

Astounding New Greek Discoveries about 'Election'

by C. Gordon Olson, Th.M., D.Miss.

Geoffrey Bromiley, the translator and editor of the prestigious *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* gave a caveat which is of extreme importance: "When this is understood (its place between a simple lexicon and commentaries and biblical theologies), Kittel is safeguarded against the indiscriminate enthusiasm which would make it a sole and absolute authority in lexical and exegetical matters." It "contains articles of unequal value and varying outlook. Indeed, there are internal disagreements as regards basic presuppositions, historical assumptions and specific interpretations."¹ Indeed, Bromiley should have given another more important warning. Most of the authors of the articles did not hold an evangelical view of the inspiration of Scripture; indeed they were beholden to Wellhausen's documentary hypothesis based upon the evolution of religion. This is evident in their articles and has biased both their methodology and their conclusions. More positively, Colin Brown, the General Editor of the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, suggested: "It is as one quarries among the mass of data and tries to build something out of it that the data becomes alive. . . The great revivals of the Christian church have come about when some individual here and there has been grasped by something that his predecessors and contemporaries have take for granted without stopping to ask why it should be so."² Indeed, I have grasped something previously missed in linguistic research into the Greek words for so-called election. It is important to study the cognates simultaneously.

A Word Study of *Eklegomai*, *Eklektos*, *Eklogē*

It is surprising that the connotation of the adjective, 'choice,' the noun, 'the choice of the excellent,' and of the verb, 'to appoint, to commission' found in the Hebrew and pre-New Testament Greek, is not adequately carried over into our New Testament translations. Although these words are of great theological significance, current lexicons and theological dictionaries are very defective in failing to bring out their precise meaning. An effective Greek word study must build its analysis of New Testament usage upon that of the classical, Septuagintal, and secular Greek and Jewish usage. Although Lothar Coenen, editor and author of the article in *NIDNTT* had done a fine job showing usage before the New Testament, he utterly failed to use that base in his defective approach to the New Testament data.

Pre-New Testament Usage

Coenen's main contribution was in noting that the secular Greek usage of the verb has to do with electing or appointing people to an office or responsibility with an accompanying obligation to fulfill that responsibility. This is of extreme importance since democratic elections began in Greece and the word originated in that connection.

Although these words originate in 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 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 upon 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 . . ." (bold mine).³

According to G. Shrenk in *TDNT*, the verb *eklegomai* in the classical 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). He confirmed Coenen's insight by the use of two most important words from the classical usage of the noun, **'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 soldiers, judges, and things of best quality: "choice judges" (Plato), "selected, lightly armed troops" (Thucydides).⁴ The meaning of the noun *eklogē* 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."⁵

Coenen also showed how the Old Testament usage in the Septuagint confirms this insight:

The mid. *eklegomai* nearly always renders forms of the Heb. vb. *bāhar*, choose, select, prefer . . . *bāhar*, however, has in fact roughly the same range of meanings as the Gk. vb. . . . the participial forms *bāhūr* and *bāhīr* (again like the Gk.) can be used to describe specially chosen elite troops . . . Besides *bāhar*, *eklegomai* is also used to translate the rare vb. *bārar*, set apart, select, purge. . . *eklektos*, also appears a number of times for Heb. roots connoting loveliness, preciousness, or excellent condition. **Here the adj. does not express the fact of being chosen, but in a wider sense factors already present which make choice likely. . . . *bāhīr* (cf. 2 Sam. 21:6; Ps. 105:43; Isa. 42:1; 65:22) indicates that the purpose of the choice is some commission or service, and can only meaningfully**

retain its validity in its fulfilment (bold mine).⁶

The key idea here of both the Hebrew terms and the Septuagint is in God selecting or setting apart qualified people to fulfil some commission or office. Thus, they are used when Moses *appointed* judges for Israel, the *appointment* of the Levitical priesthood, when Joshua *commissioned* capable warriors, the *appointment* of Saul, David, and Solomon as kings over Israel, the *commissioning* of Israel as God's unique people, and the *appointment* of the Messiah as a light to the nations (Isa. 42:1). However, since there was no democracy in Israel, the idea of a political election is totally absent. Horst Seebass in *TWOT* confirmed this usage of *bāchar*: "The horizon of the election [commissioning] of the people of Israel is the peoples of the world, in relationship to which as a whole the 'individual' Israel was chosen. *bchr* as a technical term for the election [?] of the people of Israel stands under the symbol of universalism."⁷ He quoted Th. C. Vriezen in support:

