

Why another book on predestination and election? Because people still struggle with these great biblical doctrines. Why a book by Cornel Venema on the subject? Because he is one of the clearest and simplest systematic theologians today. Why read this book rather than an older one? Because Venema applies old texts and old doctrines to contemporary questions. Are you sold yet?

Ryan M. McGraw

Morton H. Smith Professor of Systematic Theology,  
Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, South Carolina

As a doctoral student I found Professor Venema's work on predestination during the Reformation period immensely helpful. But this book brings abundant exegesis and theological argument to bear on a controversial but wonderful truth. I'm delighted to commend such a learned and helpful work.

Michael Horton

J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology & Apologetics,  
Westminster Seminary California, Escondido, California

This is a magnificent discussion of predestination and election. It exemplifies the thorough Biblical exegesis and careful historical and theological analysis that we have come to expect from Dr Venema. I can think of no better resource, for not only does it address the usual questions surrounding this difficult but vital topic but it does so with close attention to the Biblical text and in dialogue with the history of thought from Augustine to the present day.

Robert Letham

Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology,  
Union School of Theology, Bridgend, Wales

Cornel Venema had given us a careful, thoughtful, and very helpful study of predestination: its biblical foundations, its historical development in Augustine and the Reformation, its modern challenges from Arminius, Barth, and open-theism, and its pastoral significance. Throughout Venema provides an excellent exposition and defense of the Reformed doctrine of election.

W. Robert Godfrey

President Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Church History,  
Westminster Seminary California, Escondido, California

Vigilant in explanation and polemic, Venema serves up the classic Reformed doctrine of predestination for a new generation of readers. Those readers will here find an intelligent overview of the most relevant biblical materials, along with a careful survey of select authors who have shaped this doctrine to the present day. Taking measure of some modern rivals to the Reformed confessional consensus, Venema contests Barth's revision of the doctrine. But, more importantly, against Open Theism, and in conversation with some of the Reformed tradition's best teachers, he wages a fresh defense of the conquering grace of God—which is to say, he defends 'the old, old story of Jesus and His love.'

J. Mark Beach

Professor of Doctrinal and Ministerial Studies,  
Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Dyer, Indiana

This is an important book for the lucid and instructive treatment of predestination it provides. Composed of in-depth biblical, historical, and theological discussions with some concluding pastoral reflections, it will greatly benefit all who are interested in this doctrine and the crucial issues involved—issues, the author shows convincingly, that concern nothing less than the heart of the gospel.

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

Professor Emeritus of Biblical and Systematic Theology,  
Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, Pennsylvania

R.E.D.S.

REFORMED,  
EXEGETICAL  
AND  
DOCTRINAL  
STUDIES

# CHOSEN<sup>in</sup>CHRIST

REVISITING THE CONTOURS  
OF PREDESTINATION

Cornelis Venema

**MENTOR**  
*Encouraging Christians to Think*

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*To my wife Nancy,  
And all our children and grandchildren.*



## ABBREVIATIONS

- APC Benjamin B. Warfield, 'Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy,' in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 4: *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*. Reprint. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981
- BDE H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*. London: James Clarke and Co., 1950
- BECNT Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
- BNTCS Black's New Testament Commentary Series
- CC *Calvin's Commentaries*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981
- CD Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins*. Studies in Historical Theology 2. Reprint. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1988
- CD II/2 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II/2: *The Doctrine of God*. Ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957
- CNTC *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 12 vols. Ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960
- CO *Calvini Opera (Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia)*. Ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss, et al., 59 vol. Brunsvigae, Schwetschke, 1862–1900
- CTJ *Calvin Theological Journal*
- DSHR D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981, 1994
- EEC Evangelical Exegetical Commentary
- GCP Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Reformed Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 1991
- GECC Richard A. Muller, 'Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice: Arminius' Gambit and the Reformed Response,' in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, vol. 1: *Biblical and Practical Perspectives on Calvinism*. Ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995
- GGBW Schreiner, Thomas, and Bruce A. Ware, eds. *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, vol. 1: *Biblical and Practical Perspectives on Calvinism*. Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1995
- GGWM Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989

