

## An Exploration of the Biblical Theology of Divine Election

Duncan Odera  
Email: oderaduncan10@gmail.com

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### Abstract

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The doctrine of divine election is a deep and contentious part of Christian theology, with its complexities and divergent views still a matter of ongoing debate and investigation. It deals with how the election by God of specific individuals or nations to salvation is related to human free will and God's sovereignty. The doctrine of election is important in defining Christian identity, Christian practice, and Christian mission. This study offers a starting point for understanding the election's theological, historical, and ethical dimensions. This work uses biblical-theological and exegetical methods to examine key biblical texts. The study observes that the doctrine of divine election is a central thread in the biblical narrative, revealing God's sovereign initiative to choose individuals and nations for redemptive purposes. It demonstrates that election, rooted in grace rather than merit, progressively moves from particular (Israel) to universal (all nations), culminating in Christ and the call for believers to a life of humility, mission, and hope in the new creation.

**Keywords:** Divine Election, Predestination, Foreknowledge, Free Will, Salvation, Biblical Theology

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### Introduction

The genesis of life on earth, as narrated in the Pentateuch books, is based solely on God's divine election.<sup>1</sup> Through this selection, the flow of the human story in the Bible follows a complex but discrete plan where everything that happens is designed specifically to achieve God's intended outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Different characters in the Bible have been carefully chosen and situated to reveal

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<sup>1</sup> Igal German, "Chosen and Unchosen: Conceptions of Election in the Pentateuch and Jewish-Christian Interpretation," *Biblical Interpretation* 18, no. 4–5 (2010): 486–88.

<sup>2</sup> David Novak, *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 32.



various themes and God's intentions, highlighting that humans, as God's most defined work, were divinely chosen for different purposes. The choosing of humans further ensures that specific individuals are chosen to reach particular goals. As one traverses through the Bible, the mode of God's divine choices changes depending on existing circumstances and desired outcomes.<sup>3</sup> The doctrine of election is demonstrated by knowing that God, in his perfect foreknowledge, casts all things to effect different results with different people in their respective circumstances. For instance, Romans 8:29–30 (NIV here and thereafter) states, 'For those he foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and those he justified, he also glorified.'<sup>4</sup> Paul emphasizes that God's election is central to his redemptive plan; he states, "Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (Rom 8:29–30). It shows that election is not merely a historical event but an eternal process that culminates in salvation.<sup>5</sup>

Romans 8:29–30 presents the divine process of salvation, encompassing foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. God's foreknowledge (προέγνων) refers to his eternal awareness of those he has chosen, not based on their merit but on his sovereign will, leading to predestination for conformity to Christ's image. This process has been described as a "golden chain," which secures the believer's salvation, starting from God's eternal plan and culminating in eternal glory, with each link inseparable and infallible.<sup>6</sup> These stages of salvation are divine acts, with God as the ultimate author, ensuring the certainty of the believer's transformation into Christ's likeness.

The Bible emphasizes the significance of God's choices regarding different individuals, and rather than questioning these decisions, it seeks to explain the reasons behind them. In Genesis 1:26–27, humanity is created in the image and likeness of God. The description in Genesis 2:7 is more practical because God directly forms man from the dust of the earth. Adam's selection, in this context, was not random but purposeful. He was chosen to oversee and manage God's creation, giving him a unique responsibility among all the creatures. God's creation could

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<sup>3</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of God's Sovereignty and Free Will*, 3rd ed (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 2010), 45.

<sup>4</sup> Joel S. Kaminsky and Joel N. Lohr, "Election in the Bible," in *Biblical Studies*, by Joel S. Kaminsky and Joel N. Lohr (Oxford University Press, 2017), 78.

<sup>5</sup> A. Chadwick Thornhill, *The Chosen People: Election, Paul, and Second Temple Judaism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 102.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Henry's Commentary, "Verses 29–30 - Matthew Henry's Commentary- Bible Gateway," 2025, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/matthew-henry/Rom.8.29,30>.



be furthered through Adam, as Adam was entrusted with the care and management of God's creation.

Genesis 3 introduces a decisive change to the narrative with the story of human disobedience. God punishes Adam and Eve for their disobedience by severing their relationship with him, which leads to both world contamination through death and distortion of the divine likeness in human beings. The fall does not break God's purpose but starts the redemption timeline. The response to human disobedience begins with God initiating his restoration plan, which starts with choosing Abraham and developing Israel as his chosen people. In electing Israel, God established a chosen nation that would shine a light towards all nations according to Isaiah 49:6. Through Israel's election; God demonstrated his commitment to gather a people that carries both the honor and the duty to follow God's commandments while serving as God's agents who extend his blessings to humanity.