'In the OT choice is always the action of God, of his grace, and **always contains a mission for man; and only out of the mission can man comprehend the choice of God.**' . . . In any case, in the OT *bchr* is used **not to describe that which constitutes the basic relationship between God and his people**, but to denote that which results from this basic relationship (bold mine).⁸

The servanthood of Israel came into particular focus in the latter part of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 41:8-9). However, in that context Isaiah saw the ultimate fulfillment of Israel's ministry in the Messiah, Yahweh's Servant (Isa. 42:1-7): "**Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; my chosen [choice] one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. . . . and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, . . .**" (42:1, 6b-7a). Isaiah confirmed the commissioning of Israel as God's special servant. This is a major theme of the Old Testament, but as we go into the word meanings in the original languages, this all comes into sharper focus. The derivative used here is *bāchir*. The verb (164 times) and its derivatives are common, occurring 198 times in the Old Testament, of which 108 are rendered with *eklegomai* in the Septuagint. John Oswalt in *TWOT* explained: "It is important to note, however, that it always involves a careful, well thought-out choice. . . . In all of these cases serviceability rather than simple arbitrariness is at the heart of the choosing." The derived participle *bāchūr*, sometimes refers to young men, "in that the picked or chosen men in a military context are usually the young men." The derivative *mibchār* means 'chosen,' or 'choice': "As such it is often translated as a superlative (Cf. Gen. 23:6, 'In the choicest of our sepulchures')."⁹

The Septuagint translation of the Hebrew has the same meaning. G. Quell in *TDNT* confirmed that the adjective connotes choosing "that which is choice or excellent," "what is desired, or costly," "what is costly in the concept of the pure," "also emphasizes the choice or excellent element. . . ." Schrenk also confirmed a similar usage: "choice, select, costly, sterling, purified, profitable, best of its kind, of top quality."¹⁰ The translators should have referred to Christ as the "choice One" in harmony with its frequent usage in the Hebrew. Indeed, Jesus of Nazareth was never *one chosen from among many* to be the Messiah. *This is the key to understanding 'election' in the New Testament.*

The usage in the common Greek papyri confirms this. A usage of the verb in AD ii can well be translated: "A choir of slaves and freedmen was appointed." To be effective a choir is not chosen willy nilly. The adjective in another AD ii papyrus speaks of ". . . the select of the judges in Rome." Another contemporary epitaph says, "I made this city the choice of cities."¹¹ *Thus 'chosen' is in the main too general a rendering since these words usually relate to a specific kind of choosing.* The ones appointed usually are those with some qualifications for that office or responsibility. Thus a more precise rendering of the verb would be 'to appoint' or 'to commission' in most cases rather than just 'to choose.' This is especially significant in reference to Isaiah 42:1, where the Messiah is God's appointed one, commissioned for a unique ministry (Note that neither Coenen, Quell, or Schrenk acknowledged Isa. 42:1 as messianic, undoubtedly because of their liberal, destructive higher-critical views). Since the classical Greek usage of these words for a political election does not carry over into the New Testament either, a serious question is raised whether the words 'elect' and 'election' should have ever been used in our translations. The Old Testament contains no concept of individual 'election' different from appointment to an office, based on prior qualifications not arbitrary selection. Therefore, the translation, rather transliteration 'election' should never be used. *Thus our understanding of New Testament usage must be based upon this predominant usage in secular and Septuagintal Greek.*

Both Coenen and Schrenk have fascinating treatments of the Jewish concept of election in the inter-testamental period. Coenen traced the rabbinic misunderstanding of "status and privilege" to Pharisaic exclusiveness, and "inevitably this brought the concept of individual election further to the fore[front] (cf. 1QH9:29f.). This is esp. apparent in the Qumran texts (1 Q4:22; 8:1-15) in which consciousness of being chosen leads not only to a feeling of superiority over other nations, and over the ungodly in their own. . . but

also to a direct hatred for those who have been rejected (1 QS 1:4).¹² Schrenk confirmed that Jewish exclusivity and sense of superiority developed in the intertestamental period and referenced the Damascus document in which election and reprobation became more strongly individual. “In particular *eklegomai* is not adapted to serve as a basis of a dogma of election and reprobation. It is unfortunate that the concept of election has been linked with the predestination controversy.” He quoted 4 Esdras 2:17, “Thou savest whom thou wilt, and destroyest whom thou wilt.”¹³ Christ’s teachings refuted these Pharisaic errors.