- HC Heidelberg Catechism
- ICC International Critical Commentary
- Institutes* John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. Vols. 20–21: Library of Christian Classics. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960
- IVPNCS The IVP New Testament Commentary Series
- JES* *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*
- JETS* *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
- LCC The Library of Christian Classics
- LW *Luther's Works*. Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. American ed. 82 vols (projected). Philadelphia: Fortress; St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1957–
- MAJT* *Mid-America Journal of Theology*
- MSJ* *The Master's Seminary Journal*
- NICNT The New International Commentary on the New Testament
- NIGTC The New International Greek Testament Commentary
- NT New Testament
- NTL The New Testament Library
- OS* John Calvin, *Opera Selecta*, 5 vol. Ed. P. Barth and G. Niesel. München: Kaiser, 1926–52
- OT Old Testament
- PNTC The Pillar New Testament Commentary
- R&R* *Reformation and Revival*
- RD* Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. Trans. John Vriend. Ed. John Bolt. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008
- SCJ* *The Sixteenth Century Journal*
- SJT* *The Scottish Journal of Theology*
- SLNPNF A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church
- TECT* Dempsey, Michael T., ed. *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011
- TNTC Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
- WCF Westminster Confession of Faith
- WJA *The Works of James Arminius*. Trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, 3 vols. Reprint. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986
- WTJ* *The Westminster Theological Journal*

# Acknowledgments

WHILE working on this book, I was reminded frequently of my dependence upon the help of others. The topic of election is one with which the church of Jesus Christ has wrestled throughout its history. It can scarcely be addressed without careful engagement with, as well as reliance upon, the formulations of the church's confessions and most gifted theologians. I am aware that my study on election will be published on the four-hundredth anniversary of the convening of the Synod of Dort in 1618 A.D. Readers of this book will discover that I make grateful use of the Canons of Dort, which offer one of the finest confessional summaries of the Scriptures' teaching on election. They will also discover that I stand in the line of those, like the authors of the Canons, who are indebted to the great church father, Augustine, whose writings on the subject of election have had a formative influence upon Christian theology.

I would like to express more particularly my gratitude to a number of people without whom this book could not have been written or completed. I thank Matthew Barrett and John V. Fesko, the editors of the R.E.D.S. series, for inviting me to write a new study on the doctrine of election. Throughout the process of writing the book,

Matthew and John offered timely and helpful advice and steered the project to completion. I am also grateful for my faculty colleagues at Mid-America Reformed Seminary with whom I have enjoyed camaraderie for many years and from whom I have learned much along the way. I am especially thankful for the editorial assistance of J. Mark Beach and Ruben Zartman, who read some parts of this study that were first published as articles in the *Mid-America Journal of Theology*. I am also grateful for the assistance of Glenda Mathes, who willingly edited the entire manuscript; Daniel Ragusa, who worked readily and patiently on preparing a table of abbreviations, a glossary and a select bibliography; and Tim Scheuers who read the chapter on Karl Barth's doctrine of election and offered suggestions for improvement. I also want to thank those at Christian Focus, especially Willie MacKenzie, for their commitment to the R.E.D.S. series and willingness to publish this book.

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Last, but by no means least, I would like to acknowledge my gratitude for my wife, Nancy, whose encouragement, companionship, and music, have enriched my life for more than four decades. I am deeply grateful for her, as well as for the four children and twelve grandchildren that the Lord has given to us. All of them are a constant reminder of the truth of 1 Corinthians 4:7 ('What do you have that you have not received?'), a text that reminds us that God's grace alone is the source of every blessing in our lives. I dedicate this book to them.