In the New Testament, the theme of election becomes even more pronounced. The focus shifts to the salvation of humanity from sin through Christ, which was necessary because humans. It emphasizes that through God's election, individuals are chosen for salvation, restoring the original intention for humanity to be in the right relationship with God.<sup>7</sup> This study explores the doctrine of divine election by tracing its development across the biblical narrative and engaging with various theological perspectives, including Calvinism, Arminianism, and diverse views within the Christian community. Its significance lies in providing a nuanced understanding of the election's role in salvation history and its ethical, missional, and pastoral implications for contemporary Christian identity and practice.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a biblical-theological methodology, drawing on the principles of biblical theology and a thematic, canonical approach to investigate the doctrine of divine election. It traces the progressive revelation of election throughout the biblical narrative, engaging key scriptural texts to examine theological meaning and implications. The key scriptural passages on election on the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1–3), God's covenantal choice of Israel (Deut 7:6–8; 14:2), Jesus' reference of those given to him by the Father, (John 6:37, 44; 15:16), Paul's theological reflections on Israel and the elect especially (Romans 9–11), and the divine

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<sup>7</sup> Douglas C Youvan, "The Theology of Election in the Old Testament," 5, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.11508.73605>.



predestination and grace (Eph 1:3–11). The aim is to discern how the motif of divine election emerges, develops, and functions within the broader framework of salvation history, emphasizing the continuity and diversity of its expressions across both testaments.

The study reviews relevant secondary theological literature in conjunction with the biblical-theological analysis. It gives particular consideration to the doctrinal traditions of Calvinism and Arminianism to capture the rich diversity of theological thought. The review includes critical engagement with historical theological formulations and how these have influenced ecclesial understandings and practical theology. The methodology also incorporates historical-theological analysis to contextualize the development of election within major theological movements and controversies. It concludes with a reflective synthesis that explores the ethical, missional, and pastoral implications of divine election for contemporary Christian identity and practice.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Election of Humans over Other Creation**

Throughout biblical history, God intentionally chose individuals and groups according to his specific purposes. The OT shows election as a divine covenantal process that resulted in God choosing Israel as his favored possession (Exod 19:5–6; Deut 7:6–8). The OT describes God's selection process using בָּחַר (bachar), which translates as “choice,” to identify his sovereign choices regarding Abraham, as well as Moses and David in redemptive history. Walter Brueggemann states that election in the Hebrew Bible extends beyond privileged selection and establishes people as responsible actors.<sup>8</sup>

The NT describes divine election through the Greek word ἐκλογή, which applies to salvation and divine choosing of Gentiles among the people of God (Rom 9:11; 11:5; 1 Thes 1:4). Grudem explains that God made a pre-creation selection to save particular individuals based entirely on his sovereign will rather than their potential achievements.<sup>9</sup> Erickson states that biblical election operates through divine grace and rejects human accomplishment, representing “God's eternal plan to bring certain individuals into a saving relationship with himself.”<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 145.

<sup>9</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 234.

<sup>10</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2013), 21.



biblical concept of divine election is a core theological principle that shows God's specific participation in the progression of human events through covenantal and soteriological viewpoints

This theological theme of divine choice is present from the very beginning of the biblical narrative. The second creation account in Genesis exemplifies God's preferential treatment toward humans. In Genesis 1—2, God creates humans in his image (*tselem* - צֶלֶם) and likeness (*demut* - דְּמוּת), terms that highlight not just a physical resemblance but also a relational and moral capacity unique to humanity.<sup>11</sup> The Hebrew word *tselem* conveys the idea of a representative or a likeness that reflects the Creator's essence; *demut* underscores the intended divine purpose, aligning humanity's purpose with God's moral character. These terms establish that humans are elevated above other creatures and are endowed with a unique capacity to reflect God's will.<sup>12</sup>

Further, in Genesis 1:26–28, humans are given dominion (*radah* - רָדָה) over the earth and all living creatures.<sup>13</sup> The term *radah* implies authority and governance, highlighting humanity's role in stewarding creation according to God's intentions. This divine election of humans to rule over the earth emphasizes their elevated status and the responsibility entrusted to them as caretakers of God's creation.<sup>14</sup> In the narrative, God ensures that the first man, Adam, is not alone in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 2:21–22, God causes Adam to sleep, and from his side, He forms a woman (*ishah* - אִשָּׁה),<sup>15</sup> showcasing the intimate and relational aspect of their creation. Forming a woman from Adam's side emphasizes the deep connection and interdependence between the two. Adam's naming of Eve (Gen 2:23) represents an act of authority, as naming reflects the power to define and influence the future.<sup>16</sup>

### The Fall in Genesis 3

The election theme becomes evident when God gives Adam and Eve the freedom to eat any tree in the Garden of Eden and take care of the garden, with the responsibility to obey his

<sup>11</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Dallas, Tex: Word Books, 1987), 31.

<sup>12</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 25.