New Testament Usage

In the New Testament, the verb *eklegomai* is used 22 times, the adjective *eklektos* is also used 22 times, and the abstract noun *eklogē* 7 times. In examining these contexts it would be expected to find them being used much the same as before the New Testament, that is, the appointment or commissioning of qualified people to an office or responsibility with an obligation to fulfill it well. Those appointed are usually the ‘choice’ people. But the lexicons, theological dictionaries, and translations disappoint us!

Christ, the Choice One. It should be expected that the three references to Christ as the elect or ‘choice’ servant of God, as seen previously in Isaiah 42:1-4, would be so rendered in our translations. Unfortunately only the NAS and a few others so translate it and then only in 1 Peter 2:4 & 6. But starting with the Father’s words on the Mount of Transfiguration as reported by Luke: “**This is my Son, My Chosen One (*ho eklelegmenos*); listen to Him!**” (Lk. 9:35), this language identifies Him with God’s choice Servant in Isaiah 42:1-7. However, the other two Gospel parallels use *agapētos* “**beloved Son**” (Mt. 17:5=Mk. 9:7). As usually translated the Gospels are in contradiction since ‘beloved’ is not equivalent to ‘chosen,’ but rather ‘choice’ comes far closer in meaning. Thus, to harmonize the Synoptic writers’ representation of the Father’s words from heaven, ‘choice’ resolves the problem simply, especially since this was the major connotation in prior Greek literature.

Luke also showed how His being the choice Messiah was the heart of the issue with the Jewish rulers throughout His ministry, reaching its acme as they mocked Him as He hung on the cross: “**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 One [His Choice One]’**” (Lk. 23:35). ‘Choice’ makes much better sense here also since there is no evidence that the Jews thought of the Messiah as ‘chosen.’

Peter very explicitly confirmed this understanding in his usage in 1 Peter 2:4, 6: “**And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God. . . . ‘Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone.**” Here the NAS is one of the few translations which saw the pre-New Testament usage as imperative in this context (also James Moffatt, the *New English Bible*, and the *Twentieth Century New Testament*). Clearly, the connotation of ‘choice’ or ‘select,’ seen in the secular and Septuagint usage, is *absolutely demanded* in this context, which is confirmed by the close connection with ‘**precious.**’ Christ was in no way chosen by God; He is the ‘**Choice One.**’ As noted in our discussion of foreknowledge in Chapter 23 in reference to 1 Peter 1:20, there is no way in either passage that Jesus of Nazareth is to be considered as chosen by God from among other Jews to be the Messiah. This notion that He was chosen to be the Messiah at His baptism is the heart of two ancient heresies, Cerinthian Gnosticism and the Ebionite heresy. Nor was He ever chosen as one out of many in any other sense. As Reformed homiletician and editor, James Daane pointed out, like the nation Israel He was formed by a miraculous birth:

God’s election must produce what it elects. And it does. Isaac is a son of miracle. . . . the nation of Israel is not viewed as one extant nation among many, which is then selectively chosen by God as his elect people. Rather, Israel as the object of God’s election not only does not exist but even has no possibility of existence apart from God’s elective and creative action.¹⁴

In the same way, through the virgin birth, Jesus of Nazareth was uniquely brought into being to be the ‘**choice One**’ of God; He was never chosen, that is, one from among many. He was appointed by the Father. Thus the pre-New Testament usage of these words is not only helpful, but *mandatory* in understanding the real meaning in these contexts.

