

Election, Covenant and Community

A. The Election of Israel

1. Election *ex nihilo*

- a. the object of election does not exist prior to the act of election
election creates its own object: God creates what he elects
(Gen 17:7ff; Rom 4:5,17,19,24)
- b. this means that election is not selection
- c. election is the means to the creation of Israel
- d. Israel can only exist as the elect of God, named and given identity by him
(Gen 17:5; 32:28; Ps 132:13 – 14; Isa 43:1,6,7,15,20,21; 44:1,2; 49:1,7)
- e. no grounds for election can be found in Israel
(Deut 7:7; 9:4,6)
- f. Yahweh elected to show forth his power in weakness
- g. this magnifies his electing love which is the ground of election
(Deut 7:6ff)

2. Election and covenant

- a. election is grounded in the covenant
- b. election is to an exclusive covenant relationship
(Deut 10:14 – 15)
- c. this constitutes Israel as a holy nation
(Ex 19:5 – 6, Deut 7:6)
- d. Israel belongs uniquely to God
(Ex 34:9; Deut 4:20; 32:8 – 9)
- e. this is expressed by the language of election:
 - (1) God only *knows* Israel
(Amos 3:2 cf. Jer 1:5)
 - (2) Israel only *knows* God
(Deut 13:2,6,13)
- f. this knowledge is personal, intimate and experiential
- g. God ties *his* name to Israel
(Ex 3:15)

- h. this means that ,by grace, God and Israel form a complex unity
 - i. God is the husband of Israel, Israel is God’s wife
(Isa 54:5; 61:10; 62:4 –5; Jer 3:20; 31:32; Ez 16:32; 23; Hos 1 -3)
 - j. Israel is God’s son, God is Israel’s father
(Deut 32:6; Isa 63:16; Hos 1:10; 11:1)
 - k. this contains within it all the elements of the covenant
 - (1) victory over enemies
 - (2) inheritance of nations
 - (3) blessing and cursing in relation to Israel
(Psalm 2)
 - l. Israel is a unit – in – relation to God, the temple in which he dwells
(Lev 26:12, Ezek 37:27; Isa 60:19; Zech 2 :10 – 13)
3. Election and community
- a. individuals are not elected as such
 - b. the primary election is of Abraham and his *seed*
(Gen 12:3,13:15)
 - c. election is corporate, collective and national
(Ex 19:5 – 6; Deut 7:6; 10:15; 14:2; Ps 105:6,43;Isa 41:8)
 - d. this does not mean that all Israel is faithful, there is an “elect remnant”
(Isa 10: 20 – 23; 14:1; 65:9)
 - e. it is the corporate “people of God” that is an abiding group
 - f. this concept is developed retrospectively in the New Testament
(Rom 9 – 11)
 - g. the notion of a collective unity can be elucidated in terms of a corporate solidarity, the priority of unity over diversity, community over individuality
 - h. this is expressed in a variety of ways in the Old Testament
 - (1) a family is identified with its ancestor
(Ge 13:15 – 17; Isa 41:8; Hos 11:1; Mal 1:3 –4)
 - (2) punishment and blessing on a corporate scale
(Ex 20: 5 –6; Num 16; Josh 7; Gen 12:3; Ex 32:13)
 - (3) the sacrifices for the nation on the Day of Atonement
(Lev 16:16,19,21)

- (4) prayers expressing corporate responsibility
(Ezra 9:5 –15; Neh 9:33; Dan 9:5 – 9)
 - (5) guilt borne by descendants
(2 Sam 21: 1- 14)
- i. other collective metaphors include:
 - (1) flock
(Pss 23; 78:52; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; Jer 13:17; 23:1; Hos 4:16)
 - (2) house
(Ex 16:31; Lev 10: 6; 19:3; Ru 4:11; 1 Sam 7:2 – 3; 2 Sam 12:8; Isa 2:5; Jer 2:4; 5:15)
 - (3) people
(Deut 7:6; 14:2; 21:8; 1 Sam 2:24; 1 Ki 8:30,33 – 34; Isa 43:20)
 - j. this does not exclude but highlights individual identity and responsibility
(Jer 31:29 – 30; Ezek 18:2 – 4)
4. The purpose of election
- a. election is to a special destiny
 - b. this involves service
 - c. such service may entail special suffering
 - d. this destiny is achieved through the special power of *blessing*
(Gen 12:2 – 3)
 - e. the ultimate meaning of election is not revealed under the old covenant
 - f. the goal of election looks beyond Israel to all nations (Gen 12:3)
 - g. this is attached to the knowledge which God has of Abraham that leads to intercession
(Gen 17:19; 23 – 33)
 - h. prophetic passages speak of the election of the nations
(Isa 19:19 – 25; 45:20 – 25)
 - i. Israel serves a religious role of witness, messenger and priest to the peoples
(Isa 42:19,43:10; 45:14 cf. Ex 19:6)
 - j. disobedience to the covenant leads to cursing
(Deut 7:25 –26,27- 29; Ezek 35 – 44; Am 3:2)

