

## Ask Jeff: Chapter 11

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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**Bible Text:** Isaiah 42; Isaiah 45  
**Preached On:** Sunday, November 11, 2018

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Alright, ladies and gentleman. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Alright, you can just keep walking if you want or you can make it to your seats and we'll start studying tonight.

On a serious note as we gather together as the family of faith, let us open with a word of prayer for guidance tonight. Tonight is one of those nights that happen so often where we come across a subject matter, we come across an issue that is found in the word of God that just demands some more of our time, just some more time to study what does the Bible actually say. There are so many opinions, there are so many ideas, there are so many perspectives and such, and so tonight and I hope that you are following along with the 3 year Bible reading program. I've had many of you tell me that Isaiah is a struggle. I've got good news, Matthew is right around the corner. But that's one of the beauties of Scripture is there are passages, there are sections that we struggle with. That's why 2 Timothy says, "Study the word of God." And in my experience in academia, it was the subject matters that I struggled with the most that required the most study. So I know that Isaiah has been somewhat of a struggle, Matthew is quickly coming and Exodus and we're going to be in some passages for the months ahead that most of you will find most familiar.

Let's pray.

*Lord, tonight as we gather, we know, we believe and we trust that your word means what it says and says what it means, but we also confess, God, that we have a lifetime of experience, we have history, we have had teachings and understandings and we've had conversations and such that oftentimes cloud our vision when it comes to Scripture. Lord, whether it be a specific denomination, whether it be a specific upbringing, whether it be just a specific idea that I pray somehow that you would remove those like scales from our eyes tonight and that we would approach the word of God tonight as if it's the first time we've read these passages and we would just see them for what they are so that we can live them as they're supposed to be lived. Help us, O God. Guide us as we search the Scriptures not to verify what we believe but to believe what you verify. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

Tonight, we're going to begin in Isaiah 42 and I'm giving you some warning about the veracity of Scripture tonight. All of the references that we will be leading will be on the screen behind me and in front of you so you will have access to them. One of the reasons that I wanted to spend the majority of tonight in a teaching format was so that you would have the availability to actually turn to the passages and read them for yourself. I know oftentimes it is easier just to say, "Trust me, this is what it says," but tonight I'd like you, if possible and if able, to turn in these passages so that you can read along with me and so you could see what we're alluding to tonight.

I've addressed tonight, for those of you who read the title in the Messenger, "Ask Jeff: Chapter 11." Now I know that none of you understood what that meant but about 20+ years ago, the Lord gave me the privilege to begin somewhat of a ministry, if you will call it, of spending time both in formal and informal environments answering people's questions about the Bible. What does the Bible say about this? Is it clear on this? Is it confusing on this? Whatever it may be, and I had some individuals come to me and they didn't really challenge me, they encouraged me that there are a lot of questions that get asked all the time and there's nothing wrong with that because there's always a new influx of people who are part of it, there are always people that are crossing my path over the years and to be quite honest, there are some questions I've lost count of how many times they've been asked. So the encouragement was: why don't you put at least in book form the top 10 questions? That way not that you're avoiding the questions, ignoring the questions, but there will be a resource for people who are struggling with questions that are the most frequently asked. Not that you wouldn't answer it verbally but that you could just give them a copy with the references and all the details so that they could go and research on their own. I thought it was a brilliant idea. The Lord provided the means and a few years ago I published that. The problem was chapter 10. The subject matter that we're going to address tonight was actually the original chapter 10, but I replaced it for two reasons. 1. And if you've got a copy of that book and notice that now chapter 10 is actually the section that we addressed a few weeks ago on homosexuality because it is becoming a more frequently asked issue from the word of God. But the other reason that I replaced the subject matter tonight is that as it was going through the revision process, as I was allowing folks to read and to discuss with me, it is just that controversial of a subject matter. You say, "More controversial than homosexuality?" Among the body of Christ it is. Among the "church" it is because tonight from Isaiah 42 and on throughout Scripture, we're going to deal with a subject matter that is just a word in Scripture that has so many shades of opinion. It is the word "election," and I'm not talking about what happened last Tuesday. The term "election" is a Bible term. It is a scriptural term. It is used dozens of times, in fact, tonight and I promise you we will be out by 7, tonight we're actually going to walk through every passage in the Bible that uses the word "elect, elects, or election." Every single one of them for this purpose: that there are so many different opinions and so many different views on this subject matter that it has over the last 400 years caused great division. Division among denominations. Division among individuals. Division among friends and among family members.