<sup>13</sup> David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2003), 15.

<sup>14</sup> Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3. ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 907.

<sup>15</sup> David Alexander and Pat Alexander, *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011) 23.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 37.



commandments. This freedom, however, is intertwined with a command to avoid the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which symbolizes the choice between obedience and disobedience. When Adam and Eve fail to uphold their part of the covenant and sin against God, their disobedience marks the fall of a critical moment in human history.<sup>17</sup> Though not a formal declaration of election in the traditional covenantal sense, the fall establishes the need for God's sovereign intervention in human history. As Adam and Eve are granted freedom in the garden with the responsibility to obey God's command, their subsequent disobedience introduces sin and alienation into creation. However, this moment of failure becomes the backdrop for the first implicit promise of redemptive election—what theologians call the *protoevangelium* (Genesis 3:15). This early proclamation of a coming deliverer reflects God's initiative to restore broken relationship through a chosen agent, thus positioning election as an act of divine grace in response to human sinfulness.

In Romans 5:12–19, Paul contrasts Adam's disobedience with Christ's obedience, linking Adam's fall to the redemptive work of Christ. The term פֶּשַׁע (*pesha*) for sin in this passage highlights rebellion against God's command, while Christ's righteousness serves as the remedy. Thus, God's mercy in not destroying humanity after the fall is a form of divine election, where humanity is chosen for salvation despite their failure.<sup>18</sup>

In the aftermath, God assigns punishments (*makkah* - מַכָּה) for Adam, Eve, and the serpent (Gen 3:4). The term *makkah* refers to physical or spiritual discipline; in this context, it talks more about the consequences of disobedience.<sup>19</sup> For Adam, the punishment is the toil on the earth, as he is called to work and cultivate the land, signifying his dominion over creation. The naming of Eve as the mother of all living further highlights her special role in the continuation of God's creation, even though it comes with pain in childbirth. This designation is not incidental but theologically significant. Eve becomes the vessel through whom human life continues and, more importantly, through whom the promised *seed*—the one who would ultimately crush the serpent's head—is expected to come (Gen 3:15). In this light, her role reflects an aspect of divine election: not in the sense of privilege without suffering, but in the sense of being chosen for a unique and foundational part in God's redemptive narrative. Her motherhood becomes a conduit

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<sup>17</sup> Ingrid Faro, *Evil in Genesis: A Contextual Analysis of Hebrew Lexemes for Evil in the Book of Genesis*, Studies in Scripture & Biblical Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 82.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Dallas, Tex: Word Books, 1987), 83.

<sup>19</sup> E. Nestle et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece (Na28): Nestle-Aland 28th Edition* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 132.



of hope, signaling that even within judgment, God’s electing grace is already at work to bring restoration through the lineage of humanity.<sup>20</sup>

### The Progress of Redemption

In Genesis 4, God’s choice of Seth after Abel’s death reveals his sovereignty in actualizing the human salvation plan. Seth’s name, meaning “appointed” or “placed,” reflects God’s intention to restore the line of righteousness. His election continues the divine purpose that Adam and Eve began, demonstrating God’s ongoing plan for the salvation of humankind through chosen individuals.<sup>21</sup> Noah’s election in Genesis 6—9 is also significant. When God chooses Noah to build the ark, he provides the instructions and materials, demonstrating God’s active role in guiding human history. The election of Noah, his family, and the animals preserves God’s creation during the flood. The term *tevat* (תֵּבָה), meaning an “ark,” further emphasizes God’s providential protection and the new beginning he offers to humanity.<sup>22</sup>

Further, Genesis 12 marks a critical point within biblical history as God chooses Abraham through both covenant and promise to become a great nation that will bless all the nations of the earth. God summons Abraham from anonymity to create a covenant, establishing that God will transform him into a vast nation and that all peoples will find blessing through him (Gen 12:2–3).<sup>23</sup> Despite later references to Abraham’s faith (Rom 4; Heb 11), Genesis emphasizes that God’s initiative is the central theme rather than Abraham’s accomplishments. Abraham’s call acts as a momentous theological shift where God creatively uses his election to spread blessings across all nations, thus growing his divine concern beyond constraints. Abraham receives his election to carry out a divine mission for the benefit of others.<sup>24</sup>

Biblical teaching reveals that whenever God elects someone, the growth in blessings accompanies a corresponding increase in accountability. Old Testament election exists as a mission because God blessed Abraham and his lineage to extend blessings to others. Abraham received his election, extending beyond securing his territory and bloodline, because God

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<sup>20</sup> Faro, *Evil in Genesis*, 97.

<sup>21</sup> Cotter, *Genesis*, 112.

<sup>22</sup> William Lee Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner*, Thirteenth corrected impression (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 217.

<sup>23</sup> Gary A Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 88.