5. Election and Messiah

- a. there is a progressive narrowing down of election to an individual
- b. this is the Servant of the Lord
(Isa 41:8 –9; 42:1)
- c. he is the answer as to how Abraham and his seed will be a blessing to the nations
- d. he is the living covenant between God and the people
(Isa 42:6, 49:8)
- e. the mediation of election is through the expression of God's power in weakness
(Isa 52:13 – 53: 12)
- f. through the rejection of the Servant Israel will somehow fulfil the divine purpose of election
- g. from the perspective of the New Testament the whole history of God's covenant with Israel prophetically prefigures the fulfillment of its election in Jesus

B. Election and Jesus as Messiah

1. Jesus as the Electing God

- a. as the Word who is Jesus Christ is always with God, this reality of God concerning his Son is the basic determination of God concerning all things. “Jesus Christ was the choice or election of God in respect of this reality (which is distinct from himself)...In the beginning with God, i.e. in the resolve of God which precedes the existence, the possibility and the reality of His creatures, the very first thing is the decree whose realisation means and is Jesus Christ.” (Barth)
(John 1:1 – 18; Rom 8:29f.; Eph 1:4; 3:10; Col 1:15)
- b. the content of God’s gracious act of election is the elected human Jesus Christ. He is the relation between God and humanity.
- c. if Jesus is only elected and not also Elector we have no real knowledge of our election, for the electing God is either behind or above him
- d. like the Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ participates in the divine decree of election as a divine subject. “In no event which takes place between the Father and the Son is the Son merely an object.” (Barth)
- e. in this way God has ordained himself to be the person called Jesus. This is the God who loves humanity as he has eternally loved himself.
(John 17:24)
- f. this means that God has tied himself to the universe in the fullest possible way
- g. in the Gospel of John the Father gives the elect to the Son, this does not mean that Jesus is only passive in election
(John 6:37; 17:2,6,9)
- h. Jesus himself chooses who will follow him, this separates them from the world
(John 13:18; 15:16,19)
- i. this is not to be understood as a representative and instrumental action only but an act of divine sovereignty
(Cf. John 1: 3,10; Rom 8:29f.; Eph 1:4; 3:10; Col 1:15)
- j. Jesus is the immediate executor of election
(Matt 28:18; John 5:22,26,27; Rev 3:5)

2. Jesus as the Elect Servant

- a. the election of Jesus is pre –temporal
(Eph 1:4)
- b. the elect person Jesus Christ is the true object of the divine predestination
- c. the baptism of Jesus is the occasion of the Father’s public declaration that Jesus is his elect Son
(Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22)
- d. the background is the conflation of the images of the Davidic king and the suffering servant
(Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1)
- h. God’s good pleasure (*eudokeo*) in Jesus seems in context to carry the sense “pleasurably choose” for service
(Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Matt 12:18. Cf. 2 Peter 1:17)
- i. the election of Jesus means that he is uniquely holy
(John 6:69; 10:36; 17:16; Acts 3:14; 4:27; Rev 3:7. Cf. Rom 1:4)
- j. Jesus was chosen to fulfil the divine plan the Messiah would suffer and die, rise again and rule over creation
(Matt 26:24; Mark 14:21; Luke 22:22; 24:26; Acts 2:33; 3:20; 4:28; 13:29; Eph 1:9 – 10; Heb 10: 9 –10; 1 Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8)
- k. the election of Jesus by God is set in opposition to rejection by his people
(John 1:11; 1Pet 2:4 – 6)
- l. whether or not Jesus is the Messiah, the chosen of God, is the principal point of contention with the Jewish leaders
(Matt 27:43; Luke 20:2; 22:35)
- m. the rejection of Jesus is the outworking of the divine predestination that God has chosen for himself reprobation, perdition and death; he has made our guilt his own. “Predestination is the non – rejection of man.” (Barth)
- n. by rejecting its election Israel becomes the means for the taking away of the sin of the world and the origin of the church
- o. some texts tie the election of Jesus to his sonship (John 1:34; Luke 9:35; 22:35. Cf. Rom 1:4; 2 Pet 1:17)
- p. in Johannine language this appears to be conveyed by the term *monogenes* (“only”, “unique”)
(John 1:14,18, 3:16,18, 1 John 4:9)