Christ’s decisive parable and aphorism. Of the few doctrinally significant passages, the parable of the king’s wedding feast in **Matthew 22:1-14** is basic. Please turn to it here. Note in 22:3 that those who were invited to the wedding feast “**were unwilling to come.**” They even mistreated and killed the messenger slaves (22:6). The king emphasized that those invited “**were not worthy**” (22:8) and sent judgment upon them. Then he had his slaves invite people from the highways indiscriminately, “**both evil and good**” (22:9-10). Even though wedding garments were surely provided for the guests, when a guest was found without

them, he was ejected into outer darkness (22:11-13). At that point the Lord Jesus gave this famous and enigmatic aphorism: **“For many are called, but few chosen [eklektoi]”** (22:14). As it is translated there is a serious disconnect in that the aphorism has nothing to do with the parable, *in which no one was chosen*. Rather only those who responded to the king’s summons got in. Did Christ have a lapse of thought here? This is unthinkable! It is the translations which are at fault! As in prior usage it means ‘choice’: **“Many are summoned; but few are choice.”** The prior usage of this word and in Luke 9:35, 1 Peter 2:4, 6, and Romans 16:13 give an easy solution to an extremely serious interpretive problem.

This now makes sense, since those who didn’t respond to Christ’s invitation are described as **“unwilling to come”** and **“not worthy.”** This was not attributed to God’s choice, nor were those who ended up in the feast chosen either; they had merely responded to the open invitation or summons of the king.

Some might respond that this seems to make salvation a matter of human merit. The answer is clearly found in God’s making the believer ‘choice’ by His grace. This is the point of the provision of wedding garments for the guests, who would have had no opportunity to procure them on their own. Justification by faith involves God’s provision of the wedding garments. This symbolism was anticipated in Isaiah 61:10: **“I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”** Believers are elsewhere called “saints,” without in any way undermining the gracious character of salvation, since we understand this to be positional truth. Being ‘choice’ is also positional truth.

The broader context of this parable and its aphorism confirm the appropriateness of this translation. It is one of a group of three parables Christ gave after His triumphal entry at the beginning of passion week, in all of which He declared His own rejection by His own ‘choice people,’ Israel. In accusing God’s choice nation of being unwilling to accept the invitation He had been extending to them for over three years, He made it clear that the invitation is going out to all, whom the king will then qualify to be His select guests, although their previous condition was both **“evil and good.”** Thus, in effect He set in contrast God’s ancient choice nation and the new “choice people” to whom the kingdom of God would be given, an idea explicitly declared in the previous context: **“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it”** (Mt. 21:43). Israel was uniquely appointed to be God’s choice nation, but they failed to fulfill His purpose. There is strong irony in Christ’s aphorism: the choice nation is being set aside and indiscriminate invitees (**“evil and good”**) become choice by God’s gracious plan.

The appointed Apostles. Now we come to the heart of the issue. It is a striking and overlooked fact that the major use of the verb *eklegomai* (11 out of 22 usages) is the appointment of the Apostles or the commissioning of special envoys. The appointment of His twelve Apostles was more than simple choice because it involved an office and an obligation (Lk. 6:13; Jn. 6:70; 13:18; 15:16, 19; Acts 1:2). This has nothing to do with a dogma of election to salvation, since the Eleven were already saved before He appointed them as Apostles, except that Judas was clearly a counterfeit. The Lord even referred to this fact in John 6:70. It is outrageous, therefore, that some Calvinists misuse John 15:16 as a proof-text for the notion of unconditional election to salvation: **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, . . .”** To extrapolate the address and meaning of this verse to all believers in a doctrinal way is seriously misguided and irresponsible, even though *by application* we can affirm that all believers have been appointed to bear abiding fruit.

The verb was also used for the *appointment* of a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:24), the *appointment* of the first deacons (6:5), and the *appointment* of two envoys to go to Antioch with the decision of the Jerusalem Council (15:22, 25). Peter stated in the Council that God had *appointed* him to bring the message to the Gentiles (15:7), which was a unique *commission*. Paul spoke of God choosing the Patriarchs, which was really a *commission* (13:17). Similarly, the noun is used of Christ’s word to Ananias about Paul’s *commission* to the Gentiles (9:15). *Thus, it is indisputable that the major use of these words in the New Testament is in total harmony with the prior usage, as would be expected, that is, appointment or commission.*

Only Jost Eckert in *EDNT* came close to perceiving the more precise meaning:

2. *Eklegomai* occurs with the general meaning **choose (something)** only in Luke 10:42 and 14:7; elsewhere it denotes the election [appointment] by God of the fathers (Acts 13:17), of Jesus as Son of God (Luke 9:35), and of those who believe (1 Cor 1:27 and often) and the election [appointment] of the disciples [apostles] by Jesus (John 6:70, etc.) and **appointment** to ministries and offices by the church (Acts 6:5; 15:22, 25). (Square brackets and bold mine).¹⁵

This confirms the analysis of the usage data laid out above, and if Eckert is right (and he is), then most of our translations are in the horrendous rut of rendering *eklegomai* as ‘to choose’ in most places, missing the more

precise connotation. Even Eckert stuck with the transliteration ‘election,’ and used the actual connotation ‘appointment’ only once in his article.^A

It is significant that the verb is used six times in the Olivet Discourse of the end-time tribulation believers, once coupled with the adjective in Mark 13:20: **“But for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days.”** As translated it is redundant. If we build upon the earlier usage, it would be: “But for the sake of the choice ones, whom He commissioned. . . .” Such believers facing martyrdom are especially ‘choice’ in God’s sight. It is also significant that four of Paul’s uses of the noun are in the context of his discourse on God’s dealings with the nation Israel (Rom. 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28). Is there a connection between these two major usages? Could the end-time choice ones be the 144,000 Jewish evangelists of Revelation 7:4-9, who were surely sealed to win the great multitude of Gentiles? Revelation 17:14 uses *eklektos* for these 144,000 Jewish believers who stand faithful with the Lamb in the tribulation, which is supportive of such a connection. This would be a wonderful fulfillment of God’s original commission to the Patriarchs, and although admittedly difficult of proof, is nevertheless intriguing. If correct, this confirms the more precise rendering ‘choice.’ Thus, in the Gospels *eklegomai* has nothing to do with being chosen to salvation.

Peter’s simple explanation. Now the simple statement of Peter, that philosophically naïve fisherman, must be examined again: that believers are **“elect (*eklektoi*) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood:”** (1 Pet. 1:1-2). From the predominant prior usage of *eklektoi*, it is clear that Peter addressed Christians as ‘choice ones,’ just as Paul called us ‘saints.’ Peter’s explanation that this was accomplished by the **“sanctifying work of the Spirit”** confirms that this happens when we were saved by putting faith in Christ, not in past eternity. What God foreknew in eternity is now being implemented by the Holy Spirit according to God’s foreknowledge, not by some imagined elective purpose.

Thus, by reading a pregnant determinative meaning into *prognosis*, Calvinists contradict Peter’s simple explanation that our becoming God’s choice ones is by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Peter was naive of the complex doctrine of unconditional election in eternity past and felt that the truth he was setting forth was not **“hard to understand.”** It is implemented by the preaching of the gospel and the **“sanctifying work of the Spirit.”** This is clarified by the root idea of sanctify as ‘to separate, to set apart.’

It is significant that in the same context after Peter referred to Christ as the **“choice stone”** (2:4, 6), he went on to refer to the Church as **“a chosen [choice] race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”** (2:9 HCSB). Peter borrowed language used of the nation Israel to refer to the Church, thus indicating that the Church’s election, like Israel’s, was corporate and had an obligation attached. Peter indicated in Chapter 1 that election is conditional and in Chapter 2 that it is corporate.

Peter’s single use of the noun is supportive of this understanding: **“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election [choice]. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** (2 Pet. 1:10-11, TNIV). No subtleties of exegesis are required. The issue is quite simple: if individual election is unconditional, how can anything which those professing believers do change that eternal reality? Unconditional election means that there is *no condition* which any person can meet in order to become elect or to remain elect. But clearly Peter affirms that they must be **“diligent”** (NAS) to make it sure. He is thinking of believers whose assurance is shaky and of nominal Christians who are careless about their spiritual state. This exhortation contradicts the notion of unconditional election foisted upon the church four centuries after Pentecost by Augustine, but does not negate the eternal security of true believers.

Paul’s usage

His early usage. Paul’s use of the noun *eklogē* is more complex. First in order: **“. . . knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice [appointment] of you; for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction;”** (1 Thess. 1:4). Here the point is simple: if this is a reference to individual election, how could Paul know this of every individual in the Thessalonian church?