# Introduction

NEARLY every author who tackles the biblical teaching regarding predestination and election begins by noting the controversial nature of the topic, as well as the dangers that often accompany any treatment of it. During the course of my preparation of this volume on election, I occasionally wondered about the wisdom of writing yet another book on the subject. Some of the most gifted and faithful theologians in the history of the church have wrestled with this subject, and yet none seems to have provided a completely persuasive account of the Scriptures' teaching. Certainly, none of them has put an end to the divisions this theme often provokes. Nor have they provided a resolution of questions likely to continue arising in Christian theology's ongoing conversation regarding the doctrine. No feature of biblical teaching affords a more compelling proof that theology in this time between the times of our Lord's first and second comings will remain a 'theology of pilgrims' (*theologia viatorum*). On this subject, as well as many others, we must recognize with humility how much we do not know, and even what we know is seen through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12). No doubt, we will be reminded of this again and again as we make our way through this study.

However, even though the task is daunting, we are obliged to continue to reflect upon the doctrine of election for several reasons.

In the first place, it is impossible to marginalize the Scripture's teaching on the subject of election. Try as we may to avoid the topic, it is scarcely possible to listen carefully and humbly to the teaching of Scripture without bumping up against a story whose main Actor is the triune God, whose gracious initiatives throughout the long course of redemptive history are born out of a deep-rooted determination to redeem His people in Christ. Whether it be in the Old Testament's account of God's election of His people Israel, or in the New Testament narrative of Christ's coming in the fullness of time as God's chosen Servant through whom the blessings of salvation will extend to all the peoples of the earth, God is always the One who directs the course of events in a way that fulfills His saving purposes. Anyone who attends to the biblical story of redemption can hardly fail to ask the question to which the doctrine of election provides an answer: What ultimately lies behind these gracious initiatives of God?

Even if the biblical account didn't expressly answer this question by pointing us to look deep within the eternal counsel of God for the redemption of His people in Christ, we would not be able to repress such questions as: When did this story begin, within God's eternal counsel or in the course of history? Why does God choose to act in the manner in which He does? Does the story of redemption that unfolds in the Scriptures begin and end with God's grace in Jesus Christ? Or is the story of redemption merely an afterword, a kind of second story that only begins after God's first work, creation, is unexpectedly undone by the introduction of sin into a world originally created good? In what way does the story of redemption fulfill God's original purposes in creation, including the destiny of human life in fellowship with Him? What we will discover in this study is how the biblical answers to these questions inevitably take us back to God's own eternal counsel and will, which are revealed and unfolded to us through the whole course of the history of redemption and revelation. What we will see is that the doctrine of election, far from being an obscure and speculative subject to be reserved to the playground of theologians, lies before and underneath the whole course of the triune God's redemptive actions throughout the course of history.

In addition to the integral place of the doctrine of election in the biblical understanding of redemptive history, it is remarkable to observe how this theme is often linked in the Scriptures with two, closely interrelated, motifs. The first of these is the believer's humility in the presence of God's merciful election in Christ. Nothing more starkly expresses the truth that salvation is God's gift in Christ to all who believe than the teaching of God's gracious election of His people in Christ. The scriptural teaching that salvation finds its source in God's free and sovereign purpose of election nullifies any view that ascribes any part in salvation to human merit or worthiness. The second of these motifs complements the first. If the salvation of sinners does not depend upon human merit, but upon God's grace alone, then all praise and honor for salvation belong exclusively to God. No room remains to boast in anything we do to make ourselves worthy recipients of what God alone graciously grants to us. For this reason, in the scriptural presentation of election, we hear a recurring 'hymn of praise and gratitude for the foundation of salvation' in God's merciful election, and not a fear or foreboding that steals from believers their thanksgiving to God for His unspeakable gift.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, any biblically-faithful engagement with the doctrine of election ought to encourage humility as well as hearty thanksgiving on the part of those who acknowledge God's grace toward them in Christ. If these responses are not provoked by our contemplation of God's gracious purpose of election, then we have reason to ask whether or not we have handled the topic properly or harbor some residue of pride in our own merit before God's presence.