Now you say, "Well, why does it cause division? What's the issue there?" Well, when one discusses election, it naturally progresses, and by the way, tonight is not necessarily the

topic thereof of this, but it naturally progresses to concepts of predestination and the issues that are commonly known as or referred to as "Calvinism," and those are subject matters that when discussed are often very divisive and they're much of a struggle and one of the things that I have learned and I prayed for us tonight is that we're really guilty of having our opinion, whatever that opinion may be, and we love to take our opinion and just layer it over the Scripture and say, "I told you that's what the Bible said." Well, tonight we're just going to see what does the Bible say.

Now before we go to these passages to clarify, shall we say, the division, so to speak, within the constructs of some of these ideas there is the idea of what is called unconditional election. That's a phrase you may or may not be familiar with in theological terms and how it is typically propagated is that God in his own measure and in his own means, he has unconditionally, that is without input from anybody else or influence from anybody else, he has unconditionally elected or chosen those individuals who will one day reside in a place the Bible calls heaven and those individuals who will one day reside in a place the Bible calls hell. There is no personal "decision" to be made. It has been foreordained before the foundation of the world. Election has taken place.

This past Tuesday, we had the privilege of seeing a ballot with names on those ballots and we made a decision on who we believe would represent us best based on a variety of issues and subject matters and places. The theological term election means that God pulled that lever or made that decision irrespective of anybody or anybody else's input to the matter. Now do you see why it can be so divisive? Because to keep it very simple tonight, there is one side of the equation that says that each and everybody's eternity is already determined and nothing or nobody can change it, no matter how much they would desire to do so. The other side of the equation says that one's eternity can be decided upon their decision of what to or what not to do with Jesus Christ and the reason for so much division is there are literally a thousand shades of differences in the middle. So tonight irrespective of a stance of a denomination or the stance of a particular group or even another pastor or such, let's just see what does the Bible say about this concept known as election, God's foreordained doing irrespective of humanity's wishes, wills and ways.

Isaiah 42, beginning in verse 1 says,

1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. 2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. 3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. 4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

Now what we have here in Isaiah 42 is what we call the first mention. Some of you may or may not have heard the term, the doctrine of first mention. What that simply means is this and oftentimes these first mentions are in the book of Genesis, particularly the first

11 chapters, is the first time that you see a subject matter, the first time you see an issue raised in Scripture or a teaching, whatever it may be, that the way that it is utilized in its initial description should guide you to interpret the other times that it is used throughout Scripture. In other words, the second, the third, the fourth time that a concept, a subject matter, a word comes up, you would never interpret it contrary to how it was first used. So the doctrine of first mention helps us whether it is the sacrifices of the animals on behalf of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, or whether it is the Noachic flood in Genesis 6 and the concepts of judgment, whatever it may be, that the first time you see a subject matter, it should determine how you view it in further passages.

Now what's interesting about chapter 42 of the book of Isaiah, this entity that is elect, "mine elect." It is absolutely unquestionable that these four verses are talking about whom we know as Jesus Christ. You can't get around it. In fact, notice how many times the personal pronoun is used, "He shall not cry. His voice will be heard." And later in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus Christ actually quotes this passage as verification for his identity. He verifies, "I am the Messiah because I'm the fulfillment of this passage."

The first time that the term or the concept of elect or election is used, it's referring to a called one, that one being Jesus Christ the Messiah. Now I will share with you that in this passage it's speaking about an individual, not you as an individual or me as an individual but Jesus Christ as an individual, and not to get the cart before the horse but when we get to the New Testament, you and I are called the body of Christ, in other words, in him as an individual we collectively find our place in the family of God. So the very first mention is unequivocally about Jesus Christ as being elect, God's plan, God's purpose, God's intent, which means that when it comes to election, you cannot interpret this word or anything about it apart from the person, the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You can't do it. It can't have anything to do with anything else other than him.

