

A New Treatise on the Doctrine of Election

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TH 302 Systematic Theology II

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Introduction—By carefully examining the election of Abraham, the nation of Israel, and the major and minor prophets of the OT; and examining the election of Christ, the Twelve, and believers within the NT, I intend to present that God’s election has always been conditional, requires service on the part of the elected, and never guarantees salvation to anyone.

### I. Election in the Old Testament

- A. Hebrew word *bachar*
- B. Abraham
- C. The nation of Israel
- D. Major and minor prophets

### II. Election in the New Testament

- A. Greek word *eklegomai*
- B. Jesus as the “Elect One”
- C. The Twelve
- D. Believers

Conclusion—Ultimately the doctrine of election stands upon the choices of people by God throughout history to serve His purposes, and that fact alone should produce in every one of us a sense of amazement that He sees it fitting and necessary to work through us to reach those of this world that do not know Him.

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In general, the doctrine of election has become a theological mess that most want to shy away from attempting to explain or even attempting to understand. It is my belief that this doctrine is simpler than most would like to believe. I feel that the examples the Bible gives in both the Old Testament and the New Testament are adequate in discerning just what is meant by election, to whom it pertains, what purpose it serves, and whether or not it leads to salvation. By carefully examining the election of Abraham, the nation of Israel, and the major and minor prophets of the OT; and examining the election of Christ, the Twelve, and believers within the NT, I intend to present that God's election has always been conditional, requires service on the part of the elected, and never guarantees salvation to anyone.

To ascertain exactly what election is, it is of first necessity to define the words from which the doctrine is derived. Appropriately the word's place within the OT will be examined first, and to this end it should be noted that *election* is not found within the KJV, but only its variant *elect*, and that only four times within *Isaiah* of this particular portion of the Bible. But the notion that is carried by the word *election* presents itself in the Hebrew verb *bachar*, which means "to choose," and indicates a choice of something that is very much intended and not arbitrary (Klein 26). This choosing presents itself in many ways, even things that may be insignificant with regards to religion or salvation, such as David's choice of stones for his battle

with Goliath (1 Sam 17:40), or a carpenter's choice of wood for a project (Isa 40:20) (Klein 26), and this should be remembered when considering the other appearances of such choosing in the OT. When this verb presents itself with God as the subject though, it takes on a more prominent motif with regards to the doctrine of election. As Klein says, "The God who chooses stands at the heart of the Old Testament concept of election" (26). This election of God deals with both particular individuals and corporate peoples (Klein 26; Pannenberg 47; Pinnock 50), and deals with both salvation election [individual salvation] and vocational election [service to God's redemptive purposes] (Election and Free Will 39; Land 53; Pannenberg 50; Pinnock 50).

Even though the Hebrew word *bachar* is never used with regards to Abraham's calling by God in the OT, it is still necessary to examine his election first. This is because God choosing this one man to be the initial person from whom salvation will be brought into the world is where the doctrine of election gets its foundation, both in the OT and the NT ("The Bible's Story of Election" 31). When looking closely at Abraham's election [God choosing him for a particular purpose], it is seen that firstly God has not presented a salvation election unto him, but a vocational election that deals with service, specifically with that of following the commands of and fulfilling the purposes of God for redemption as has been presented to him (Gen. 12:1-3). In the eschatological present, this is understood to be the historical election of whom the genealogy of redemption would later come, therefore being able to clearly assert this being a purpose of God to redemption is made possible. Secondly, it should be noted that in this service-oriented election that Abraham could have either obeyed or disobeyed; therefore, this election is conditional, both upon Abraham's response and continued faithfulness in his service, and God's

grace to offer such. Not only is it conditional in this first instance of God choosing Abraham, but

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even when his vocational election progresses to the point of salvation election—the pinnacle of where the redemptive revelation has progressed within Abraham’s lifetime—it is still very much conditional. It is from my perspective that Abraham’s salvation election is not presented until God counts him righteous for his faith in God’s promise to give him an heir (Gen 15:6). But still this is not an election that is set and determined so, but remains conditional because the heir has not presented himself at this time. The only moment when Abraham’s salvation election becomes guaranteed, in my opinion, is when he faithfully follows God in the sacrificing of Isaac and his faith and the covenant is fully confirmed (Gen. 22:1-19)—which indicates Abraham’s continued faithfulness to his call of service for God’s redemptive plan. The solemn reason that Abraham’s salvation election is constantly conditional up to this point is because he always has the opportunity to decline to heed God’s commands and nullify his faithfulness of service to God’s plan; and nowhere does the text infer in any way that God coerced Abraham into submission by either supernatural persuasion or force.

