3:12) Colossae was in Asia (minor) and we have seen how Peter wrote to those in the dispersion who were in Asia. We also know that Paul first entered the local synagogue wherever he went in order to persuade the Jews first. Thus, his letter to the Colossians, located in Asia is most likely a letter written in the principle of "Jews first and after that the Gentiles." This is confirmed by looking at the Jews present on the day of Pentecost: "And there were dwelling in Jerusalem **Jews**, devout men, from **every nation under heaven**. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another… how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs…" (Acts 2:5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11)

The letter to the Thessalonians is also a letter to the Jews first and then the Gentiles. In Acts 17 we read "they came to **Thessalonica**, where there was a **synagogue** of the **Jews**. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures… and **some of them were persuaded** and … joined Paul and Silas." (Acts 17:1, 2, 4) With that in mind, we can see why Paul would say "we give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers… knowing, beloved **brethren**, your **election** by God. (1 Thes 1:2, 4) Once again, election is not Calvinistic in its definition, but Jewish. Likewise in Titus 1:1 Paul speaks of the faith of God's elect which very possibly was a reference to the faith of the Jewish people.

The Apostle John wrote to "the **elect** lady and her children…" (2 John 1:1) Though there is debate whether this is addressed to an individual woman and her immediate family or to the larger community is not material for this study. However, the term elect would again point to a reference to someone ethnically Jewish. The salutation also points to someone who is ethnically Jewish. "The children of your **elect** sister greet

you." (2 John 1:13) We cannot help but think back to Peter's address to the elect Diaspora and how the elect-together-with-you in Babylon (that is, fellow Jews) greeted them.

The final mention of the elect is found in Revelation 17 "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, **chosen**, and faithful." (Rev 17:14) We have seen that the elect and chosen do not refer to the Calvinistic concept of election. We have also seen that elect in the New Testament almost always refers to Israelites. When the Lord Jesus comes back his entourage will absolutely include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their seed. The question, however, is will Gentiles also be among that group? Given the fact that we Gentiles are grafted into Israel (Rom 11:24) and enjoy blessings that come with that, we can be confident that we will be in that number returning with the Lord.

Conclusion

We thus come to the end of our study having seen that elect and election have nothing to do with salvation, predestined to eternal life or death, nor any Calvinistic definition whatsoever. God elected priests, kings, disciples, Messiah, angels, and Jerusalem – all of which had nothing to do with being predestined to salvation. We also saw that elected/chosen was used of foolish things and of false gods (on man's part) – again, the term had nothing to do with being predestined to salvation. We then came to the election of Israel and saw that in no less than eight verses in the Old Testament God declared Israel to be His elect! Thus, when we turned to the New Testament we could see that elect/election/chosen never was there as a reference to being predestined to salvation; in fact, nearly every reference of the elect was to Israel. We looked at the elect in the tribulation and saw that it was speaking of the Jews. We looked at the epistles of Peter and found the mention there of elect was to the Jews. We looked at the book of Romans and again, the Jews were the elect. We examined the remaining verses that spoke of election or God's choosing and found that they more than likely refer to Israel as the elect.

Finally, we considered the term foreknowledge/foreknow and found that it is not a salvific term but simply God or even man, knowing something in advance. With all that we have seen we must therefore conclude that elect is not salvation. The definition that Calvin gave "Of the eternal election, by which God has predestinated some to salvation and others to destruction," is completely lacking in Scripture. Election has nothing to do

with salvation or damnation. It is simply God or man making a choice. However, the term "the elect" is more often than not, a reference to Israel/Jews who are of course God's chosen people. The New Testament references of the elect are never speaking one's eternal destiny but of God having chosen someone for a particular purpose. In almost all of the New Testament references, the elect are in fact the Jews! It turns out that the New Testament is more Jewish-centered than most of us ever imagined! The epistles of Paul, James, Peter, Hebrews and John are written to the Jew first and then the Gentiles. Personally, I am quite satisfied that God's plans center around Israel; we Gentile believers have been grafted in which is good enough for me.

About the Author

Douglas Hamp, author of ***Discovering the Language of Jesus***, ***The First Six Days***, and ***Corrupting the Image*** earned his MA in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. During his three years in Israel, he studied both modern and biblical Hebrew, biblical Aramaic, Koine Greek and other ancient languages as well as ancient texts and the archeology of the Bible. He has served as an assistant pastor at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, where he teaches at the School of Ministry, Spanish School of Ministry and Calvary Chapel Bible College Graduate School. Douglas has given numerous lectures on biblical languages, creationism and the end times in the United States and internationally. Douglas has received endorsements from **Dr. John Morris**, President Institute for Creation Research, Ken Ham, Founder and President Answers in Genesis and the Creation Museum, **Joseph Farah,** Chief Executive Officer WorldNetDaily.com Inc., **Carl Westerlund** Th.M, Director Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa School of Ministry and Graduate School, **Dr. Stan Sholar**, Retired Aerospace Scientist, **Dr. Bill Spear** Director Mountain Ministries, Dillon, Colorado **Pastor Chuck Smith** and **Albert Cerussi,** Congregational Coleader of Ben David Messianic Congregation.

Douglas is a committed follower of Yeshua (Jesus). He lives with his wife and three children in Southern California.

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