Now that being said, fast forward to the book of Isaiah 45 which I have called on the outline the second mention. You say, "Well, I thought it was the law of first mention, what's the law of second mention?" I'm going to show you that the second time it's referenced it's an extension of the first. In fact, the only place that the word "elect" or "election" is used in the Old Testament is in the book of Isaiah. There's no other place in your Old Testament. So when we go to the New Testament, we have to interpret it in light of what Isaiah has shared with us.

In Isaiah 45, I'm going to begin in verse 2. It says,

2 I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: 3 And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. 4 For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

And what you see when we take chapter 42 and 45 together is that Jesus Christ is the elect, he is the purpose, he is the plan of God, but Israel is going to be called his elect. They are going to be those representatives of that body, to use that analogy, under his purpose and his plan. Two things I want you to notice about this passage. The first is this: that this group is called by God. It says in verse 4, it says, "I have called thee by your name," but he has called them as a group. Notice what it says, "For Jacob my servant's sake," Jacob was an individual, "and Israel mine elect." Jacob was renamed Israel because of the fruition over the propagation of what we know as the 12 tribes and the collective body of the people of God. In other words, when the concept of election in Scripture, though the first mention is Jesus Christ, the second mention when it begins to go into the minutiae of humanity, the first reference of humanity being elected is a corporate reference, not an individual reference. In other words, it's not speaking to you as a person or myself as a person or even a specific tribe as an entity, but Israel in their totality is called the elect of God.

Now the final mention. Turn to Isaiah 65, and I say the final mention because it's the final mention in the Old Testament within the book of what we know as Isaiah. Four references in the entire 39 books of the Old Testament, only found in Isaiah. In Isaiah 65, and by the way, the reason I call it the final mention is this: that we see this reference that Jesus Christ was elect, we see this reference that Israel is the elect, and by the way, Israel was called out in Genesis 12, but in Isaiah 65 and 66, we're dealing with the absolute end-times. We're going to be dealing with concepts of the millennial reign of Christ, the eventual what we know as the new heaven and new earth, and I want you to notice what verse 9 of chapter 65 says,

9 ... I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.

We'll turn a few more verses to verse 22, it says,

22 They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. 23 They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. 24 And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. 25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

This is obviously a reference to the end-times, the kingdom of the Lord literally physically realized on earth. But notice in chapter 65, "my people, the elect." It's plural. It's corporate in nature and I believe the reason that this is significant as we begin to turn to the New Testament is this: that Jesus Christ is the first mention as the elect but as far

as humanity is concerned, all the other passages within the book of Isaiah are referencing to humanity as a whole under the provision of the Lord and his calling.

Now, here's the issue tonight, it's the in-between. I don't think anybody is going to argue that Jesus Christ is the elect. I don't think anybody is going to have disagreement that Israel was elected by God. It's nothing that they did to deserve it. There's nothing they did to earn it. The Lord just showed up to Abraham and said, "I'm going to have you be called out to lead my people to eventually bring forth the Messiah." I don't think any of us would have any disagreement there. I don't think any of us would struggle that when we "all get to heaven," as the old hymn says, that those who were elected by God are going to be in his presence for all of eternity. That's really not the struggle, the struggle tonight is the in-between and two important questions to ask. The first one is this: what. Is God's election conditional or unconditional? In other words, is his election something that we have a say in, or is it something that is predetermined that we have absolutely no input in whatsoever? The second question is this: who. Is it speaking of a corporate election or individual? Is the concept of election speaking of the believers in totality and in general, or individually as if called by their very name?

As we transition to the New Testament, I'm just going to begin with the Gospels and we're going to work our way all the way through the book of 2 John. At least we're not hitting Revelation tonight so we will end in time. I want to begin in Matthew 24 and we're going to begin a journey of just looking at how all these passages are utilized and allow me to go ahead and share with you in advance, the information is going to be on the screen, that almost without exception every reference to somebody or something being elected is going to be a corporate reference, not an individual reference.

