

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 42

KEY TERMS: ELECTION, PART 3

The amplification of the Abrahamic Covenant that addresses the issue of Jewish justification salvation is presented in the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). This covenant was identified long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob died and it will not be implemented with the nation until the Lord returns and the Messianic Kingdom begins. Even at that time, they will not be believers as a result of God specifically choosing each one as an individual to believe. They will be believers because He will put His law within them and they will all know Him. I understand this to mean there will be no unbelieving Jewish person who will live during the reign of the King in the Millennial Kingdom. There will be Gentile unbelievers at the end of the Millennium but there will be no unbelieving Jew at the end of it.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 ³¹“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³²not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. ³³“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴“They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

The primary word used in Hebrew for the concept of choosing is בָּחַר and it means to choose, elect, or test. It has the idea of an examination or testing of something. It very frequently has theological nuances assigned to it but there is little to no difference between the secular and the theological uses of the word. “It denotes a choice, which is based on a thorough examination of the situation and not an arbitrary whim” [Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, s. v. “בָּחַר”]. That leads to the understanding that it can carry the meaning of the choicest or the best and that meaning is significant in understanding the doctrine of election. The word is used of people making choices about something and it is likewise connected with God and His work. When God is choosing or appointing someone, it is to service or ministry rather than to justification salvation. We will see that this concept continues in the Greek.

A major problem with using the dictionaries and encyclopedias to determine the theology behind the use of this word group is the theological meaning presented in them has been forced into them concerning the doctrine of justification salvation. That’s because all the authors of these works are theologians in the Calvinist system of theology. The lexicons, however, generally do a good job of defining the words but that is subject to discernment because it can happen in them as well. Apart from

the lexicons, theology gets inserted into these dictionaries and encyclopedias and that causes massive confusion. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* is a good, representative example of this problem. The first two sentences in the entry for “Election” read: “In both the OT and NT, a divine choosing of man, individually or corporately, either to salvation and eternal life, or to a special office or work. The term ‘the elect’ in both Testaments applies mainly to God’s elect people, chosen unto eternal life” [ISBE, s. v. “Election”]. The authors of this entry in the ISBE do recognize the aspect of election that pertains to appointment to ministry but their claim is that the primary emphasis is on justification salvation and that is incorrect. It is a theological presupposition inserted into the entry. Another dictionary begins its entry, “These terms are of frequent occurrence in the Scriptures, and when used in a religious sense designate the sovereign act of God in choosing from eternity some men to salvation” [*The Westminster Bible Dictionary*, s. v. “Election”]. This entry completely assigns a justification salvation emphasis to the meaning in theological contexts and totally denies the concept of appointment to service. Both of those entries are very misleading and incorrect; they are serious exaggerations of the true doctrine of election because their theology has been introduced into their definitions and their theology then becomes the definition. That is the logical fallacy of circular reasoning. Many of them do, however, recognize that God’s choice of people is to service or ministry. “Divine election is God’s choice of a people or person for himself. This choice usually entails a calling or task to be accomplished” [*Lexham Theological Wordbook*, s. v. “Election”]. This is an accurate description of the use of election and it is an extremely important consideration for understanding the doctrine.

The Bible clearly indicates that people can make decisions whether they are good decisions or bad decisions. I realize that the decisions made by human beings with a sin nature are tainted by sin but they can still make good, morally correct decisions in the sight of other men. Many unbelievers do good works. They are kind and they are what most people would consider to be morally upright people; they do charitable works and they live their lives as good citizens, but as Isaiah noted, all their works are as filthy rags because they are tainted by sin. The point is bona fide choices are made.

For example, Joshua was calling on the Israelites to examine the issues before them and make not only a national, corporate decision to follow God and reject idols but also an individual decision, each one of them and their families, about whether they would follow idols or whether they would follow God. There is no element of divine coercion or predestination in this decision making process. God was going to use the nation for His purposes whether the individuals in the covenant community were faithful or not, and whether they were believers or not and we know many Israelites were unfaithful and rebellious throughout the history of the nation. They were also called upon to make the same decision earlier when Moses delivered to them God’s promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The point is there is no biblical indication the Israelites were predestined or elected to justification salvation; conversely, there is every indication they were elected to service in the name of God.

Joshua 24:15 ¹⁵“If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose [רַחֲבֵּ, ἐκλέγο] for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Deuteronomy 30:19 ¹⁹“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose [רַחֵב, ἐκλέγομαι] life in order that you may live, you and your descendants,

The word רַחֵב is a word meaning the choicest thing or element, or the best; it means the choicest thing of things of very high value compared to a standard. This is another word that is important element in understanding the doctrine of election.

