

The Elect

The great theological theme of the Bible and history is election. Everything is reduced down to this single concept. Why did God create the world? To produce the elect. Why did God send his Son into the world? To save the elect. What is the basis of human history? God preserving and prospering his elect. When will the end of the world come? When the last elect person is converted to Christ.

Election and the church

In the English OT the elect are normally described as the 'chosen'¹ (e.g. *bachiyir* - 'chosen one', Ps 105:6; *bachar*, Isa 41:8), the 'remnant' (Isa 28:5, 46:3) or the 'righteous' [and in Isaiah as 'elect' three times (*bachiyir*,)]; but in the NT the elect are usually described as the church (*ekkllesia*, 74 times in the singular) and 15 times as the 'elect' (*eklektos*).

The foundation in all these is the idea of being selected, chosen, a residue of the nations. In the OT the prime idea is selection or choosing but in the NT it is a focus is on a body of people called out to represent an authority. The secular use of *ekkllesia* was of a body of citizens summoned to discuss affairs of state (e.g. Acts 19:39, 'assembly'); thus God's elect are those called out to be his representatives. The church is God's witness.

It is important to understand that the elect equals the church. In the OT the chosen, the elect, the faithful remnant, the righteous were the church before the cross. [Note Acts 7:38, 'the congregation in the wilderness'; 'congregation is *ekkllesia*. The elect in the OT were called a church.] The *ekkllesia* in the NT is the church after the cross. The OT elect had faith in God's future deliverer-prince who would bring actual (as opposed to Levitical-symbolical) cleansing from sin. NT saints look back in faith to the cross of Christ, the Messiah, for salvation. Both lived by faith in God's deliverance; both are saints; both are elect.

Election and Israel in the OT

Israel was elect in the sense that it was chosen from among the nations as a testimony to God. This was not a theological election (i.e. a divine unconditional choosing for eternity) but was an illustration of God's electing purposes. Israel was an object lesson showing that God chooses a small proportion of humanity. Thus Israel was chosen because it was the smallest ('least') of all nations and was not a powerful empire (Deut 7:7).

Israel was always a mixed community from the start, as evidenced by the Golden Calf incident; it contained the faithful elect, who were righteous according to the law; and the idolatrous reprobate, who were wicked. The righteous elect remnant are said to be the seed of Abraham (Ps 105:6; Isa 41:8) but the reprobate were hated and condemned (Ps 11:5). As a whole the nation was said by God to be stiff-necked (proud, obstinate and rebellious, Ex 32:9; Deut 9:6), idolatrous (Ezek 23:35, 49), guilty of abominations (Ezek 20:4) and under condemnation (Ezek 7:2-10, 18:30). With the arrival of the Messiah (whom Israel should have been testifying to and welcoming but instead rejected him) Israel was removed from God's purposes (Matt 21:43) and suffered judgment (Matt 21:44, 23:37-38). The object lesson was over and the real testimony of God was found in the church, the elect community, the body of Christ. The elect were placed into the Messiah by divine union. Fleshly Israel then became the enemy of the church (Rm 11:28). Israel never was, and is not today, elect in the special sense of permanent divine choosing. Christians are the chosen sons of God, a holy nation, a royal priesthood (1 Pt 2:9). Christians are the Seed of Abraham (Gal 3:29). Christians are the temple of God (1 Cor 3:17). Christians are spiritual Israel and Jerusalem (Gal 6:16; 4:26; Rev 21:2). The church is now Zion, the city of God (Heb 12:22).

Election

Election carries with it divine oversight. God will protect, cherish, nourish and defend his people. Thus, those who are unconditionally elected are always preserved unto eternity. Even the OT testifies to this, 'The remnant of the house of Israel, who have been upheld by me from birth, who have been carried from the womb' (Isa 46:3).

The reason for this divine protection is the fulfilment of God's decree, the plan from eternity to produce a people for his name, united in His Son, to be a witness and testimony for eternity. These people are chosen in eternity, born in time, saved in time, united with Christ, resurrected at the end and changed to be like Christ. They then form God's people that serve him forevermore on a restored Earth, in unity with Christ.

¹ The phrase 'chosen people' does not actually appear in the English translation even once.