Matthew 24:22, Jesus is on the Mount of Olives. This is often referred to as the Olivet Discourse. He is speaking about the end-times, the tearing down of the temple, his coming. The disciples ask, "What will the sign of your coming be?" Beginning in verse 15, he begins to mention the abomination of desolation and all the end-time events that the book of Daniel prophesies and Revelation realizes. When you get to verse 22, it says,

22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

Now if you turn a few more verses to verse 31 continuing in the Olivet Discourse, it says,

31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Here is Jesus describing the aspect of the elect during these horrific times that he, himself, called the Great Tribulation, and as you read those verses, it's a collective reference to his people; it's a description to those who are his. For the elect's sake. The elect will be gathered together. It is a collective reference. It is corporate in its nature.

As we turn to the book of Mark 13, we find ourselves in the exact same Olivet Discourse except now we're going to have the Holy Spirit utilize a teenager to communicate to us. If you've ever done a study of the Gospels, Mark most likely was the young man whose cloak was removed from him the night of Jesus' captivity and his imprisonment. The Bible says he literally ran around naked that night. You say, "What does that have to do with election?" Absolutely nothing but it is entertaining to talk about.

Verse 20 of Mark 13. You're going to hear the same communication we just heard in Matthew. It says,

20 And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake [plural], whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.

22 For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.

27 And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.

Again, we have a collective term that it is the elect, it is those that are his that are gathered together, they are brought together, they are provided for by the Lord himself.

Finally in the Gospels, the book of Luke 18. Interesting that the Gospel of John, the one whom the Lord specifically sat closest to him and was his beloved, he never uses the word "elect" and never addresses the concept of election, but in Luke 18:7-8, this is not the Olivet Discourse but we're real close to the end, we are in the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry. So he's not on the Mount, he isn't describing the temple being torn down, but it's still got kind of a somewhat eschatological or end-time feel. Verses 7 and 8 of Luke 18,

7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? 8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

Again, there are two personal pronouns that are utilized to describe the elect that are both in the plural. It's a description of "them." It's a description of a group. The elect that's referenced there is corporate in its nature, not individual in specificity.

Now to the letters of Paul. Now do you have your seatbelts on? Here we go because it is in the book of Romans that we often find ourselves have the most, shall I say, heated of discussions regarding this matter. In the book of Romans, we begin in chapter 8 and then we're going to spend a lot of time in chapter 9 and 11, but as you'll see in a moment, we're going to preface these passages with some other passages.

In Romans 8:33 this statement is made,

33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

That's a simple statement about the elect, however, I want you to back up a verse to verse 32.

32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?

That's talking about Jesus. In other words, who can charge Jesus with wrongdoing? Who can say to him that he did not provide the means for our salvation and our forgiveness? So, again, even in the book of Romans which has a tendency to be a viable discussion on the subject matter, the first reference to election or the elect in the book of Romans is a direct reference to Jesus Christ and what he has done on behalf of "his elect's sake."

Now chapter 9. This is where if you've ever had the privilege, and I dare say I have, to have hours upon hours and days of conversation of the subject matter and the differences of opinions that people find themselves in, this is the section, chapters 9 through 11 of the book of Romans, that oftentimes gets the most attention, it receives the most time-frame of conversation. I want to begin, though, by reading the first seven verses of chapter 9. I think this will help us out. It says,

1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, 2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. 3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: 4 Who are Israelites [do you remember Isaiah and the reference of the elect being the people of God, the Israelites, those whom we know as those famous 12 tribes, Israel?]; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; 5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. 6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.