Despite the centrality of the doctrine of election in the Scriptures, as well as the humility and thanksgiving it ordinarily ought to produce in us, we must frankly admit that the theme of election also provokes considerable uneasiness on the part of many. This uneasiness has at least two occasions.

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1. G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 13. Berkouwer rightly observes that in Scripture 'the certainty of salvation is never threatened or cast in shadows because of the fact of election. Rather, we always read of the joy of God's election and of election as the profound, unassailable and strong foundation for man's salvation, both for time and eternity.'

On the one hand, the doctrine of election seems for many to raise the specter of God's 'secret' and 'inscrutable' will to save some and not others. If salvation ultimately depends upon God's free decision to save some fallen sinners in and through Christ, how can we obtain any certainty or assurance of our salvation? Since we do not know (as God alone knows) those who are elect (2 Tim. 2:19), doesn't the doctrine of election inevitably confront us with a hidden or unknown will of God that casts a dark shadow over the revelation of His grace in Jesus Christ? Although the scriptural presentation of election is invariably linked with thanksgiving and praise to God for His undeserved mercy in Christ, the history of Christian theological reflection on election often seems to have aggravated the problem of assurance. If election in the Scriptures is inseparably joined to the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ, how do we explain the disjunction between what is said about God's grace and mercy as these are revealed in Christ and the inscrutable, hidden will of God in respect to those toward whom He elects not to show mercy? Certainly, in the modern period, theological reflection upon the doctrine of election has often been preoccupied with the question of the assurance we may have of God's grace toward us in Christ.<sup>2</sup> We will have occasion to see how this has come to expression in the course of our study. But it undoubtedly constitutes one of the most vexing features of the doctrine of election, which cannot be avoided in any contemporary treatment of it.

On the other hand, the doctrine of election raises questions regarding divine sovereignty and human freedom. If salvation or non-salvation ultimately depend upon God's purpose of election, then how are we to understand the responsibility of sinners in relation to the summons of the gospel to faith in Jesus Christ? For many, the doctrine of predestination and election, which emphasizes God's unconditional choice to save His people in Christ from before

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2. When I treat Karl Barth's revision of the Reformed understanding of election in chapter 7, I will note how his view is driven in significant measure by a desire to address this question. In Berkouwer's introduction to his study on the doctrine of election, he clearly identifies the question of the certainty of salvation as 'the most important' question that needs to be addressed. As he puts it, 'Can we really speak of the consolation of election, or must we conclude that this doctrine undermines the basic foundations of our lives, devastating all certainty and stability?' (*ibid.*, 12).

the foundation of the world, seems to diminish, even nullify, the choices fallen sinners make in response to the gospel summons to believe in Christ for salvation. The idea of God's pre-temporal foreordination of what will come to pass in time, especially in respect to the salvation of fallen human beings who are called to faith and repentance, seems incompatible with the freedom of human beings to choose for or against God. In the history of Christian theology, the doctrine of election has inevitably provoked questions regarding human freedom and the implications of the doctrine of original sin for the ability of sinners to respond properly in faith to the call of the gospel. If God's choice determines who will be saved and who will not be saved, can we still maintain the freedom and responsibility of fallen human beings to respond to the gospel's obligations? Not a few theologians in the history of the church have regarded a robust doctrine of God's merciful election to be incoherent with what we know about human responsibility. In their judgment, if God's choice to save some does not depend upon what fallen sinners do in response to the call of the gospel, then fallen sinners are no more responsible for their decisions than a robot is for doing what it was programmed to do. We are left with a view of redemption's history that looks more like the playing out of a script by actors, all of whose actions and decisions are not their own but pre-determined by the divine author and playwright. If the salvation of believers ultimately depends upon God's sovereign choice to save them and not others, fatalism is introduced into the order of salvation.