A . It is amazing that none of the lexicons or theological dictionaries have noted this as a major use of the verb, neither *BAG*, *TDNT*, or *NIDNTT*. Only *EDNT* dimly perceives it. This is why I have not significantly referenced these works for the NT analysis and have developed my own NT word study. I have found eight major defects in Coenen’s NT analysis, such as totally overlooking 1 Peter 1:1-2. Jost Eckert’s more recent (1978) brief statement as quoted, substantially advances the research. The reader will notice that it is very helpful to examine all the cognates simultaneously rather than separately as the lexicons and theological dictionaries have done. This helps in better seeing the connections.

He spoke of the manifest work of God in their corporate conversion, not only, as we remember from Acts, that some Jews and many Gentiles were converted in just a month or so before his untimely departure, but also the radical change in their lifestyle (1:3, 6-10). Since the New Testament consistently warns of counterfeit believers in every church, Paul could not have known this about every individual in the church there. But Paul is convinced that there is a choice company of believers in Thessalonica. There is no basis for going beyond this, because there is nothing in the context which requires us to presume individual unconditional election here. He saw that they had met the condition of repentant faith and had come into “much full assurance” (*plērophoria pollē*) by the powerful working of the Spirit in conviction, regeneration, and sanctification, but not by an arbitrary eternal decree.

In reference to the Greeks’ search for wisdom in philosophy and the revelation of God’s wisdom in the gospel of Christ, Paul spoke about God’s appointed plan which goes contrary to the things people value:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen [appointed] the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen [appointed] the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen [appointed], the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Paul’s use of the verb here of God’s choice of the marginalized in society rather than the elite, makes better sense as an appointed plan rather than individual predestination to salvation, as does the parallel in James 2:5. It would be absurd to visualize God preferring the non-elite in the supposed unconditional election of individuals. It is much more likely that human factors, such as the pride of the elite factors in. Schrenk comments that this passage implies “a radical break with selfish concerns about election.”¹⁶ This is a plan which reverses the natural human way of doing things and gives greater glory to God! This context is perfectly understandable in terms of the general principles which are operative in the way people respond to God’s calling through the gospel message. The Lord Jesus had explained this principle after dealing with the rich young ruler: “**Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven**” (Mt. 19:23; cf. Mt. 5:3-5). One does not have to be very bright to observe that it is not the world’s intellectuals, power brokers, millionaires, and ‘beautiful people’ who are responding in significant numbers to the gospel. This is fully explainable in terms of human nature and is hardly based upon some mysterious unconditional election of individuals by God. Indeed, Paul went on to tell how the open secret of God’s wisdom has now been revealed through the Apostles (1 Cor. 2:6-7). Thus it is astonishing that J. I. Packer stated that this passage is one of the five major passages upon which the Calvinistic doctrine of election is based.¹⁷ Here is a clear case of reading one’s theology into a passage. The principle enunciated here is not mysterious: wealth, power, prestige, and intellectualism are major obstacles to people coming to faith in Christ.

Romans. There are five doctrinally significant passages in Romans: “**He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect [choice ones]? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?**” (Rom. 8:32-34). Here there is the wonderful consequence of the five-linked chain of vv. 28-31. Now that we have been foreknown, foreordained to be conformed to the image of Christ, called, justified, and glorified, there can be no condemnation (8:1). Certainly justification and glorification put in a past tense must be understood as positional truth. Since we are also positionally God’s *eklektoi* (choice ones), the idea of God allowing a condemnatory charge against us is unthinkable. Which possible rendering, ‘chosen’ or ‘choice,’ makes better sense in the flow of Paul’s logic? He had identified us as “**those who love God**” in v. 28. Then he began the sequence with foreknowledge in v. 29. Either is possible in this context, but ‘choice’ is to be preferred: “**Who will bring a charge against God’s choice ones?**” *It is not because He has chosen us, but because He has positionally made us His choice ones based upon foreknowledge, that no charge can be entertained in His courts.*

Paul used the abstract noun *eklogē* four times in the section defending God’s righteousness in His dealings with Israel (Chs. 9-11). First in Romans 9:11 is the selection of Jacob over Esau to be the progenitor of His choice nation. Salvation is not at all the issue here, nor are Jacob and Esau in view as individuals, as is clear from the whole of Genesis 25:23, where God informed Rebekah: “**Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger.**” The context of Romans 9–11 is God’s fairness in setting the nation Israel aside dispensationally and turning to the Gentiles. Israel’s being commissioned as God’s choice people corporately for two millennia did not automatically save any Jew, nor did it rule out salvation for Gentiles. But it gave awesome privileges and responsibilities to Israel (9:1-6).

