

# Who Are God's Elect?

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That the Bible uses the words "elect" and "chosen" to refer to some people is indisputable. Sometimes it is referring to certain individuals whom God chose to a certain calling or position, such as that of a priest or a prophet. In the Old Testament, God uses it to refer to the nation of Israel: "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, above all peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 7:6). But what I want to discuss in this article is the New Testament's use of "elect" and "chosen" to identify sinners whom God has saved. Theologians hotly debate the precise identity of these people and how they became elect. Let's look at four teachings concerning the New Testament elect and see how these stand up to Scripture.

## **1. The Elect Are the Jews and/or the People or Nation of Israel**

I know that I said this article would concern itself with the body of people the New Testament calls "elect" and "chosen." Yet, there are Bible teachers who insist that the elect people of God in the New Testament are the Jews or the nation of Israel. Like Deuteronomy 7:6, Deuteronomy 14:2 says, "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, above all peoples who are on the face of the earth." There are other similar statements in the Old Testament. But these always refer to physical blessings as a nation, not to spiritual salvation. This physical election was merely a type of the spiritual election that was to come under the New Covenant and which Israel did not, as a whole, attain to:

I ask then, did God reject his people? May it never be! For I also am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God didn't reject his people, which he foreknew. Or don't you know what the Scripture says about Elijah? How he pleads with God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have broken down your altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life." But how does God answer him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by

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grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. What then? That which Israel seeks for, that he didn't obtain, but the chosen ones obtained it, and the rest were hardened. According as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, to this very day." David says, "Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, a stumbling block, and a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see. Bow down their back always." I ask then, did they stumble that they might fall? May it never be! But by their fall salvation has come to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy.

Romans 11:1-11

When ancient Israel in Elijah's time turned from God to worship Baal, God had seven thousand elect *within* Israel who remained faithful to Him. Israel was God's chosen nation, but they were spiritually unfaithful to Him. But there was another elect, a spiritual elect, who did not worship Baal. That was an election by grace.

Paul is saying that, as in Elijah's time when God did not reject every single Israelite because He had an elect remnant who remained faithful, so in Paul's time, God had not rejected every single Israelite, but He had an elect remnant who trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior. They were in the same position as the Gentiles whom God had graciously saved because He had chosen them. But the implication is that Israel as a nation had fallen. God no longer considered it His nation and the Jewish people His people. His people were now the elect from all nations.

Read what Jesus says in Matthew 21:42-43: "Jesus said to them, 'Did you never read in the Scriptures, "The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner. This was from the Lord. It is marvelous in our eyes?" Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation bringing forth its fruit.'" God was removing Israel from its chosen status as God's nation because it had rejected its Messiah. Peter repeats this thought:

Because it is contained in Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, chosen, and precious: He who believes in him will not be disappointed." For you who believe therefore is the honor, but for those who are disobedient,

"The stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone," and, "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." For they stumble at the word, being disobedient, to which also they were appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: who in time past were no people, but now are God's people, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as foreigners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

1 Peter 2:6-11

Don't leave what Peter says here without seeing that those who stumble at the word and are disobedient "were appointed" to this. And those who believe are "a chosen race...a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." These are word pictures Peter took out of the Old Testament to describe, not the nation of Israel, but individual people from diverse nations whom God chose to now be his true, holy nation.

These elect were to include some Jews, but what nation they were from now made no difference. The idea that the elect in the New Testament refers to the Jews or to national Israel is thus proven wrong. Look how simple it is to see this in 1 Thessalonians 1:4: "We know, brothers loved by God, that you are chosen." But the Christians in Thessalonica to whom Paul wrote this were largely Gentiles. The elect or chosen people in the New Testament are believers from all nations.

## **2. The Elect Are Those Whom God, Looking Ahead from Eternity, Sees Will Choose to Trust in Jesus Christ as Their Savior**

Peter addresses his first epistle to the elect or chosen ones "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood" (1 Peter 1:1-2). There are people who believe that the "foreknowledge" in this passage refers to God looking ahead from eternity, seeing who will choose Jesus as their Savior, and then electing them. Since the elect in this scenario believe by their own free choice anyway, what the purpose of God's then electing them is remains vague.

This system of belief is called Arminianism. Even sticking to this one passage, we can see that it does not support the Arminian system. Peter says that these people are elect or chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood." Obey Jesus in what? Peter doesn't explicitly state it here, but Jesus does in Mark 1:15: "The time is fulfilled, and God's Kingdom is at hand! Repent, and believe in the Good News." We obey Jesus by believing the Gospel. Arminianism has the cause and effect reversed. For Arminianism to be true, Peter would have to have said that these people were elect according to the foreknowledge of God because, looking ahead, God saw that they would obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood. But, in fact, Peter says that their obedience to the Gospel and their being sprinkled with Jesus' blood follows from their election, not the other way around.