- q. the early church identified Jesus as Isaiah's chosen Servant of the Lord
(Isa 41:8 – 9; 42:1; 53: 7 –8; Matt 8:17; 12:18 – 21; Acts 3:23;
4:25,27,30; 8:32 - 33)
- r. the prophetic, priestly and kingly elements of Israel's election are fulfilled in
the life of Jesus as the Messiah
- s. his life service qualifies him to be judge of all
(Acts 10:42; 17:31)
- t. this is verified by the resurrection
(Acts 17:31; Rom 1:4)
- u. Jesus is the only individual in the Gospels who is said to be "elect"

3. Election is in Christ

- a. election occurs in the sphere of the reciprocal knowledge of Father and Son (Matt 11:25 – 27; Luke 10: 21 – 22; John 15:10,16; 17:20,23,2,6,9)
- b. this involves the power to know the Father *in* Jesus
- c. this is more than knowing God through Jesus or in terms of benefits deriving from him
- d. the entry into the sphere of the divine knowledge brings salvation (John 17:3)
- e. God chose and accepted the church in Christ in eternity (Eph 1:4,6)
- f. Jesus is the principal Elected One, and God has chosen an elected body to be included in him
- g. this means participation in Christ's election
- h. we are all called to fulfil the election of Jesus
- i. this is achieved through the cross where the previous division between Jew and Gentile is overcome (Eph 2:11 – 22)
- j. the one new humanity is the church and the *mystery* of the church (Eph 3:4 – 9; 5:32; Col 1:26 – 27)
- k. the permanent existential and ontological centre of being of the church is Jesus
- l. Christ is “the mirror of election...we cannot find the certainty of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father, if we look at him apart from the Son.” (Calvin)
- m. this is central to the meaning of the new covenant, in Christ God chooses for himself a whole people

4. The Corporate Election of the Church

- a. since the church has inherited many of the terms, categories and promises God gave to Israel as the elect people of God, it follows that the church is an elect people
(Rom 2:28; 9:25; 11:17 – 24; Gal 6:16; Phil 3:3etc.)
- b. if the church is the nation that inherits the kingdom belonging to Israel, then the church must now be the elect community
(Matt 21:43)
- c. this is confirmed by the numerous corporate metaphors used to describe the church: the body of Christ, the temple, the bride, the people of God etc.
(1Cor 12:12 – 27; Eph 1:22 – 23; 1Cor 3:16 – 17; 6:19 – 20; Rev 19:7; 21:9; 2 Cor 6:14 – 7:1; Gal 3:26 - 29; 6:10 etc.)
- d. the corporate election language of the Old Testament is directly appropriated to the church
(1 Peter 2:9 cf. Ex 19:5 – 6; Deut 7:6; 10:15; Isa 43:20 (LXX); 61:6)
- e. a congregation can be identified as elect
(1 Peter 5:13; 2 John 1,13)
- f. God is able to choose a company with certain characteristics who constitute the church
(1 Cor 1: 27 – 28; James 2:5)
- g. a group of people appears chosen to/responds to the gospel call
(Acts 13:48; 2 Thess 2:13; Tit 1:1; Heb 9:15; 1Peter 1: 1-2; 2 Peter 1:3,10; Jude 1)
- h. groups are appealed to respond to the gospel
(Acts 2:39; 3:17ff; 2 Cor 5:20; 1Thess 1:4 – 10 etc)
- i. the *church* is chosen in Christ in eternity; the whole framework of the Ephesians epistle bears this out
(Eph 1:4; 2:12, 16 etc.)
- j. this indicates that the frame of reference of the New Testament doctrine of election is not individualistic but inclusive or organic
- k. this finds its broadest expression in Paul’s use of Adam – Christ typology
(Rom 5:12 - 21; 1 Cor 15: 22)
- l. what is in mind is a solidarity between the “one” and the “many”
(Rom 12:12; 1 Cor 12:12; Gal 3:16 etc.)