Genesis 23:6 ⁶“Hear us, my lord, you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest [רַחֵב, ἐκλεκτός] of our graves; none of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead.”

Deuteronomy 12:11 ¹¹then it shall come about that the place in which the LORD your God will choose [רַחֵב, ἐκλέγομαι] for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice [רַחֵב, ἐκλεκτός] votive offerings which you will vow to the LORD.

I’m going to discuss an issue concerning God’s choice of Israel that I don’t recall seeing discussed anywhere else regarding election to service. The question is did God choose Israel to be His chosen people out of all the other nations in the world? Some of the language used in the Word of God seems to suggest it.

Deuteronomy 7:6–8 ⁶“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen [רַחֵב, προαιρέω] you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose [רַחֵב, προαιρέω] you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

The Septuagint use of προαιρέω is interesting. It does mean to choose. It also is used to indicate a choosing for oneself, a commitment of oneself, or a preference for something. This word is used to reflect the nuance of God creating Israel for Himself, a nation to which He is committed in order to use them to reveal Himself to the nations of the world, and for whom He has a preference over all other nations [see BDAG, s. v. “προαιρέω”]. This Scripture is not suggesting, as it seems to be, that God specifically chose Israel out of all the other nations of the earth and it is certainly not suggesting that His choice of them was to individual justification salvation.

Exodus 19:3–6 ³Moses went up to God, and the LORD called ³to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ⁴‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. ⁵‘Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; ⁶and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”

The Bible reveals that God sent Israel into Egypt for a purpose and He brought Israel out for a purpose. He sent them there to form them into a nation and to protect the small family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from being assimilated and integrated into the pagan Canaanite society. Their identity as God's people would have been destroyed if that happened. He brought them out so they would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation who were His representatives to the world. They were uniquely His people because He created them to be His people. Through them, whether Israel as a nation was in a state of obedience or in a state of rebellion, He was going to reveal Himself to a pagan world system.

The problem with the interpretation that God chose Israel as a nation out of all the other nations of the world is that God did not choose Israel from among the nations; God specifically created Israel to suit His Divine purposes. The existence of Israel was the result of God's miraculous, creative work without which there never would have been a nation Israel at all. That Divine purpose was designed to have Israel serve as a national medium through which He would reveal Himself to the world. Israel would be the vehicle for Divine revelation whether Israel was obedient or not and whether the people were believers or not. The world knows that God has a distinctive, intimate relationship with Israel that is qualitatively different from His relationship with all the other nations and peoples of the world. Satan knows this and those who belong to him know this and that's why anti-Semitism is such a powerful force in the world throughout history and continuing on to this day. The whole world is against Israel today including much of America and sadly, even much of Christian America. That tiny little nation with so few people is the object of the world's hatred because the world knows God has a purpose and a plan for them. God's choice of Israel was not to justification salvation; it was to service. There is no exegetical foundation for basing the doctrine of election to justification salvation on God's choosing the choice nation, Israel. When the Jewish people are referred to as "the chosen people," it seems to better to think of them as the "choice" people of God, the people He specifically created to be a choice people and a choice nation for His purposes. Israel has fulfilled this role, not because of their faithfulness, but because God is able to use them as they are and the world has taken notice.

God took the families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob into Egypt where he formed them into a nation. In bringing them out of Egypt, He used that most powerful nation in the world and their Israelite slaves as vehicles through which He would make Himself known throughout all the earth. This isn't hard to fathom when we understand that Egypt was, at the time, the most powerful nation on planet earth.

Exodus 9:16¹⁶"But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you [Pharaoh] to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth.

God's name was, in fact, widely proclaimed and pagan peoples were terrified of Him. His judgment on and subsequent destruction of Egypt and the revelation of His existence, power, and wrath through the Israelites had indeed proclaimed His name throughout the earth.

Joshua 2:9–11⁹and [Rahab] said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you.

¹⁰“For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹“When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

Israel was to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Their presence in the land and their obedience to God would cause the world to wonder about the great and mighty God the Israelites served.

Deuteronomy 4:5–8 ⁵“See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. ⁶“So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ ⁷“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? ⁸“Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?

The world took notice of Israel because of the blessings God bestowed on the nation and on Kings David and Solomon when the kingdom was at its peak.

1 Kings 4:31, 34 ³¹For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was known in all the surrounding nations.... ³⁴Men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

1 Kings 10:9 ⁹“Blessed be the LORD your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the LORD loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness.”

Isaiah spoke of the concept that God’s creation of Israel resulted in a relationship that could be characterized as chosen but which could just as easily been translated as “preferred” people rather than as “chosen” people.