Now I want to take a step back for just a moment. Tonight's not a systematic study of the book of Romans, however, the Apostle Paul has been building a case, he's been building a case that the problem with all of humanity is sin, chapter 3:23, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." He has been building a case that there are some eternal consequences to that sin in chapter 6, "For the wages of sin is death." Then he gets into chapter 7 of the book of Romans and he says lest you think that he is more pious than the



rest, he calls himself the chief of sinners, nobody has sinned more than him, and he talks about the fact that the things he wished he would do, he doesn't do, and the things he wishes he wouldn't do, he does. He said, "O wretched man am I!" Basically when you get to the end of chapter 7, if that were the end of the book of Romans, we could just close it up, go home, because there is no hope. But then there is chapter 8. Chapter 8, if you're ever feeling down, if you're ever struggling with your relationship with the Lord, chapter 8 is the chapter because it says, "Therefore." You understand that "therefore" is there for a reason? "Therefore there is now," this is verse 1, "no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." And he begins to lay forth that because of what Jesus Christ has done on our behalf, that even though we have sinned and there's no excuse for our sin, that he took on our condemnation and we have become his adopted children. We are now joint heirs with him, related to him, and when you get to the end of chapter 8, it says there is nothing that can separate us. Nothing. There is no height. There is no depth. There is no power. There is no principality. There is nothing in the world that can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus, that's verse 39 of chapter 8. When you get to chapter 9 through chapter 11 of the book of Romans, all of a sudden the people of Israel are brought forth. Yes, he desires for them to be saved. Yes, it bothers him that his own kinsmen have not "seen the light," no pun to the Damascus Road as he has seen. But he goes and he utilizes the Old Testament, he utilizes who Israel is in the Old Testament to refer to us that the rules of how God operates have been transferred from what we knew as the Israelites to the church of Jesus Christ. That is why in verse 11 of chapter 9 it says,

11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

He's referring to Israel and he's saying there is nothing that any of those children did to deserve to be called out as an Israelite, but what did we just read in verse 6? "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel." In other words, he's taking these statements and he's going back and comparing the church of Jesus Christ to Israel.

If we go forward a little bit to chapter 11, we find the next reference to this concept of election. In verse 5 of chapter 11 it says,

5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

Then we go to verse 7,

7 What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded

Verse 28,

28 As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

The question we have to ask in verse 28 is who is the "they" that's being spoken of here? I want you to back up a few verses to verses 25 and 26. There was a young man years ago, obviously deceased now and not so young when this story took place, one of the longest tenures as a pastor in a Southern Baptist Church was a man by the name of Wally Amos Criswell. If you're not familiar with that name, he was the pastor at First Baptist, Dallas for 50 years. If that's the case, then you'll only have me for 48 more. We're going to be good. None of us will be here then, but that's okay. He said that the next two verses we're about to read were the most difficult verses in all the Bible to interpret. So why not? Here we go. Verse 25,

25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. 26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

Now those passages are critical and I want to pause before we go to these other passages from the pen of Paul. What he is saying there is that God's means and God's instrument and God's provision not just of the Messiah but salvation, was through the calling of Israel through the seed of Abraham, however, it says that at some point, and we know this around the time of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that they forsook, they rejected and the time of the Gentiles is now present, but what we know as this time shall one day end, and if you read the book of Revelation beginning in chapter 6, you discover that Israel will bloom again as Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24. Why is that critical to our understanding? Because Israel was collective and corporate, as we just discussed, and in between their rejection and their revival in the days ahead, you and I have a very distinct privilege of being a part of what is called the church of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ. The church was established in the book of Acts and in 1 Corinthians 15, it's going to be called up. We are often referred to as a collective entity in body, his members as 1 Corinthians 12 addresses us. Why is this critical to our understanding? Because I believe in chapters 9 through 11 which oftentimes are the most controversial, what the Apostle Paul is doing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is saying that the body of Christ, the believers in Jesus Christ who have called on the name of the Lord are much like Israel, they have been called out as a collective body for his honor, his glory, and his purpose.

Fast forward to the book of Colossians 3. I promised you that we would do this in a timely manner and I promise you it will get done. Colossians 3:12. By the way, the book of Colossians is probably the greatest challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century church as it talks about how to live a distinct and separate life in the midst of compromise and worldliness. Listen to verse 12 of Colossians 3,

12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

As the elect. You know the word "as" is a simile; it's a comparison to; it's a reference to the being called out that we as the body of Christ, we are actually an extension of what the Lord established all the way back in the book of Genesis. We were that progression. We were the fulfillment through Jesus Christ that even though the Israelites in proper rejected, that we had the privilege of receiving.