<sup>24</sup> John Goldingay, *Genesis for Everyone*, 1st ed, Old Testament for Everyone (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 152.





selected him to participate in the plan to bless all humankind. Israel's future divine call derives its theological basis from this early election, which becomes the foundation for salvation through Christ's inclusive mission.

### ***Divine and Universal Election***

The divine act of choosing Abraham starts a covenantal bond that significantly affects the fate of Israel and all nations of the world. In Genesis 12:3, God promises Abraham to make him the vessel through which “all peoples on earth will be blessed.” God permanently tells Abraham in Genesis 22:18 that his descendants will be divinely selected to bring blessings to the ends of the earth. Wright (2006) states, “Election exists as the method to reach the objective.”<sup>25</sup> God chose Abraham to bless numerous nations. The election of Abraham starts the missional pathway, which combines specific intentions toward his family line with global redemptive purposes.

In Exodus 19:5–6 God promises to make Israel “a holy nation” and establish them “as a kingdom of priests,” which will be “a chosen possession from all nations.” This section demonstrates that God elects Israel for his eternal purpose and sovereign love, not due to strength or righteousness (Deut 7:7–8). God commands Israel to act as his representatives, who will extend his divine presence to all nations. In the Sinai covenant, Israel receives formal recognition as God's chosen and covenantal people who bear his commands and share his divine presence while pursuing God's mission to display holy living to the world. Israel's election exists to demonstrate God's righteous character and justice to neighboring countries, beyond being an exclusive nation.

The ten plagues of Exodus 7—12 require understanding them within God's overall covenant with his chosen people, Israel. God sends plagues to showcase his power while delivering his people as promised to Abraham (Exod 9:16). The Sinai covenant explains Israel's place in God's redemption plan more clearly than the plagues demonstrate by themselves. Israel holds dual purposes in God's plan: to rescue and illuminate the world as a radiant spiritual community (Isa 42:6), which exhibits God's justice. The connection between Abraham and Sinai demonstrates that divine election leads to relationships, covenants, and global restoration.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2006), 112.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Isaac Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 145.





The prophetic literature consistently emphasizes a vision in which God’s salvation encompasses the nations. The Servant of the Lord is told that restoring the tribes of Jacob alone is “too small a thing,” and instead, he is appointed “as a light for the nations, that [God’s] salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6, ESV). This reflects a clear expansion of divine election beyond Israel. Isaiah does not merely suggest the future inclusion of Gentiles—he roots it in the very mission of the chosen servant, thus integrating universality into Israel’s identity and vocation. Other prophets, such as Amos and Zechariah, also envision a time when Gentile nations will call upon the name of the Lord (Amos 9:11–12; Zech 14:16).

Jonah’s story becomes a living illustration of these theological principles. The repentance of Nineveh, as recorded in Jonah 3:10, is not a detour in Israel’s story but an embodiment of God’s mercy extending beyond ethnic boundaries. The Hebrew term for repentance (שׁוּב – *shûb*) signifies a relational return to God, and its use here underlines the authenticity of Nineveh’s response and God’s willingness to receive them. Jonah’s reluctance, by contrast, reveals a narrow understanding of election, which God directly challenges. In this way, the book of Jonah functions not only as a narrative of prophetic obedience but as a theological critique of exclusivist nationalism, reaffirming that borders do not constrain divine grace.<sup>27</sup>

### ***The Universal Scope of Divine Election Through Christ***

Divine election reaches its ultimate fulfillment through the incarnation and work of Jesus Christ. According to Paul in Ephesians 1:4–5, believers were chosen “in Christ before the foundation of the world,” establishing that election proceeds from Jesus. God’s election shows itself in action through his chosen method of taking human form to redeem the elect individuals. Luke 9:35 identifies Jesus as the chosen One: “This is my Son, whom I have chosen.” In addition, 1 Peter 2:4 describes Jesus as a “chosen and precious cornerstone.” The life of Jesus, including his death and resurrection, recreates God’s plan of redemption, which provides Abraham’s promised blessings to Jew and Gentile believers. Similarly, through his work, election transitioned from being a nation-bound concept to becoming a global invitation into an unbound covenant community that embraces grace through its membership standards over cultural differences or legal requirements.

The inclusion of Gentiles into the community of faith became a defining development in the Early Church (Acts 15). Confronted with growing numbers of Gentile converts, the apostles

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<sup>27</sup> Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 312.



debate whether these believers must adopt Jewish customs. Peter testifies that God “made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9), emphasizing that Gentiles, too, receive the Holy Spirit. This watershed moment marks the formal ecclesial acknowledgment that divine election transcends ethnicity and Law, embracing all who respond to God in faith.