Next, it is proper to examine the election, or God’s choice, of Israel as His nation. Many agree that the OT use of election terminology is predominately found within the calling of the nation of Israel being God’s special, chosen people within Deuteronomy (7:6-11; 10:15; 14:2) (Election and Free Will 6, 41-43; Klein 28; Pannenberg 47-48; Rice 87; “The Bible’s Story of Election” 31-32). Still, just as Abraham’s election was both salvation and vocation oriented, so is that of the election of Israel. Not only this, but also the election of Israel involves both corporate election of the nation, and the election of individuals as well—both to service and to

salvation. Firstly, it should be understood that the nation of Israel's corporate election by God was conditional from the beginning. Their election was both conditional upon God's offer of

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community with them, which ultimately can be traced to being conditional with regards to God's election of Abraham (Klein 29; Pinnock 284), and conditional upon their response of obedience to God's commands. Rice makes this very plain:

To begin with, God's election of Israel was fundamentally a gracious invitation. It was not an announcement of fate. Neither was it inevitable destiny. It was not as if the Israelites had no choice in the matter. God was not informing them of what had to be the case. Instead he was telling them what could be the case if they cooperated. This does not mean that God presented the invitation as a take-it-or-leave-it matter. He never acted as if their response were of little importance. To the contrary, their response either way entailed serious consequences. But they could choose to refuse their election as God's special people. God's call represented an opportunity, not a necessity. (80)

This corporate election of Israel was meant for service with regards to God's plan of redemption, not privilege unto blessings and individual salvation of every Israelite (Klein 29; Pinnock 285; Rice 80). As Rice has also said:

The Israelites were not simply called. God called them to do something. Specifically they were supposed to extend the knowledge of God to other nations and ultimately to whole world. By precept and example, the Israelites were to enlighten the earth with an understanding of God's saving power. (80)

Ultimately the reason for God's corporate election of Israel was for them to witness God's righteousness and love through observance of the law so that knowledge of God and His redemption could be witnessed among the nations.

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It is with regards to this end where the individual election of persons comes into play, both pertaining again to service and salvation, from within the corporate election of the nation. Individual Israelites were elected by God no doubt, but most commonly this individual election presented itself within the context of the corporate election of the nation (Pannenberg 48-49). This individual election also hinged upon the same purpose of serving God's redemptive plan for the world through the Israelites. It is my understanding that an individual Israelite's salvation depended solely upon his or her adherence to the Law, limited not only to holy living but also submission to the sacrificial system. There was no individual salvation for the Israelite simply because they were one of the many in God's corporate election of the nation. Because of this it should be seen that an individual Israelite's election unto salvation was also conditional—conditional both on God's part to give the commands to follow and on the individual's part of agreeing to and continuing to adhere to such demands. It is by following the Law in obedience that an individual's election pertained also to service, seeing as in general the Law was given to Israel to serve God's great redemptive plan as seen above.

Still I think it is necessary to look at some specific examples of this type of individual election, both to salvation and to service if we are to understand how such relates to the greater corporate election of the nation. I don't believe that anyone would argue that the prophets of the OT did not each receive individual election unto salvation (aside from that of Jonah, whose

destiny is not clear from the text), even though none of my sources mention such. I think it can clearly be seen in God's exclamation to Daniel about his inheritance and entering into God's rest: "But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of days" (12:13). It is by assimilation, which I don't believe to be a false assumption on

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my part, that we can faithfully assert that much the same would have been said for all the other major and minor prophets (again Jonah excluded). It is also through the individual calling of the prophets' to serve God, and some of those who were reluctant to serve Him (Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 1:6; Jonah 1:3), that we can clearly see that their election was conditional, both upon God's part and on the part of the prophet to obey. But their individual salvation is not the focal point of their individual election. More, the prophets' election is service oriented because they are constantly calling the nation, which includes Israel corporately and individual Israelites, back to faithful covenant relationship with God so that the ultimate purpose of continuing to be the light unto the world of God's mercy and redemptive power may continue. And just like any other individual Israelite who decided not to continue in covenant faithfulness to God, had any prophet decided not to remain faithful to the call to serve God's purposes then that one would be subject to nullifying their salvation election. Pannenberg concurs with this thought regarding anyone elected for such service: "His personal salvation is connected with his mission of serving the more universal purposes of God. Therefore, if he fails to live up to his mission, he becomes a candidate for rejection or reprobation" (50). It is in light of such understanding that I place the prophet Jonah into this possible category because ultimately his faithfulness to God seems to be in question as the text portrays him. And such question of his ultimate election unto salvation



due to unfaithfulness should be a reminder to us of election's conditional nature as we examine the doctrine of further as presented in the NT.