5. Election is of Grace

- a. the election of Jesus to *be* the Christ is wholly dependent on the power of God.
“As Abraham gets a son by divine miracle, Israel by a divine creative action gets Jesus out of virgin soil.” (Daane)
- b. God is the subject of election
(Rom 8:28 – 38; 2 Thess 2:13)
- c. election is a divine prerogative which creates its own object
(Rom 9: 1 –24; Gal 1:15)
- d. this creation occurs in Christ
(Eph 2:10,15)
- e. that the Gentiles are now included in the people of God is a supernatural (unnatural) phenomenon that surpasses the exclusive election of Israel
(Rom 11:17 – 24)
- f. the basis of God’s election is grace
(Rom 11:5; 2 Tim 1:9)
- g. this is emphasised by the eternal nature of God’s choice
(Acts 15:16 –18; Eph 1:4; Rev 13:8; 17:8)
- h. foreknowledge as a foundation of election seems to be a knowledge of persons as such, not of properties
(Rom 8:29; 11:2; 1 Peter 1:2 cf. 1 Peter 1:20)
- i. this means personal effort and status are irrelevant
(Rom 9:30; 11:6; 1 Cor 1:27 – 28)

6. The Purpose of Election

- a. the dominant purpose of election is Christlikeness
(Rom 8:29)
- b. this means sonship
(Rom 9:24 – 26; 1 John 3: 1- 3)
- c. the goal of election is holiness
(Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:4; Col 3:12; 1 Thess 4:7; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:15; 2:10 Cf. Eph 5:27; Col 1:22 - 23)
- d. this effects an eternal witness of the church to the love of God
(Eph 1:22; 2:7; 3:10 etc.)
- e. the corporate election of the church, Jew and Gentile, is the concrete sign and reflection in history of God's plan to unite everything in the cosmos under the headship of Christ
(Eph 1:10)
- f. the elect community witnesses to the fact of the election of Jesus as the Christ, and so calls the world to faith in him
- g. that to which it witnesses by its existence is the passing away of the old reality in Christ and the birth of the new creation
- h. the church is the mirror of the mirror of election, it is called to mediate Christ, this is its inner reality
- i. this means service to the whole of humanity, to be a blessing for the nations

7. Election and Suffering

- a. “the elect” in the Synoptics are usually referred to in the context of tribulation (which is eschatological)
(Matt 24:22,24,31, Mark 13:20,22,27; Luke 18:7)
- b. they are those who are covered by God’s protection
(Luke 18:7)
- c. others may fall away but the elect endure
(Matt 25:10,24,31)
- d. this element of preservation and perseverance is also found in John
(John 6:37; 15:16 (2); 17:2,11 – 12)
- e. to be called to be a Christian is, in the epistles, to be called to suffer
(Phi 1:29; 1Pet 2:21)
- f. the Apocalypse sees the saints as “called and chosen and faithful”
(Rev 17:14)
- g. the election of Paul is associated with suffering
(Acts 8:16; 1 Cor 4:9,13; 2 Cor 11:23, 27; 2 Tim 1:12; 2:9 – 10; 3:11)
- h. many of these passages link Paul’s suffering as an apostle to the salvation of the elect
(2 Tim 2:10 etc.)

8. Implications of a Corporate View of Election

- a. one is chosen into a way of life that is essentially communal
- b. the assertion that individuals are chosen in eternity is abstract and empty without a corporate human reality in which they are elected
- c. it is the *community* which comprehends the fullness of the love of Christ, the joy of the individual is found in communion
(Eph 3:14 – 21)
- d. this negates the individualistic and consumerist orientation of western Christianity
- e. life in the church as the elect community of God is set by immersion in the Father – Son relationship of unconditional love and not by social contract
- f. the unity of the church is a fact and not a goal
- g. violation of this unity has severe consequences
(Acts 5; 1 Cor 11: 29; cf. Josh 7)
- h. to be a Christian is to be called into service, to be a co – labourer with God in community formation
(1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:1)