As we continue to walk through the New Testament, 1 Thessalonians 1. You didn't know that Bible drill was going to come in so handy as an adult. 1 Thessalonians 1:4, it says,

4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

Notice that those who are called elect are called brethren. Again, it's plural. It's corporate. It's a reference to believers in totality.

Go to the book of 1 Timothy 5. This is where it's going to get interesting. 1 Timothy 5:21 says,

21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

Again, even this term "elect," that which was established by God, for God, and only by him, it references the angels being a byproduct thereof but again, as you see this consistent motif, it is plural in nature.

2 Timothy 2, just a few pages over, 2 Timothy 2:10 it says,

10 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they [plural] may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Again, a reference to a collective whole, a corporate, a "they."

Then the book of Titus 1:1, the last reference by the Apostle Paul utilizing this word. It says,

1 Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness;

And it's referring there that the elect in totality and collectively agreed with his calling as an apostle. If you've ever read 2 Corinthians, that's one of the great struggles of the Apostle Paul as here he was called by God but there were a lot of folks that struggled with that. How could a man who was so vile, how could one who did so much damage to the church of Jesus Christ now be one of the great leaders of the church of Jesus Christ?

And he says it is the elect, it is the body of Christ that confirmed and called him in his apostleship.

Now we move to what we call the general epistles. General epistles, we begin with the book of Hebrews going through the book of Revelation. We find ourselves in 1 Peter and in 2 John tonight, the only passages that utilize the term "elect, elects, or election."

The book of 1 Peter 1. Just listening for the pages to quit rustling so I know you're there. 1 Peter 1:1 says,

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

This reference to the elect goes back to verse 1, these strangers. Basically he's referencing the Gentiles, the ones who were strangers to the faith in days past, but notice he references them collectively, "the strangers" in totality. It's almost as if he said, "To all the Gentiles who are elect as a part of the body of Christ."

Then fast forward to chapter 5 of 1 Peter, verse 13. It says,

13 The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you,

The entity there that is called elected is an entire church, the church at Babylon who is elect with you.

Now the book of 2 Peter 1:10. We've got two references and then we're going to wrap up. 2 Peter 1:10, it says,

10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

Again though, notice who is referenced as the election, the brethren. It's a plurality there. Notice there has never been one single reference to an individual in any one of these passages. Brethren. Strangers. The church.

Last but not least, the book of 2 John. If you ever want to have fun with somebody, just ask them to turn to 2 John 2. Do you know what? 2 John is one of those that is kind of hard to find. You know, actually this is years and years and years ago when I was very new in the ministry, I actually was dealing with a committee, a search team that was considering calling me to serve their church, and one of the men on the committee asked me, he said, "What is your opinion or what's your view on the second chapter of Jude?" And I said it's hard to have an opinion about a chapter that doesn't exist. He said, "I'm just making sure you know your Bible."

Okay, so, 2 John 1:1, it says,

1 The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth;  
and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth;

13 The children of thy elect sister greet thee.

If you read all 13 verses of 2 John, you discover very quickly that the lady is the church and the sister is another church. It's a group. It's an entity. It's collective. It's a body that's being addressed.

So here's the conclusion. There were two questions that we asked earlier, or I asked. The first is the what. Is the concept "election" conditional or unconditional? And who is it that's elected? Is it corporate or is it individual? Really the question can be is it the plan of God or is it the persons responding to the plan? As I have alluded to every passage that deals with what we know as election in both the Old Testament, Isaiah specifically, and all of the New Testament, here is how I would like to address and conclude tonight. The term "election" cannot be dismissed in the Bible. It's there and it's not just there, it's there a bunch and you get the idea that when God references his elect and when he references the election, it is unconditional. There is not a thing that you and I can do to change his plan. He has established, he has initiated from the foundation of the earth he was going to have his bride, he was going to have his church, he was going to have his children. That's from the foundation of the earth. It's the plan that is unconditional, not the persons who participate in the plan. What I mean by that is simply this: there is nothing that you and I can do, there is no amount of energy, there is no amount of effort that we could give to change God's mind on how he's going to do things, the question is this, have we made the decision to be a part of God's plan? His plan is foreordained. His plan has been established. His plan does not change, the question is have we decided to be a part of his plan because the Bible for all of the references that we've read tonight, nowhere did we read of anybody deciding to be elect, nowhere did we read of an individual who was elect, it was always a collective people whether Israel in the book of Isaiah, whether the brethren, the strangers, the church at Babylon in the New Testament.