Before moving into the latter part of the discussion of the doctrine of election as is presented in the NT, let me recap what has been presented thus far. All occurrences of election that have been represented above from the OT indicate that election, whether individual or

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corporate with regards to vocation, are always conditional upon continued obedience to the commands of God. This obedience is represented by covenant faithfulness, in the progressive election of Abraham, the nation of Israel, and anyone elected to service God's redemptive plan from within the nation. Salvation election as well is conditional in the same nature in that it requires individual covenant and vocational faithfulness. Regarding corporate salvation election, there is no such thing except when the entities that compose such a corporate body have themselves exercised individual covenant and vocation election faithfulness. These clear, simple truths should be unanimously considered when developing a correct approach to the doctrine of election presented in the NT, and should be the foundational ideology for its construction as well.

Election as presented in the NT has become somewhat of a hard topic to entertain. This is because the discussion of this doctrine often gets convoluted with the discussion of other doctrines that are directly related to God's innate character and His knowledge that flows from that character. These doctrines are those of *predestination* and *foreknowledge* (Land 54; Pannenberg 47; Rice 83; Sproul 129). What makes these doctrines a problem for discussing election is that they are secondary in determining the individuals who are elect of God. The reason they are secondary is because they deal with God's knowledge of the elect and not the

direct appointment of them as individuals. It might seem unfair to dissect the doctrine of election in the NT without giving any treatment at all to these two problem ideas, but that is specifically what I will be attempting to do. Aside from them being unnecessary to discuss either briefly or at length because of their secondary nature to election as mentioned above, they

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will also not be discussed because they go beyond the scope of my assertions regarding what election actually is.

When speaking of election in the NT, we are often speaking of the notion presented by the Greek word *eklegomai*, which simply means to “to choose,” (Klein 65; Heaton) and we should see this as a direct parallel to the Hebrew word *bachar* and its usage in the OT (Heaton). As *eklegomai* is used in the NT it carries with it the same meaning as that of its Hebrew counterpart in that it represents a choice that is made out of necessity and with purpose, not one that is arbitrary. I think it is necessary that the simplicity of this word’s meaning be kept in mind as well as I present the case for the doctrine of election within the NT. And although this Greek term is used throughout the NT, it is my objective to only elaborate on the instances where it is used with regards to three types of election—the election of Jesus as the Messiah, the election of the Twelve to service God’s redemptive plan through the Messiah, and the election of believers to service and salvation in Christ.

The clear representation of Jesus being the elected of God to be the Messiah and bring about the fulfillment of the God’s redemptive plan that was begun with the election of Abraham in the OT, is the bridge that connects the OT representation of election to that of election in the NT. What we know about God’s faithfulness is that He very much intended to keep His

covenant with Abraham and bless all the nations of the world through his seed, and that the nation of Israel in general was to fulfill this vocation. Sadly though the nation as a whole did not exert continual covenant faithfulness (which is simultaneously vocational unfaithfulness), and consequently God prepared a new way for His redemptive plan to continue. This plan is fulfilled in Jesus and represented in Isaiah: “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in

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whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.” (42:1) (Election and Free Will 7, 44-45; Shank 28-30; “The Bible’s Story of Election” 32-33). The reason we know that this “Elect One” is Jesus is because of what Matthew, John, and Luke have to tell us about Him in their gospels. First, in Matthew’s we see that Jesus is the “true Israelite” and the fulfillment of the promised seed of Abraham (1:1), and coupled with what John says (15:1-11, 16) we know that His purpose was to supplant the nation of Israel for their failure (“The Bible’s Story of Election” 34). Of course this succession is readily seen in Jesus’ election of the Twelve to replace the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel as well (“The Bible’s Story of Election” 37). And all though these examples don’t indicate Jesus as the “Elect One” specifically, Matthew does not leave anyone to wonder and tells us plainly that He is, and is the complete fulfillment of all that was spoken by Isaiah (12:17-21) (Election and Free Will 45, 58; “The Bible’s Story of Election” 33). As if we really need any more evidence to prove Jesus’ election by God, we have two different events recorded by Luke that drive this point home. The first of these events is during the transfiguration of Jesus on the mount (9:28-36), where God speaks in a voice saying, “This is My Son, the Chosen One. Hear Him!” (v. 35) This clearly signifies again that Jesus is the Elect One referred to by Isaiah (Election and Free Will 58, 7; Pinnock 292; “The Bible’s Story of Election” 33). The second of these events takes

place when Jesus is on the cross and being mocked by scoffers. Of course these revilers meant their cruel words as an insult, they still clearly proclaim who Jesus really is with regards to election: “the chosen of God” (23:35) (Election and Free Will 59, 7; Pinnock 292; “The Bible’s Story of Election 33). Still it is necessary to note that Jesus’ election is very similar to the election of individuals in the OT in that He has been chosen by God to serve God (Election and Free Will

