

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 44

KEY TERMS: ELECTION, PART 5

Even unbelievers and unbelieving nations can be used by God and appointed to His service. These unbelievers can be exceptionally cruel and vicious and yet be the elect of God in that they are appointed to do His will. They are not believers but they are still elected by God to serve Him and to accomplish His desired ends.

In terms of nations, God appointed Assyria, a totally pagan nation, to execute His judgment on the Northern Kingdom, Israel. Pagan kings and their nations were used and can be used by God to fulfill His will. Obviously, the fact that these pagan men are appointed by God to fulfill His will has no bearing on justification salvation; they were not believers. God's choice or election of a person for any reason, in and of itself, should not be interpreted to mean justification salvation--ever.

1 Chronicles 5:26 ²⁶So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, even the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away into exile, namely the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara and to the river of Gozan, to this day.

2 Kings 17:6, 23 ⁶In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel away into exile to Assyria, and settled them in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.... ²³ the LORD removed Israel from His sight, as He spoke through all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria until this day.

Also, in terms of nations, God used both Assyria and Babylon, both totally pagan nations, to execute His judgment on Judah.

Isaiah 10:5–6 ⁵Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hands is My indignation, ⁶I send it against a godless nation And commission it against the people of My fury To capture booty and to seize plunder, And to trample them down like mud in the streets.

Jeremiah 1:13–16 ¹³The word of the LORD came to me a second time saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north." ¹⁴Then the LORD said to me, "Out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land. ¹⁵"For, behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north," declares the

LORD; “and they will come and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about and against all the cities of Judah. ¹⁶“I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands.

2 Chronicles 36:20–21 ²⁰Those who had escaped from the sword he [Nebuchadnezzar] carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

Even though Assyria and Babylon had been chosen by God to do His will in punishing Israel and Judah, they themselves would be judged and punished for their arrogant pride and evil cruelty.

Isaiah 10:12 ¹²So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will say, “I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness.”

Jeremiah 50:18 ¹⁸“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Behold, I am going to punish the king of Babylon and his land, just as I punished the king of Assyria.

It is interesting to note that God called Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan king, His servant three times (Jer. 25:9, 27:6, 43:10). Servant, עֶבֶד, as used in connection with this king refers to one who helps in the service of another but is not necessarily a possession of another; it expresses the position of a human being before God. God first began using Babylon as His chosen instrument appointed to bring His judgment against Judah while Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan king. Scripture seems to indicate that pagan king became a believer after God subjected him to some divine judgment. Daniel quoted the Babylonian King's words that suggest, late in his reign, he became a believer in the one true God of heaven and earth.

Jeremiah 25:9 ⁹‘behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant [עֶבֶד], and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.

Jeremiah 27:6 ⁶“Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant [נְבֻכַדְנֶצַּר], and I have given him also the wild animals of the field to serve him.

Jeremiah 43:10 ¹⁰and say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Behold, I am going to send and get Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant [נְבֻכַדְנֶצַּר], and I am going to set his throne right over these stones that I have hidden; and he will spread his canopy over them.

Daniel 4:34–35, 37 ³⁴“But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. ³⁵“All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’... ³⁷“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.”

Cyrus, pagan King of Persia, was also used by God to do His will. There is no doubt that God’s plan was to use this pagan Persian king to get Israel back into the land. He called Cyrus His “shepherd” and His “anointed.” Cyrus was appointed or elected by God to allow the Israelites to move back to Judah and rebuild the Temple, the wall, and the city. The Bible never indicates Cyrus became a believer.

Isaiah 44:28-45:1-7 ²⁸“It is I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd [רֹעֶה]! And he will perform all My desire.’ And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built,’ And of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’” ¹Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed [מְשִׁיחַ], Whom I have taken by the right hand, To subdue nations before him And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: ²“I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. ³“I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden wealth of secret places, So that you may know that it is I, The LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. ⁴“For the sake of Jacob My servant, And Israel My chosen [בְּחֵיר] one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor Though you have not known Me. ⁵“I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; ⁶That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, ⁷The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.

Shepherd, רֹעֶה, is a metaphorical use of the word to refer to human leaders; it became a regular designation for ruling nobility. “The title ‘My Shepherd’ was one that God used of the Davidic kings. The fact that He used it here of a pagan monarch shows that God would use pagans to fulfill His wishes—since the Davidic kings had proved unreliable” [Thomas L. Constable, *Thomas Constables Notes on the Bible: Isaiah to Daniel*, p. 4:127].