So the issue of election that has become so divisive in so many circles particularly today, I think the issue isn't is election unconditional, I think the question is what is it, or shall we say, whom is it that is elect? I want you to know that I believe the Scripture says, not Jeff says, I believe the Scripture advocates that election is corporate, it is the corporate, collective plan of God. Hell itself wasn't going to keep the church from being established. It wasn't going to happen. In fact, when Jesus was hanging on the cross, for three hours it says that he and the world was engulfed by darkness. Now there are a lot of people who are a lot smarter than I am who have tried to somehow find an eclipse around that event that day, you can do everything you can and you're not going to find a lunar or solar eclipse anywhere around the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. That wasn't a physical darkness, my friends, that was a spiritual darkness. All hell unleashed could not stop Jesus Christ from offering himself for the sins of humanity and I've got news for you, when you read

Revelation 9, all of the residents of hell come up and they cannot stop the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. What Jesus Christ has purposed, hell itself and the devil in particular cannot and will not ever stop. In fact, Jesus in Matthew 16 said that when Peter made the great confession that, "Thou art the Christ," he said that, "Earth and flesh and blood have not revealed this but my Father which is in heaven has revealed this to you." He said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail." And just in case you need some more ammunition, in the book of Revelation 1 it says Jesus Christ has the keys to death and hell.

So hell itself and the devil in particular cannot, will not, and never thwart the plan of God. His plan is unconditional. The question we have to ask is what's the plan? Well, in brief summary tonight, his plan in Isaiah 42 was to bring a Savior and that Savior would come through the seed of Abraham known as Israel, the elect. Then that Israel would go forth and even though they would reject and even though they would turn their backs and even though they would say, "Let his blood be upon us and all of our children," it said that he would gather the strangers, he would gather the Gentiles as we read in Isaiah 65, and they would be gathered unto him. You see, his plan all along was for the body of Christ. That was always his plan. He was always purposed for redemption, reconciliation, salvation and forgiveness. And shall I conclude tonight by saying how dare we say that there are people walking on planet earth who don't have access to that salvation. How dare we say, "It's good for you but I'm sorry, friend, it just wasn't predestined from the foundation of the world."

His plan is unconditional. His plan was predestined. But you have a decision and I have a decision, are we going to be a part of that plan or not? Are we going to repent of our sins? Are we going to yield to the conviction of the Holy Spirit? Are we going to allow the blood of Jesus Christ to be applied to our lives, our heart, our sin, and our eternity?

So in summary, I believe in biblical election. God planned it. God purposed it. Hell itself can't stop it. But you and I have an opportunity to be a part of it or not. There on Pilate's front step, a group of men, and I'm sure there were ladies there said, "We're not interested in your plan, God, because it doesn't look like what we thought it would." How many times have you seen not just in the New Testament but in those around you, people say, "I just want to do it my way. I just think," and I've heard this a thousand times, "I just think if you're a sincere person, it doesn't matter, you'll be good. Believe what you need to believe or want to believe, whatever it may be, you'll be fine." You see, you don't have the right, it's not conditioned upon what you think it should be. His unconditional plan is that even though you've sinned, Jesus Christ is the only answer and you've got a choice, you either get in the plan or you don't, you either become a part of it or not, because the Bible says in the midst of chapters 9 through 11 of Romans which is so controversial, and chapter 10, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Whoever. The last time I checked, that means anybody. The last time I checked when it says whoever, that means the vilest offender and those who attend church on a regular basis; that we all come to the foot of the cross the same. None of us are ever going to change God's plans but aren't you grateful he let's us be a part of it? Aren't you grateful he says, "Hey, you can't do anything to deserve it or earn it but I'm going to let you be a part of it anyway."