The other uses of the noun in Chapter 11 all relate to the same issue. **“In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice [appointed plan]”** (11:5). In the preceding verses, Paul had referred to God’s reserving a remnant of 7000 in the days of Elijah and made a comparison with the remnant of Jewish believers in his day according to the principle of His gracious appointed plan. This he explained involved a judicial hardening of unbelieving Israel, as part of that transition from Israel to the Church: **“What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but the election [appointed people] obtained it, and the rest were hardened”** (11:7 NAS, margin). From the strong corporate context of this passage, it is close to obvious that Paul is not speaking of the selection of individual Jews to be that remnant, but rather His dealing with the Jewish people corporately. In the preceding section he had made it abundantly clear that faith is the principle upon which that remnant came into being (9:30–33; 10:2-4, 8-17).

The fourth use here is even more obviously corporate: **“From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice [appointed plan] they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;”** (11:28). The antecedent of ‘they’ are Jews who are enemies of the gospel, and yet, Paul says that corporately they are still a part of God’s appointed nation, which will ultimately be converted in the main at the end time return of the Deliverer (Rom. 11:11-27). Most transparently here, the abstract noun *eklogē* could not refer to individual unconditional election to salvation. *Thus there is a consistent corporate usage of this term as ‘choice’ or appointed people or plan in these four usages related to the nation Israel.*

In this case Paul’s usage of the adjective in Romans 16:13 would be the same as previously, since at least three major translations have recognized that ‘choice’ makes better sense: **“Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, . . .”** Presumably, Rufus was not the only believer in Paul’s list who was ‘elect,’ as most translations render it. It is not clear just what “chosen in the Lord” could mean in contradistinction to the other Christians listed.

Later Pauline references. The context of the use of the adjective in Colossians 3:12 is also significant: **“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience”** (NIV). With the prior usage in mind, we must retranslate accordingly: **“God’s choice people.”** In many of Paul’s letters he extensively described the believer’s exalted position in Christ, and then immediately based his exhortations for godly living upon that position (Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:1; Col. 3:1-3). Since we have been exalted to become God’s choice people, holy and dearly loved, how appropriate that these moral qualities should be seen in us. On the other hand, being chosen by God with no revealed conditions would not be a solid basis for moral appeal. Some who see themselves as ‘the elect of God’ are arrogant, self-righteous, and proud. The nation Israel, so conscious of their being the chosen people of God, had become arrogant, self-righteous, and proud by Christ’s day. In this light, a strong case can be made for the rendering “choice ones.” This parallels the equivalency we noted in Luke 9:35 where “choice Son” was equivalent to “beloved Son” in the other Gospels. God’s choice people are also **“holy and dearly loved.”**

This leads us to the most significant use of the verb theologically—Ephesians 1:4ff. Based upon prior usage it would be appropriate to translate: **“Just as He appointed us in Him before the foundation of the world that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love.”** He didn’t merely choose us; He appointed us with the obligation and goal that we would be holy and blameless in love. Now we learn that *every believer* has been appointed to an office with responsibilities attached. This more precise translation undermines the dogma that God has chosen only ‘the elect’ to salvation, whoever they may be. Ephesians is the unique epistle about the church, which consists of those who are “in Him” by simple repentant faith in Christ. This phrase, or similar ones (in the Beloved One), is used twenty times in the first two chapters. Again we see appointment as a more specific idea than merely choosing. The remaining two uses of the verb are the only contexts where the common rendering of the verb ‘to choose’ is clearly adequate (Lk. 10:42 & 14:7), which is only two out of twenty-two, as already affirmed by Jost Eckert in *EDNT*. We have a fuller discussion of Ephesians One in the next chapter.

The standard translation of Paul’s reference to angels who are *eklektoi* raises significant questions (1 Tim. 5:21). Where else in the Bible is there any concept that the division between holy and rebellious angels was by God’s election? Scripture is clear that it was Satan’s rebellion which led a host of angels astray, not any elective action by God. Thus, here too the probability is great that they are really ‘choice’ angels.