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45). As Peterson says, “It is critical to see that Jesus’ election pertains to his mission...Christ’s election has to do with his becoming one of us to redeem us” (“The Bible’s Story of Election” 33). And herein is also where we need to view how His election is in contrast to those elected in the OT to service God’s redemptive plan—Jesus’ election and vocational obedience does not pertain to His individual salvation because He is the actual embodiment of salvation and does not require it for Himself (Election and Free Will 45). Also His election is in contrast to those of the OT in that it is not conditional, but instead that the redemptive plan of God is conditional to Christ’s own election.

Another aspect of Christ’s election that is paramount in this discussion is that it permits Him to elect others to both vocation and to redemption (Shank 41). This power of election by the Elect One is seen specifically in His choosing of the Twelve as recorded by Luke: “He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose (*eklegomai*) twelve whom He also named apostles” (6:13; see also Acts 1:2, 24) (Election and Free Will 66; Klein 90-91, 128; “The Bible’s Story of Election” 35, 36). But what has Jesus chosen, or elected, the disciples for exactly? Much like Abraham, the nation of Israel, and the prophets, Jesus elected the disciples for both service and for salvation (Klein 91; “The Bible’s Story of Election 35). Three things

regarding the vocational election of the Twelve we need to know is that it is conditional upon continued obedience, was meant to lead to salvation election, and that it pertains to spreading the Gospel message of redemption to the world. The reason that we know that this vocational election pertains to the spreading of the Gospel to the world is through the Great Commission and other commissions similar to it made by the risen Lord to the disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-49). But how we know that Jesus' election of the Twelve was both

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conditional to obedience and meant to lead to salvation is by His statements in the *Gospel According to John*:

You are my friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (15:14-19)

By the statements "but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain," and "you are my friends [one appointed to bear fruit] if you do whatever I command you," we also that the Twelve's election was vocational, and conditional upon continued obedience to Jesus. But also within these statements we see that Jesus very much intended for their election to lead to salvation. This is indicated in Jesus' remarks that He

chose them “out of the world,” and that they do not belong to the world, but by implication to Him (“The Bible’s Story of Election” 35). This was surely meant to be definitive salvation, but we know that such was also conditional because of the unfortunate events that surround Judas. It is made very clear by Jesus that Judas was indeed one of these originally elected to vocation and salvation in my opinion, even though my sources argue that his election was never meant to be salvific but only that of historical (vocational) (Election and Free Will 67;

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“The Bible’s Story of Election” 36). The reason they say this is because Judas is named the betrayer and his exit from the conversation happens in chapter thirteen, and that he is therefore not present when Jesus makes the statements quoted at length above from chapter fifteen. I disagree though because Jesus clearly says that He chose, or elected him even knowing beforehand He would be betrayed by Judas, and that in the context where this statement appears, Peter has clearly spoken for them all that they know Jesus is the Christ (John 6:70, 64-69). The reason for my contention is that the text seems to say that Judas did not believe, but I am under the impression that He surely did believe and know Jesus to be the Christ because of his guilt after his betrayal of Jesus. And I do believe that faith in Jesus being the Christ is another aspect of what elects one to salvation. It is by rebellion and unrighteousness that one forfeits such salvation, and I feel that Judas displays these qualities before the betrayal and during (John 12:4-6; 18:2-3) (“The Bible’s Story of Election” 36). It is by this information that I feel that the Twelve were intended for both vocational and salvific election. It is also my opinion that Judas is a clear example that even those elected for vocation and salvation can easily lose their election, even any of the Twelve.