Tonight as we have our time of response, our invitation, I'm going to do it a tad bit differently. I'm going to come down to the front like I always do. I'm not going to have us stand, we're not going to sing, but we are going to have some music that's playing in the background for just a little bit and we're just going to have a time of prayer, just a time of closure tonight, and maybe you're that person who says, "Do you know what? It's time to get serious about the things of God. It's time to repent. It's time to get saved." Maybe you're that person tonight that would say, "Do you know what? I've been visiting a long time, I just want to be a part of First Baptist." I don't know what it is but the music is going to be playing and we're going to be bowed in a time of prayer and solitude and I'm going to be down here at the front and if there's a decision to be made tonight, let me encourage you just to step out and step forward. You know, you don't have to be standing up and singing to make a decision. A lot of places around the world, they stay seated because do you know what they say? If you won't stand up in here, you're not going to stand up out there. So a quiet time of reflection, invitation. I will be down here at the front as we have a time of prayer and reflection and if there's a decision to be made, I encourage you, step out and step forward.

Let's pray.

With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, if you're that person tonight that needs to make a decision, I'm right up here. Just come on down. It's not a time of embarrassment, it's not a time of shame, it's actually a time of celebration. You know, one of the great things about Sunday night is we've had several people lately who this has been the time when they've said, "Hey, I want to be a part of this church." If that's you tonight, we want to celebrate. Maybe you're that person tonight that says, "Do you know what? I've been to church my whole life but I never made that personal decision for Jesus Christ. I need to do it." Just step on out, come here. I'm here. I'd love to celebrate with you.

Or maybe you're that person like we're going to experience next Sunday, we have three young people who are going to be baptized next Sunday, and maybe you've been a believer for years but you've never testified through your baptism, I'd love to celebrate that with you, we'd love to celebrate it tonight.

Or maybe tonight is not one of those nights where it involves walking down an aisle but maybe it's one of those nights that involves walking out in just a few moments realizing how grateful we should be to God that he lets us be a part of his plan. In his power, his omniscience, he could have excluded us. You realize with the exception of maybe a couple of you, the vast majority of us tonight, we're the strangers, we're the Gentiles, we were the ones in the outer courts and yet he said, "Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Maybe you and I tonight in a very long study on a particular concept, maybe we leave grateful for the family of faith, grateful for the body of Christ, grateful that he would even be willing to save us. You know, when you have gratitude, it changes your attitude. You

walk more upright not because you're proud but because you realize you're his child and you're not doing it on your own.

A few more seconds. Any decisions, I'll be here. We'd love to celebrate with you tonight.

*Heavenly Father, tonight we've searched your word from Isaiah to 2 John and, Lord, we could weave a thread with specific words and constructs but more than anything, we see the thread of your grace and your mercy and your love to each and every one of us. God, we confess tonight, we stand before you so unworthy, unworthy of you bearing the nails on the cross, unworthy of you saying, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do," and unworthy of you saying, "Whosoever will call on me, I will save them and forgive them." We are unworthy but, God, thank you, thank you that your arm of mercy and grace has reached down to save us.*

*Lord, as we go out into the world in just a moment, it's a dark world out there and it's tough so, God, would you give us as your body of Christ, give us the belt of truth, give us the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, give us the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit. May our feet be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Help us, O God, just to live and to walk and to be your people, your light, your salt in this very dry, dark world. And help us, O God, tonight to see that even a subject matter that among so many is so divisive, it gives us hope that your plan for your church has always been the plan and that we have a privilege to be a part of it.*

*Lord, again tonight we are grateful and we thank you for your provision in our lives, for an incredible body of believers once again gathered. Lord, empower us not to be folks who just sit on a pew and sing songs and go to Bible study, but help us go and be the church wherever we find ourselves. It is in the mighty powerful name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*