Anointed, מָשִׁיחַ, is defined as a person having sacred oil poured ceremonially on one’s head and so become a person with special authority and function with the implication of one having the choice and approval of God. It can also refer to such a person as the anointed one. Obviously, we associate this word with the Messiah, but it didn’t carry that kind of connotation in the Old Testament with the exception of Daniel 9:25-26 where the NASB translates the word as “Messiah.” The ASV, RSV, and NET Bibles all translate it as the anointed one which is probably a more accurate translation. “One unique instance of this term is in reference to Cyrus the Persian, a non-Israelite who was regarded as God’s anointed (Isa. 45:1); therefore, one is forced to understand this characterization, not as a statement of the individual’s inherent goodness and perfection, since Cyrus was a worshipper of pagan deities like Marduk. On the contrary, it is a statement of God’s appointing or choosing an individual for a task. Furthermore, the concept of the *masiyah*, meaning Messiah, as a Savior is not fully developed in the Old Testament” [Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, s. v. “מָשִׁיחַ”]. Generally speaking, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed in the Old Testament as part of their appointment, or election, to service. Cyrus was not specifically anointed with oil when placed into God’s service but he was specifically appointed or commissioned to serve God in the return and restoration of the Jewish people into Judah and Jerusalem. “The Israelites thought of their anointed leaders as those whom God uniquely raised up to accomplish His purposes. By calling Cyrus His anointed, the Lord was teaching them that He was the Lord of all the earth, not just Israel. He could and would use whomever he [sic] chose to deliver His people” [Thomas L. Constable, *Thomas Constable’s Notes on the Bible: Isaiah to Daniel*, p. 4:128].

2 Chronicles 36:22–23 ²²Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia—in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah—the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, ²³“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed [פָּקַד] me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!’”

Appointed, פָּקַד, has a variety of meanings and the word has proved somewhat hard to pin down. In this context, it seems to involve “the transfer of authority from a superior to

a subordinate, i.e., appoint someone over someone or something; or the subjecting of someone or something to the subordinate's control, i.e., entrust, commit, deposit someone or something to someone" [Willem A. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, s. v. "פקד"]. God gave Cyrus the authority to return the people to the land of Judah and the people were entrusted to his care in so doing.

God not only revealed Himself to Cyrus through the written Word but this pagan king was used by God as a vehicle to reveal Himself to the Israelites and to all men from the rising to the setting of the sun. God elects nations and He elects people, individually or corporately, for service and not for justification salvation.

In the Old Testament, to choose something or someone can have a variety of meanings depending on context. When God chooses someone, the choice of that person or people group is always made with a view towards appointing that person to service or to ministry. The results of the relationship are the important factor, not the basis for the relationship. There is also the factor of quality; those chosen for service either are or become by virtue of their appointment or position the choice ones. There is not one verse of Old Testament Scripture to indicate God chose particular people for salvation to the exclusion of other people who would never be saved because they were not chosen. As we move into the New Testament Greek, the same concepts are presented.

The three main Greek words related to election in the New Testament are the noun, ἐκλογή, the verb, ἐκλέγομαι, and the adjective, ἐκλεκτός. It is obvious simply from the sound of the Greek pronunciation that our English word "elect" is a transliteration of the words and not a translation. This is a critical point to comprehend relating to the meaning of these words. A translation instead of a transliteration would have gone a long way in eliminating some of the incorrect theology surrounding the doctrine of what is commonly called election. The entries in the lexicons for this word group all exhibit a fairly strong tendency to insert theology into the meanings so caution is needed when using them. When I say they insert their theology, I'm referring to their doctrine of divine election in which some people are chosen for justification salvation to the exclusion of all others. This is one definition where the lexicons can be seriously misleading.

Generally, these are the definitions for these words:

ἐκλογή [noun] the choice of the excellent; selection; careful sifting on the basis of options and serviceability for a specific use

ἐκλέγομαι [verb] to pick out; to appoint; to commission; to make a special choice based upon significant preference often implying a strongly favorable attitude toward what is chosen

ἐκλεκτός [adjective] chosen; selected; being especially distinguished; choice; excellent

These words refer to an appointment to service and to quality.