The last example of election in the NT to be examined is that of believers. It is my contention though that God very much intends the election of every human being in Christ to salvation (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 4:10; 2 Peter 3:9) (Pinnock 297). I think the election of believers in the NT parallels that of the nation of Israel in the OT in that every individual of the nation was chosen to serve God's redemptive plan and enjoy salvation through obedience to the Law, but only those that obeyed His commands continually were the ones who were preserved in that election. Much like them, only those people who are believers in the Gospel

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and who continually obey God by living holy lives and servicing His kingdom by spreading the Gospel message (both by how they live and by preaching) are those that preserve themselves in God's election leading to salvation as well (Ephesians 1:4-6; 2 Timothy 2:10; Romans 9; Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 13:23-27). Of course there are a host of Bible verses that stress this point, but I think that one parable spoken by Jesus exemplifies this more than anything else—the parable of the great supper (Luke 14:15-24). Within this parable it is clear that both the formally invited guests (vv. 16-20) and the informally invited guests (vv. 21, 23) are all chosen, or elect, by God to salvation. But it is only those who are willing to heed the command to come that get to enjoy it. Also it should be noted that even though the church of the NT is a corporate body of believers, there is still no corporate salvation of all individuals just because they are a part of this corporate body. Election to salvation in this regard is non-existent, and is only present when such a corporate body is composed of individuals who have individually remained faithful to Christ and His cause in the world.

So when looking at election in the NT, it is clear that it parallels election in the OT. It is clear that Christ and Abraham are closely related in type, and that in fact the fulfillment of the

promises given to Abraham in his election by God are in Christ alone. It is also clear that Christ is the fulfillment of the election of Israel as a nation in that He succeeds them where they failed in bringing God's redemption to the world. We also see that Christ's election of the Twelve is meant to show His mission as being the fulfillment of the nation of Israel's election in the OT because the Twelve symbolize the twelve tribes of the nation. It is also clear that the Twelve parallel the prophets of the OT in that they all were chosen for service to God's redemptive plan and salvation, and that such demanded continual obedience. Without continual obedience one

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became reprobate and lost, and this is exemplified in Judas' circumstances and related minutely to those of Jonah. Also it is clear that believers in the NT parallel individual Israelites of the nation in that all are elected by God to shed the light on His redemptive truth to all the world, but that only those who continue in obedience to this are those who obtain election that leads to salvation.

So why does all this matter? What's the significance of how the doctrine of election is presented within the Bible as I've examined it? It is my concern that the doctrine of election is actually simpler to understand than most realize. The fact is that the words from which the doctrine is derived carry with them the simple meaning "to choose," and I think this is the foundation for what the Bible says regarding it. Election should simply be viewed as God's choice of both individuals and corporate bodies to serve His plan of redemption being illuminated throughout the world and nothing more. God's choice, or election, of any individual or corporate body for such a cause carries with it the responsibility to remain ever faithful to obeying the commands of God and exhibiting continual covenant faithfulness to Him. At no time does just being chosen by God for such vocation guarantee salvation of the individual or the



corporate body. For God's election of an individual or a corporate body to progress to the point where such election leads to salvation it is always conditional—first conditional on God's mighty love to offer such an invitation, and secondly conditional upon that one's or those individual persons of that corporate body continued covenant and vocational faithfulness to God in serving Him and His plans for redemption. Moreover, these simple truths of election should produce in all of us a sense of gratitude towards God for having chosen the whole world to not only work for Him in spreading His plan of redemption but also to enjoy everlasting life with

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Him at the end of time. At the same time though, the fact that we have two examples of mediocre responses on the part of certain elected individuals towards God's great love in this matter—one of them being undeniably clear—that have led to utter reprobation and a loss of this election with the opportunity of salvation, should produce in us a sense of urgency and seriousness when we consider our walk with God. We should never consider that just because we have all been chosen by God in such a nature that we are guaranteed salvation from God's point of view. Instead we should live our lives in humbleness and biblical fear leading to elevated personal holiness on our individual levels through the power of God's indwelling Spirit because one of the main reasons for God's election is to service such a holy lifestyle. Aside from fear though, we should also live with some expectation to receive our rest like the faithful prophets and disciples when we are found to be continually improving upon our walk with God and living blamelessly before Him.

From examining the biblical evidence and examples of election, I think it is simple to conclude that this doctrine has been unnecessarily complicated by others' preconceived notions about the subject than by the Bible itself. Too many times this doctrine has been a point of

contention among scholars instead of a topic that induces praise to God for His marvelous love in choosing us to be the vessels by which He shares His redemptive plan to the world. Simply put, election as presented in the Bible is always conditional both upon God's part and man's, and never has there been an instance in which God's election of an individual or corporate body guaranteed the salvation of those persons. Moreover, the congruency between the election of Abraham, the nation of Israel, and the prophets of old with that of Jesus, the Twelve, and believers in the NT should make us consider more readily the truths of God as presented in His

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Word when we are attempting to discern just what our responsibilities are with regards to preserving ourselves unto salvation. Ultimately the doctrine of election stands upon the choices of people by God throughout history to serve His purposes, and that fact alone should produce in every one of us a sense of amazement that He sees it fitting and necessary to work through us to reach those of this world that do not know Him.

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