Paul uses Romans 9—11 to explain how divine mercy governs God’s election choices and shows Israel’s possible decline despite the inclusion of Gentiles. According to Romans 9:6, Paul states that not every person who descends from Israel belongs to the identity of Israel. Paul establishes two categories, physical and spiritual descendants of Israel, while clarifying that God’s saving purposes work through his chosen sovereignty instead of human family background. The new interpretation of election directly questions covenant entitlement because divine forgiveness serves as the inclusion criterion instead of ethnic ties. Through his narrative, Paul uses OT texts and theological analysis to show that God’s promises continue to be fulfilled while he takes new paths.<sup>28</sup>

Paul continues his argument of grace superseding ethnicity by employing the olive tree analogy in Romans 11, which shows believing Gentiles have replaced natural Israelite branches that were cut off (Rom 11:17). The olive tree metaphor shows both God’s covenant people’s transformative power and the continuing partnership between Israelites and Gentiles throughout redemption’s progress. Paul states that God did not reject Israel completely and permanently after they turned away from Him.<sup>29</sup> In Romans 11:26, Paul declares that “all Israel will be saved,” which, according to Wright (2002), implies Israel’s future restoration as part of God’s continuing move toward compassion. Paul maintains that divine election remains true to Israel’s covenantal foundation, yet becomes inclusive by showing that God extends salvation to everyone without nullifying his promises to Israel.<sup>30</sup>

In Galatia, Paul countered those who insisted Gentiles must adopt the Law to be part of God’s people by stating, “those who have faith are children of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7–9). He aligns Gentile believers with the original promise made to Abraham that “all nations will be blessed through you.” For Paul, inclusion in God’s elect people comes through faith, not ethnic

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<sup>28</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, Second edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2018), 255.

<sup>29</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *When in Romans: An Invitation to Linger with the Gospel According to Paul*, Theological Explorations for the Church Catholic Ser (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 134.

<sup>30</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 221.



identity or legal observance. He concludes emphatically in Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile... for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The election that was once centered on Israel has now expanded universally through Christ.<sup>31</sup> Beyond salvation matters, election is also related to the appointment of leaders.

### God’s Election of Leaders

In Romans 13:1–2, Paul asserts that all authority is established by God, emphasizing that leaders serve as his servants for good. This principle aligns with the Old Testament examples of divine election in leadership, particularly with God’s choice of leaders transcending time and covenant, showing that leadership is guided by divine purpose.<sup>32</sup> For instance, Moses’ election was strategic. Raised in Egypt’s royal household, he was prepared to engage with the Pharaoh. The Hebrew name Moses (*Mōšē* - מֹשֶׁה), derived from מָשַׁח (*mashah*), meaning “to draw out,” prophetically points to his role in leading Israel out of Egypt. His calling demonstrates that divine election is not based on human merit but on God’s sovereign will. When Moses died, Joshua was chosen to succeed him, not by democratic vote or popular acclaim, but by divine appointment. This illustrates a pattern throughout Israel’s history. God consistently raises leaders—deliverers, judges, kings, and prophets—not based on societal expectations but according to his redemptive purposes.<sup>33</sup>

The shift to monarchy begins with Israel’s demand for a king (*melech* - מֶלֶךְ), which is met with divine warning (1 Sam 8:10–18). Yet even in granting their request, God maintains sovereign control. Saul is chosen, then rejected; David is anointed despite being the youngest and least likely by human standards. 1 Samuel 16:7 reveals, “The Lord does not look at the things people look at... the Lord looks at the heart.” This reversal of human expectation is a consistent mark of God’s election. Prophets like Jeremiah, chosen “before [he] was formed in the womb” (Jer 1:5), and others like Amos (a shepherd, not a priest) continue this pattern. They are not elected for privilege but for mission—to challenge injustice, call Israel to repentance, and declare the will of God to nations.

This thread of divine election within Israel—seen in Moses, David, and the prophets—forms a theological pattern that anticipates a broader application. God’s choices consistently defy

<sup>31</sup> Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 345.

<sup>32</sup> Chip Ingram, *Chosen by God*, 1st ed (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2011), 88.

<sup>33</sup> David Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 185.



social hierarchies and national boundaries, prioritizing faithfulness and purpose over lineage or status. The very function of the prophets—to speak to kings and foreign nations alike—prefigures a movement beyond Israel. Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Jonah were all commissioned to speak truth to the Gentiles. These examples create a trajectory that moves from a particular election (of Israel and its leaders) to a universal mission, where divine grace and purpose extend to “all nations.” The vision of Gentile inclusion is the natural unfolding of a divine pattern already present in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>34</sup> The divine election of prophets like Jeremiah (1:5), where God declares he knew him before his conception, emphasizes God’s foreknowledge and sovereign plan. Prophets were chosen to lead and correct kings and nations, embodying God’s voice in times of apostasy.