The origin of the words in secular Greek usage has a military connotation and eventually came to refer to electing or appointing to office via a democratic electoral process which, of course, is not the point in the New Testament. In ancient Greece, "...the secular Greek usage of the verb had to do with electing or appointing people to an office or responsibility with an accompanying obligation to fulfill it responsibly. This is most important since democratic elections began in Greece and the word originated in that connection" [C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism & Arminianism: An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation*, p. 316]. The concept of appointing people to an office for service is frequently very much the point in the New Testament when these words are used.

"Although these words originate in a military vocabulary, by the time of Plato *eklegomai* and *eklektos* are already in use in a political sense (referring to elections). In every case it is a matter of electing people to perform a certain task, or administer a certain office (elders, *archontoi*, or other officials and people with public responsibilities)...and [it refers to] the selection of individuals from the whole army for a particularly difficult or glorious mission...But it is the election itself which makes it possible for him to take up his function and which at the same time lays an obligation on him...It is always, however, accompanied by some kind of obligation or task concerned with the well-being of all the other members of the community..." [Lothar Coenen in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* as quoted by C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism & Arminianism: An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation*, p. 316].

"...the verb *eklegomai* in the secular Greek predominantly evidences a meaning of the selection of the best or choice, such as 'the most beautiful of what is to be praised' (Xenophon) or 'something good from literary treasures' (Herodotus)...the use of two most important words from the classical usage of the noun, [are] 'appointment' and 'commissioning': 'appointment for special tasks...The emphasis is always on commissioning for service.' The predominant meaning of the adjective *eklektos* is 'choice' or 'selected.' It is used of things of best quality: 'choice judges' (Plato), 'selected, lightly armed troops' (Thucydides). The meaning of the noun *ekloge* is predominantly 'selection,' also having a *qualitative meaning*. It is used of officials, rulers, elders, and a commission of experts. It involves a 'careful sifting on the basis of aptness

and serviceability for a specific end'" [G. Shrenk, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and *BDAG* as quoted by C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism & Arminianism: An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation*, p. 316].

"Certain factors seem to be common in these contexts [ancient Greek]: (a) there is a plurality of objects or persons from which to choose; (b) the act of choosing implies a judgment by the chooser as to which object or person is considered most suitable for the purpose at hand; (c) the chooser acts freely, i.e., the specific choice made is not the result of coercion. Many of the contexts are political, usually referring to public elections...('who have been selected according to meritorious selection,' i.e., chosen on grounds of merit from among the best); others have to do with conscription for military service. It is clear that certain factors—experience, social standing, courage, etc.—constitute the conditions necessary for selection. But it is the election itself that makes it poss[ible] for those chosen to take up their functions, which are always accompanied by some kind of obligation or task concerned with the well-being of others" [*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. "ἐκλέξω"].

It is very important to note that Christ is referred to as being elect in the New Testament and actually in the Old Testament as well. Understanding how this applies to Christ can help us understand the concept in total. Can the fact that Christ is elect possibly mean that He was chosen by God to be the Messiah out of a plurality of would be saviors? Of course not, He has always been the Son and He has always been designated to be the Savior; there is no other and there never has been another. Beyond all doubt there is no aspect of election that would refer to justification salvation for the Lord; He has no need of it. Therefore, what does it mean to say that Christ is elect or chosen? The main thing to understand is that Christ was not the chosen One; He is the choice One, the supreme One, and the preeminent One and that is how we should understand election as it pertains to Him. That fact then sheds light on how we should understand election as it pertains to those people who are in Christ by virtue of a volitional decision to place their faith in Him.

You may recall that in Isaiah 42:1, God referred to the Servant as His chosen, or choice, one. There is no aspect of Christ's life and ministry that suggests He was chosen; who He is and what He was to do has been an eternal reality. There was no point in time when He was chosen to be the Servant (the Messiah); the Messiah is who He is.

Isaiah 42:1 ¹"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen [בְּחִיר, ἐκλεκτός, choice] one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.

This Hebrew word refers to the special relationship based in affection that the Father has for the Son; it isn't about choosing Him to be the Messiah. Further, it is about identifying Him to be the supreme or preeminent One. The Servant is not the "chosen" One, rather, He is the "choice" One as the use of ἐκλεκτός would indicate. This Scripture then relates to the New Testament pericope concerning the Transfiguration.

Luke 9:35 ³⁵Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen [ἐκλέγομαι, appointed, choice] One; listen to Him!"