Isaiah 43:20–21 ²⁰“The beasts of the field will glorify Me, The jackals and the ostriches, Because I have given waters in the wilderness And rivers in the desert, To give drink to My chosen [בְּחִיר, ἐκλεκτός] people. ²¹“The people whom I formed for Myself Will declare My praise.

The word בְּחִיר means chosen one, the one preferred or selected with the implications of the favor of a special relationship based in affection. It is always used to indicate relationship of the subject to God. Isaiah immediately connects this idea of a preferred people to the fact that God specifically formed them for relationship with Himself and they were formed for a ministry purpose which was, and is, to declare His praise. There is nothing here to suggest that justification salvation is the subject, instead, this chapter is about the gathering of the believing remnant into the Millennial Kingdom. The idea that God

specifically created Israel and they are therefore His preferred or choice nation is the thought that begins the chapter.

Isaiah 43:1 ¹But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!

As noted, God called Israel to be His revelatory vehicle; He called them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. He called them to ministry. “Israel’s assignment from God involved intermediation. They were not to be a people unto themselves, enjoying their special relationship with God and paying no attention to the rest of the world. Rather, they were to represent him to the rest of the world and attempt to bring the rest of the world to him. In other words, the challenge to be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ represented the responsibility inherent in the original promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:2-3: ‘You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’ Priests stand between God and humans to help bring the humans closer to God and to help dispense God’s truth, justice, favor, discipline, and holiness to humans. Israel was called to such a function” [Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: Exodus*, p. 423]. This commentator went on to list several things the nation was expected to accomplish, yet they didn’t do them, at least not for long, but that fact does not negate the status of their election as the choice nation representing God to the world. Faithful or not, they were the elect, choice nation.

Though they never lived up to that call, at least not completely and not for long, that fact didn’t keep God from revealing Himself through them despite their failure. Even in the midst of failing to properly represent God, He has used them to bless the world not only by birthing the Savior of the world and assigning them to be the vehicle for divine revelation, but through science, medicine, law, literature, and the arts the Jews have blessed the people of the world. In relation to their small population, the Jews have been awarded more Nobel prizes than any other people group or nationality. They are highly successful people and their success has made the world a better place.

Israel would be and in fact was a vehicle of revelation to the nations despite their national disobedience. Israel has been God’s choice nation from the time He created it and that has not changed. The very fact that Israel still exists after all the pogroms, the violent anti-Semitism, the persecution committed by the church, and the holocaust are proof that God is still superintending Israel and making Himself known to the world through them. This persecution forced them into ghettos and kept them from associating with and assimilating into the greater societies in which they lived and kept them separate and distinct as a people. Only God could preserve such a small number of people and prevent them from simply melting into the other races and nationalities of the world. Even after nearly two thousand years of dispersion around the world, God has preserved the Jewish identity and kept them intact as a distinct group of people and Satan’s world hates it and it hates the Jewish people. Even when the majority of Jews are atheists, agnostics, and unbelievers as they are today and even when the religious Jews have submitted themselves to the yoke of Rabbinic Judaism, God is still shepherding His people and the world can’t help noticing it. Even when the Israelite nation rebels against Him, God uses them to continue to reveal Himself to the world.

Deuteronomy 29:22–28 ²²“Now the generation to come, your sons who rise up after you and the foreigner who comes from a distant land, when they see the plagues of the land and the diseases with which the LORD has afflicted it, will say, ²³‘All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and in His wrath.’ ²⁴“All the nations will say, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?’ ²⁵“Then men will say, ‘Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. ²⁶‘They went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them. ²⁷‘Therefore, the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; ²⁸and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.’

Ezekiel 5:14–15 ¹⁴Moreover, I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the nations which surround you, in the sight of all who pass by. ¹⁵So it will be a reproach, a reviling, a warning and an object of horror to the nations who surround you when I execute judgments against you in anger, wrath and raging rebukes. I, the LORD, have spoken.

1 Kings 9:7–9 ⁷then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. ⁸“And this house will become a heap of ruins; everyone who passes by will be astonished and hiss and say, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?’ ⁹“And they will say, ‘Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them, therefore the LORD has brought all this adversity on them.’”

Whether the nation was obedient as they were under David and the young Solomon or whether they were rebellious and disobedient, God used them to reveal Himself and He still does. Israel is an insignificant nation in terms of land area and population yet that nation and those people are in the subject of world news commentators every day. The world hates this land and hates this people and they hate the God of that people. Yet it seems that most of the Jews simply want to be recognized as simply another nation in the world. But they are not; they are God’s specifically created nation and the world knows it whether the world admits or not. We need to recognize that God is faithful to His promises whether the people of God are faithful or not. The Abrahamic Covenant was made with the Patriarchs about 4,000 years ago and God is still in the process of bringing it to fulfillment. He will not fail to do so.