In the NT, Jesus chose 12 disciples, continuing the pattern of divine election. Among them, Peter was appointed as the foundation of the church (Matt 16:18), fulfilling God’s plan for a new covenant. The apostles carried on Jesus’ mission, guiding believers through life’s challenges with teachings emphasizing living according to God’s will and securing eternal life (Rev 21).<sup>35</sup> Thus, from Moses to Jesus, God’s election of leaders—whether kings, prophets, or apostles—highlights his sovereign will in guiding his people. These chosen leaders were selected to fulfill divine purposes, ensuring God’s kingdom would be established on earth.

### **Different Christian Views on Election**

There are different beliefs among Christians about divine election. According to Calvinists, God unconditionally elects people to salvation for reasons based on his own will, without foreseen human action. Arminianism holds that God elects only those whom he foreknows will believe. According to the Arminian doctrine, God selects people for salvation through his foreknowledge of those who will exercise free faith in his grace. Calvinists believe God decided to save people beforehand.<sup>36</sup> Calvinists hold that God picks specific people for salvation, and nothing can change his plan. In their view, humans can’t save themselves; only God’s choice matters. Calvinists often cite Ephesians 1:4–5, where Paul writes that God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,” and Romans 9:15–16, which states, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy... It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”

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<sup>34</sup> Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 125.

<sup>35</sup> Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 1325.

<sup>36</sup> Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011), 45.



Conversely, Arminians believe that salvation is offered to all and that individuals must freely choose to accept it. They point to 1 Timothy 2:3–4, which says God “wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth,” and John 3:16, which emphasizes that “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” For Arminians, human free will plays a crucial role in understanding election.

Some theologians try to find a middle ground and suggest that God’s choosing and human choice work together, like two sides of the same coin. They believe God’s sovereign plan includes human freedom.<sup>37</sup> These perspectives matter because they shape how Christians understand God’s character. Is God a controller who determines everything, or a loving inviter who respects human choice? Each view tries to be faithful to biblical teachings about God’s love and human responsibility.<sup>38</sup>

I believe God’s way of choosing people for salvation is beautiful and somehow complicated because he offers a loving invitation to everyone. However, each person must decide whether to accept the salvation call. God’s election isn’t about forcing people but extending grace and providing a path to relationships. The Bible shows God knows who will choose him, yet he doesn’t remove human freedom. It’s like a loving parent who knows their child’s potential but allows them to make their own choices. God’s sovereignty and human free will work together in a mysterious, interconnected way. He initiates salvation, prepares the way, and deeply desires a relationship with each person.

Scripture instructs that salvation is ultimately a free gift from God, not something humans can earn. Yet, this gift requires a response. God invites everyone, but not everyone will respond. God doesn’t manipulate or force, but lovingly calls. This means every person has a genuine opportunity to say “yes” or “no” to God’s invitation. My perspective tries to honor both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God is entirely in control, yet he respects human choice. He knows the end from the beginning, but doesn’t remove our ability to choose. This balanced view sees election as an expression of God’s remarkable love, a love that plans, provides, and patiently waits for a personal response. God chooses us first, makes a way through Jesus, and then invites us to choose him in return. It’s a beautiful dance of divine initiative and human response, where God’s grace and freedom meet perfectly.

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<sup>37</sup> Donald A. Carson. *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspective in Tension*. (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 38.

<sup>38</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 112.



## The New Creation

The ultimate goal of God’s election is to ensure that humanity, through faith in Christ, is saved. In Ephesians 1:4–5,<sup>39</sup> Paul teaches that believers were chosen (ἐκλέγομαι) in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless. The term ἐκλέγομαι emphasizes the divine, sovereign choice made by God. This predestination (προορισμός) is not based on earthly merit but on God’s eternal plan for salvation, extending beyond temporal existence into the new creation (καινὴ κτίσις). Paul highlights that believers are adopted (ὀιοθεσία) into sonship through Jesus Christ, a status that reflects God’s grace.<sup>40</sup>

In Romans 9:11–24, Paul uses the contrasting figures of Jacob and Esau to demonstrate that God’s election operates based on his sovereign will rather than human effort or lineage. The image of the δημιουργός (potter) and the πλάστος (clay) conveys God’s right to shape vessels for purposes he determines—some for honor, others for demonstrating his justice and mercy. Yet this metaphor should not be read in isolation from Paul’s broader theological vision. In Romans 8, Paul envisions the liberation of all creation from bondage and decay (Romans 8:21–23). The election of Israel and the grafting in of the Gentiles (explored in Romans 9–11) are part of this redemptive narrative: a renewed people forming part of a renewed creation.<sup>41</sup>

God’s sovereign election is not arbitrary or disconnected from his character—it is part of his re-creative purpose in Christ. Paul’s language of “vessels of mercy prepared beforehand for glory” (Rom 9:23) aligns with the eschatological hope of a new humanity, unified and transformed in Christ. This theme culminates in Romans 11, where Paul declares that God has bound all over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on all (Rom 11:32). Here, divine election functions as a stage in God’s cosmic plan, moving from division (Jew vs. Gentile) to reconciliation and ultimately to the new creation inaugurated through Christ’s resurrection.