A sinner is not elect because he believes. He believes because he is elect.

### **3. The Elect Are a Special Class of Christians Whom God Chose in Eternity, But There Are Other Christians, Too**

According to this school of thought, there are two classes of Christians: the elect, and the non-elect who made a decision on their own to be saved. The Body of Christ, then, consists of elect and non-elect Christians.

Unfortunately for those who hold to this idea, it is completely unbiblical. The Word of God never speaks of two groups of Christians, the elect and the non-elect. The Greek word *eklektos* literally means "chosen out one." Depending on the translation, it appears in Bibles as "elect," "chosen ones," or something similar. Jesus said that the days would be shortened for the elect's sake, not the sake of the elect and the non-elect (Matthew 24:22). He said that the angels would gather the elect, not the elect and the non-elect (verse 31). He said God would avenge the elect, not the elect and the non-elect (Luke 18:7). Paul implied that no one can lay a charge against the elect because God justifies them. He said nothing about any non-elect people also being justified (Romans 8:33). Paul called the Colossians to whom he wrote "the elect of God" (King James Version; "God's chosen ones" in the *WEB Bible*), not the elect and non-elect of God. I could cite many other Scriptures, but I think you see my point.

The Bible tells us nothing of two classes of Christians. It speaks only of the elect, God's chosen people. It says nothing of any people whom

God did not choose, but who chose Him. The only non-elect are those people who do not believe and are not saved.

#### **4. The Elect Are Those Whom God Sovereignly Chose in Eternity to Save Through Jesus Christ.**

As we've seen, this is the right answer to the question, "Who are God's elect?" The Body of Christ consists only of the elect whom God chose in eternity. These are the people who, in time, He draws to His Son: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day" (John 6:44). If God looked ahead and chose us because He saw we would believe, our election would be according to our works. But Paul says that God "saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before times eternal" (2 Timothy 1:8-9). Our election in eternity is according to God's purpose and grace and has nothing to do with our works.

The Bible doesn't tell us that God peeked ahead and saw who would be good enough to believe. It tells us that "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world" and that he "predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:4-5). God not only knows the end from the beginning, He declares it, determines it, doing all that He pleases (Isaiah 46:10). "I have planned. I will also do it" (verse 11). His foreknowledge in the context of election doesn't mean his looking ahead to see what we will do and then reacting. It means His knowing His elect children from before the beginning of the world: "For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified" (Romans 8:29-30).

#### **Why Us?**

Some wonder what we, the elect, did to deserve being elect and saved. The answer is nothing. An elect person is no less a sinner than anyone else. In fact, God's elect are the "lowly things of the world, and the things that are despised, and the things that are not" so that we could never boast that God chose us because we were better (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). Nevertheless, the elect and the non-elect, also called the reprobate, have had two different destinies from eternity.

In Matthew 13:24-30, in the Parable of the Tares of the Field (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/par2tares.htm>), Jesus tells us that God plants His seed and the enemy (the devil) plants his. God's seed are the elect, and they grow into wheat. The devil's seed are the reprobate, who produce only weeds. But they look so much alike that the man tells his servants to leave the two to grow together lest they pull up some of the wheat. But in the end of the world, the difference will be plain so that the weeds will be bound and burned, and the wheat will be gathered into God's barn.

This tells us that God has predestined the elect and the non-elect from their very conception (pictured by the seed) for two different destinies. We look the same and we both sin, though saved Christians try to avoid sin. On the other hand, some unsaved people are also quite moral, and some may do many good works. But the two groups are inherently different. Some people don't like to talk about this. They say it sounds harsh or that it can sound like the elect are boasting. But how can we boast? We had nothing to do with our election. It is Arminianism that gives people a ground for boasting: "God elected me because He knew I would believe."

I find it curious that in an age that loves fictional characters who are in some way elect, the children of aliens or supernatural beings—Superman, Harry Potter, Percy Jackson, etc.—so many people, even professing Christians, despise the biblical teaching of election. Nevertheless, like it or not, God has from eternity elected a seed that He then plants in time, for whom Christ died, to whom He gives faith, and whom He justifies and sanctifies and will glorify with His only begotten Son.

So, who are the elect? If you are a believer, the elect are people like you whom God has chosen from eternity to be born into this world, to be sinners, to be born again, to miraculously believe that Jesus Christ died for them, to be sanctified and to be glorified to an unimaginably exciting destiny.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ; even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without blemish before him in love; having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his desire, to the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he freely bestowed favor on us in the Beloved, in whom we have our redemption through his blood, the*

*forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him to an administration of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth, in him; in whom also we were assigned an inheritance, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his will; to the end that we should be to the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ: in whom you also, having heard the word of the truth, the Good News of your salvation, —in whom, having also believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is a pledge of our inheritance, to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory.*

Ephesians 1:3-14