Let us also consider the context of Paul’s usage in Titus 1:1: **“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect [choice ones] and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie,**

promised before the beginning of time” (NIV). Here Paul wrote to Titus, his missionary colleague, for the benefit of God’s *eklektoi*, with a view to strengthening their faith and enhancing their godliness. This is, of course, his epistle of good works. As in Colossians 3:12, the appeal to godliness is more harmonious with Paul’s usual appeal based upon our exalted position in Christ as God’s ‘choice ones.’ In other epistles, he more frequently addresses the recipients as ‘saints’ (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2), but here those to whom Titus is ministering are called ‘choice ones.’ This rendering simply takes note of the predominant meaning in prior Greek usage. Here it is worth noting how he links their being ‘choice’ to their faith, which cannot be separated.

Paul’s reference to the *eklektoi* in 2 Timothy 2:10 brings out an aspect which is reflected in other contexts. “. . . **for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect [choice ones], that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory**” (NIV). Again, we must decide whether the traditional rendering ‘elect’ fits the context, or whether we should go back to the predominant pre-New Testament usage of ‘choice.’ If God’s people have been unconditionally elected to salvation, how can Paul say that his suffering in the Mamertine prison in Rome could contribute in any way to their ultimate salvation? On the other hand, Paul’s testimony and propagation of the word of God even from prison could have a big impact upon the lives of the churches, especially professing believers who need to be diligent to enter in (Heb. 4:11), if they are understood to be God’s choice people, not just some privileged class of ‘elect.’ There is also an overtone of suffering in Christ’s frequent reference to the *eklektoi* in the great tribulation in His prophetic discourse (Mt. 24:22, 24, 31; Mk. 13:20, 22, 27; & possibly Lk. 18:7). Suffering saints are far more appropriately described as the ‘choice ones,’ rather than some ‘unconditionally elected ones.’

John’s usage. The elder Apostle John’s use of the adjective twice in 2 John to refer to a church as the “**elect [choice] lady**” and to his own church as the “**elect [choice] sister**” (vv. 1, 13) is a euphemism in a time of growing persecution, to obscure his meaning to hostile eyes. The church is composed of God’s choice people. Mission agencies working today in restricted countries have developed a similar code to communicate with our “workers.” The corporate implications of his usage are quite transparent.

Conclusions

Since I have already shown in my previous books¹⁸ that *proginoskein* should never have been translated ‘to predestinate,’ as Jerome set the erroneous pattern for most subsequent translations. It is widely acknowledged that Augustine was the first predestinarian, and the reason is obvious that earlier church fathers read Greek and saw nothing of predestination in the Greek.

In the same way the earlier church fathers saw nothing of the doctrine of unconditional election in the Greek New Testament since *eklegomai* and its cognates say nothing about political elections in the New Testament and just as certainly nothing about a doctrine of ‘election,’ whether conditional or unconditional.

1. Geoffrey Bromiley, in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vi.
2. Colin Brown, in Brown, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, I, 7.
3. Lothar Coenen in Brown, ed., *ibid*, I, 536.
4. G. Schrenk in Kittel, ed., *ibid*, IV, 144-5, 176, 181.
5. Schrenk, *ibid.*, IV, 176-182; Arndt and Gingrich (BAG), pp. 241-242.
6. Coenen, *ibid*, I, 537-8.
7. Horst Seebass in G. J. Botterweck & Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, II, 83.
8. *Ibid*, II, 87, quoting Vriezen’s 1953 German article in *ATHANT*.
9. John N. Oswalt in Harris, Archer, Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, I, 100-101.
10. G. Quell in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV, 144; Schrenk, *ibid.*, IV, 182.
11. J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, p. 195; This is my rendering of the supplied Gk. text from POxy II, Ogis, and the Avircius epitaph. Unfortunately the Gk. quotations are very brief.
12. Coenen, *ibid.*, I, 539.
13. Schrenk, *ibid.*, IV, 171, 175.
14. James Daane, *The Freedom of God*, p. 101.
15. Jost Eckert in Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, I, 416.
16. Schrenk, *ibid.*, IV, 174.
17. From the debate between Clark Pinnock and J. I. Packer on Calvinism and Arminianism, tape in my possession.
18. C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* (2002) and *Getting the Gospel Right* (2005).