Therefore, Romans 9 is not merely about exclusion or predestination—it is about the unfolding drama of divine grace preparing a people, both Jew and Gentile, to inhabit a renewed world. God’s choosing is never an end but a step toward restoring all things. The same God who

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<sup>39</sup> Alexander and Alexander, *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible*, 307.

<sup>40</sup> Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 837.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Bird, *Romans, The Story of God Bible Commentary* / Tremper Longman III & Scot McKnight General Editors New Testament Series 6 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016), 256.



formed Adam from clay in Genesis is now forming a new people, a new creation (2 Cor 5:17) through his mercy and sovereign call.<sup>42</sup>

In Ephesians 1:5, Paul writes that humans were predestined for God's grace, which affirms that salvation is not accidental but part of God's eternal plan. The term *proorismos* used here signifies God's intentional design. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 2:7 underscores that this destiny was planned before time. Acts 4:28 reflects the fulfillment of God's salvation plan through Jesus' death, which has profound implications for Jews and Gentiles. The new creation is not just a theological concept but is actively realized in the life of Christians. Through Christ's death and resurrection, the entire cosmos is undergoing renewal, and this new creation is solidified by the sufferings (πάθημα) of Christ's followers, accelerating the spread of the gospel.<sup>43</sup>

## Implications

### Ethical Implications

Understanding that God chooses one transforms the way individuals perceive themselves. The Greek term ἐκλεκτός (chosen) implies not an elevated sense of superiority but a divine selection based on love, not achievement. This understanding encourages εὐχαριστία (humility and gratitude), motivating believers to serve others with kindness, to κοινωνία (share) their faith, and to embody God's love in practical ways.<sup>44</sup>

The doctrine of election should never foster pride or a sense of superiority. Rather, it calls believers into a posture of humility and responsibility. Just as Israel was chosen to be "a light to the nations" (Isa 42:6), so are Christians called to reflect God's character in the world. Election is not a reward for merit but a gift of grace meant to inspire awe, gratitude, and loving action. Paul reminds the church in Ephesians 2:8–10 that faith is a gift from God, and believers are created in Christ for "good works... prepared in advance." This means that being chosen carries a mission: embodying mercy, pursuing justice, and extending God's love to others.

Being elected means recognizing the inherent worth of every person as made in the image of God and potentially included in his saving purposes. It urges the church to live with compassion rather than comparison and to honor the dignity of even those outside the faith. In this way, election becomes not a boundary that separates but a calling that sends. God has drawn

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<sup>42</sup> Joshua Garroway, "David R. Wallace. Election of the Lesser Son: Paul's Lament-Midrash in Romans 9—11," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 10, no. 1 (November 5, 2015), 5.

<sup>43</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 265.

<sup>44</sup> Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 252-3.





believers to himself, so they are now sent to draw others—not by force but by the compelling witness of love, service, and humility.

### **Missional Implications**

Ultimately, the purpose of election is relational and missional: to live with the assurance that God deeply loves one and to respond to that love by sharing it with others. People formed by grace are called to be agents of grace, inviting others into the redemptive story of God and living out their chosenness in ways that point to the new creation already breaking into the present world.

The theological concept of divine election, as explored in this paper, presents a profound understanding of God’s sovereignty and his role in shaping the destiny of humanity. Election is not merely a historical event but a theological principle that affects the individual believer and the collective body of God’s people.

In the Old Testament, God’s election is first introduced through the stories of individuals such as Adam, Abraham, Moses, and the nation of Israel. As the first human, Adam is chosen to represent humanity in God’s creation. Despite the fall, God’s plan to elect humanity for redemption is seen in his continued engagement with his creation.<sup>45</sup> The election of Abraham is crucial because, through him, God initiates a covenant that would later extend to all nations, marking the beginning of God’s redemptive plan. In this covenant, God’s promises to Abraham, prosperity, descendants, and blessing, are not contingent upon human merit but are based on God’s grace.<sup>46</sup>

### **Pastoral Implications**

As Israel’s history unfolds, God’s sovereign choice in electing leaders such as Moses, David, and the prophets further emphasizes that pastoral leadership is divinely appointed and not based on human preferences. The call of Moses, for example, demonstrates how God’s selection is strategically designed. Raised in Pharaoh’s court, Moses was uniquely positioned to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Despite his inadequacies, God’s decision to choose Moses illustrates that divine election often operates contrary to human logic.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, the choice of David over his brothers, despite his youth and modest appearance, underscores God’s preference for the heart

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<sup>45</sup> Douglas C. Youvan, “The Theology of Election in the Old Testament,” *ResearchGate*, accessed May 12, 2025, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373989595\\_The\\_Theology\\_of\\_Election\\_in\\_the\\_Old\\_Testament](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373989595_The_Theology_of_Election_in_the_Old_Testament)

<sup>46</sup> Hallvard Hagelia, *Divine Election in the Hebrew Bible*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 84 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2019), 52.