The parallel verses in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt. 17:5, Mark 9:7) have ἀγαπητός, translated "beloved," rather than ἐκλέγομαι translated "chosen." Metzger attributes this change to scribal assimilation and he believes Luke 9:35 is almost certainly according to the original manuscript. Scribal assimilation refers to the fact that occasionally a scribe copying the Scriptures would change the text to, in their mind, more nearly reflect other parallel Scriptures. It seems to have been an attempt to harmonize, at least in the mind of the scribe, the Scriptures. Even if the gospels are all correct as written using ἐκλέγομαι and ἀγαπητός, isn't being the "choice" One more in concert with the concept of being the "beloved" One than is the "chosen" One?

Christ is said to be the chosen One of God in Isaiah 49:7 but this could just as easily have been translated as "appointed."

Isaiah 49:7 ⁷Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, To the despised One, To the One abhorred by the nation, To the Servant of rulers, "Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down, Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen [חָבַר, ἐκλέγομαι, appointed] You."

The Jewish rulers used ἐκλεκτός to refer to Christ in a mocking way as He was dying on the cross.

Luke 23:35 ³⁵And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen [ἐκλεκτός, choice] One."

There is no evidence the religious Jewish leadership would have thought of the Messiah as being one who would have been chosen for His ministry. These men were intimately acquainted with the languages spoken at the time; therefore, it makes much more sense to understand them to be saying that Christ was claiming to be God's Choice One. The word they used has a qualitative sense. They knew the words were referring to the quality of the Christ of God and not to whether or not He was chosen by God to be the Messiah. This is not an acknowledgment by them that He was, in fact, the Messiah;

they are ridiculing and mocking Him for His claim to be the Christ, the Choice One of God. Understanding the Messiah to be the choice One rather than the chosen One would have been in accordance with Jewish theology and that is surely what they were expressing when they were mocking Him.

The NASB actually, properly translates ἐκλεκτός as “choice” in 1 Peter 2:4, 6; it is the only translation I found that did translate this word as “choice” in these two verses. All the other translations use “chosen” or use “elect” to translate ἐκλεκτός. It is unfortunate that the NASB translators rarely recognized this meaning. Even in the NASB, the theological pull of understanding this word to mean “chosen” is just too strong for them to overcome in most other verses which use this word group. Obviously, the use of “choice” here is evidence that at times some theologians can and do recognize the element of superior quality in the use of the words.

1 Peter 2:4, 6 ⁴And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice [ἐκλεκτός] and precious in the sight of God,... ⁶For this is contained in Scripture: “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE [ἐκλεκτός] STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”

The NASB translators also recognized the quality nuance of this word group regarding one man Paul singled out for commendation. Every other translation I checked used “chosen in the Lord” for this verse with the exception of the Revised Standard Version which used “eminent” and that is a perfectly acceptable translation. The Complete Jewish Bible has it “chosen by the Lord” and that gives a very false picture of the meaning Paul intended to convey, but that is the most common way this word group is defined and it is simply incorrect. “Chosen in the Lord” would be somewhat correct if that was defined as those who are in the Lord are the elect, but that isn't what they mean by saying it that way. They mean that those in the Lord are chosen and then they are in the Lord. That's backwards.

Romans 16:13 ¹³Greet Rufus, a choice [ἐκλεκτός, choice; eminent (RSV)] man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.

Besides Israel and the Church, there is another elect, or choice, group identified in the Bible and that is the faithful angels who passed the test and who did not follow Satan.

1 Timothy 5:21 ²¹I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen [ἐκλεκτός, choice] angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.

There is nothing in the Word of God to suggest that God elected or chose some angels to refuse Satan's exhortations to join him in rebellion against God and by virtue of that refusal guarantee their eternal presence before God. There is also nothing in the Scriptures to suggest that God elected or chose some angels for a never ending existence in "the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt. 25:41) by following Satan and serving him in rebellion against their Creator God. The Bible never says God made those choices for the angels. It seems much better to understand the connection Paul made between Christ and the concept that these are God's angels to translate this as "choice" angels rather than as chosen angels because everything connected with God is superlative and that includes the faithful angels who, by virtue of their obedience and their faith in Him, have become choice. By passing the test placed before them, they confirmed their faith and their faithfulness and these angels were then appointed to continue their service before God and they are the choice angels in that assigned role today. There is nothing in the Scriptures to suggest any angels were chosen to be saved or, conversely, chosen to be damned.