<sup>47</sup> Cotter, *Genesis*, 134.



over outward appearances (1 Sam 16:7). This teaching on divine election points to God's sovereign will rather than human judgment.

The NT builds upon this foundation, introducing the idea of election through Christ. In Ephesians 1:4–5, Paul underscores that believers are chosen “in Christ before the foundation of the world.” This highlights that the ultimate purpose of election is not only temporal but extends into the eternal realm.<sup>48</sup> The idea of predestination (*proorismos* - προορισμός) for adoption as sons and daughters through Christ represents the fulfillment of God's plan to create a people set apart for Himself. Through Christ's redemptive work, believers are brought near to God and are made partakers in the divine promises originally given to Israel. This election is not based on human works but on God's grace and mercy, as illustrated in Romans 9:11–24, where Paul speaks of God's sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau, underscoring that God's decisions are based on his will and not human actions.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, the Gentiles are part of the universal scope of election. On the cross, Christ broke down the dividing wall of hostility that had existed between Jews and Gentiles so that all might participate in the blessings of election. It is important to note that divine election is universal since it shifts the focus from a particular group to a universal message of salvation available to all people without regard to their nationality or heritage.

Understanding divine election has significant implications for those involved and the global Christian community. One of the first doctrines that this doctrine of election teaches believers is that their salvation is in no way based on their own merit, but is entirely by God's grace. This nurtures an attitude of humility and gratitude, as believers realize they have been chosen not because of their works but by God's unmerited favour. This understanding challenges any tendency toward self-righteousness or pride, encouraging believers to live with a dependence on God.<sup>50</sup>

The doctrine of election also has profound implications for how Christians view others, particularly those outside the faith. Since God's election is not limited to a particular group, believers are called to share the message of salvation with all people, regardless of their background. The universality of election in Christ challenges the church to embrace diversity and

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<sup>48</sup> A. A. Solomon, “The New Testament Doctrine of Election: Its Origins and Implications,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 11, no. 4 (December 1958): 406–22, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600009157>.

<sup>49</sup> Garroway, “David R. Wallace. Election of the Lesser Son,” 202.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995), 78.



to engage in mission work that reaches beyond traditional boundaries.<sup>51</sup> As Paul highlights in Ephesians, the dividing walls of hostility between Jews and Gentiles have been broken down, and this calls Christians to work toward reconciliation, unity, and peace in their communities.

In addition, the teaching on election also underscores the responsibility of believers to live in a manner worthy of their call. Holiness, obedience, and the willingness to serve others should characterize a Christian life, imitating God and his character and purpose for the world. Understanding election gives the believer confidence that God's plan was at work. The doctrine reminds us that God's plans are unflinching and will be carried out, regardless of the tribulations. This offering of ourselves to God guarantees hope and comfort because it is his will that salvation is not of us but of Him. If properly understood, the doctrine of divine election changes how Christians relate to God, their fellow men, and the world. These are grounded in deep assurance of God's grace and sovereign purpose and a resulting life of humility, mission, and perseverance.

## Conclusion

The doctrine of divine election lays bare a tapestry of God's sovereignty, grace, and calling within the context of human response. It is far from an abstract or divisive theological concept. Scripture shows the election to be God's chosen means to carry out his salvation plan (call people, shape nations, and extend mercy to all humankind through Christ). Through the selection of Adam and Abraham to the prophets, kings, apostles, and the church, God chooses not for either a whim of favoritism but faithfulness to his purpose: the restoration of creation through relationship, responsibility, and redemption.

Divine election, as connected to both the Old and New Testaments, processes from particular to universal, from a specific people to a universal people, and finally, to Christ the Lord, the person and work of whose embodiment of God elect purpose for his people is made known throughout the Scripture. This doctrine is taught within the broader framework of grace, reconciliation, and the final hope of new creation as found in Paul's writings. While God's choosing is not simply for privilege, his choosing is always for purpose: holiness, service, and extending the light of his salvation to others.

Finally, the election reinscribes the identity of the Christian, not with superiority but with gratitude, humility, and purpose. It confirms that salvation is a divine gift and that no man

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<sup>51</sup> Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 92.



has an inch to boast; we are all part of God's restoration story. It calls for election to embody God's justice, mercy, love, and participation in his redemptive work until the fullness of his kingdom comes. Divine election is a cornerstone of biblical theology and a foundation for ethical living, faithful mission, and hope in the heart of God who calls, justifies, and glorifies his people in this way.

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