While these questions concerning divine sovereignty and human freedom have recurred throughout the history of theology, they have become especially acute in the context of the modern world. Although generalizations regarding what some call the 'post-modern mind' are often unduly simplistic, two broad convictions predominate among many people who live in the secularized, post-Christian cultures and societies of the West. Both of these convictions are hostile to the biblical teaching of election and to the most common formulations of this teaching that have held sway throughout the history of the Christian church. In the language of David Wells, a keen analyst of the postmodern mind, the two great foci of the postmodern mind are a 'decentered world' and

the ‘autonomous self.’<sup>3</sup> A decentered world is one in which God is radically marginalized and no longer viewed as the One who lies at the center of what transpires in history. Because the modern mind has dethroned God, the world and its history have no ultimate meaning, and the future becomes unknown and unknowable. The postmodern world is one in which anything is possible, and hence everyone is at risk of what the future may bring in the way of random changes. The decentered world of the modern mind corresponds to its deep-seated commitment to human autonomy, the freedom of human beings to do as they will, to think as they please, and to fashion a ‘god’ small enough to accommodate their autonomous selves. From the perspective of the autonomous self, the future depends in large measure upon what we choose to make it, at least within the little world that lies within our sovereign control.

It is not difficult to see how these assumptions of the postmodern mind are incompatible with the traditional Christian doctrine of God in general and anything like a traditional understanding of the doctrine of election in particular. In the biblical worldview, God is the transcendent Creator of all things and the providential Lord over all that transpires within the created order. The first article of the Belgic Confession, one of the great confessions of the Protestant Reformation, offers a typical statement regarding God that represents the common view of the historic Christian church: ‘there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and ... he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.’ Within the framework of this biblical understanding of who God is, the doctrine of election has its proper home. When God is at the center of all things,

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3. David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 233-62. Wells recognizes that the language of ‘postmodernism’ is rather elusive, and that many of the tenets of what is called postmodernism find their origins earlier in the modern period, especially in the period of the Enlightenment. In a companion volume, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today’s World* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008, 2017), Wells uses the language of an ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ God to express the way God’s transcendent otherness and governance of history has been replaced in the modern era by a therapeutic god who answers to our felt needs (67-103). As Wells observes, only a transcendent God, who is ‘outside’ of us, ‘rules over all of life, [and] guides it toward the end he has in mind for it’ (91).

the One in whom ‘we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28), it is not surprising that He should lie at the center not only of the creation as a whole but also of all that takes place in the course of history. Nor is it surprising that, in respect to the salvation of human beings who bear His image and fell into sin through the disobedience of Adam, God should lie at the center of their redemption.

That God works all things according to the counsel of His will (cf. Eph. 1:11), and that the salvation of fallen sinners depends upon His saving purpose, makes eminently good sense within the framework of the biblical assumptions that shaped the formulation of the doctrine of election throughout the history of the church. But it makes no sense within the framework of the postmodern worldview with its convictions about a decentered world and the autonomous self. From the postmodern perspective, the doctrine of election is not only inconceivable, but radically opposed to what is most prized, namely, the freedom of human beings to shape their own future and decide for themselves what kind of ‘god’ answers to their aspirations for human well-being. The postmodern mind can only be inhospitable to any doctrine of election that views the salvation of fallen sinners to depend wholly upon God’s grace in Christ. Consequently, when modern theologians allow themselves to ‘make peace with the culture of modernity’, they are obliged to revise the doctrine of election in a way that diminishes God and enlarges human autonomy.<sup>4</sup>

For all of these reasons, and especially in view of the inhospitable cultural context in which the doctrine of election must be presented today, I believe revisiting the biblical doctrine of election will prove beneficial and timely. Because the doctrine of election is a central theme in the Scriptures, it has intrinsic and perennial importance as a topic for Christian theology. But especially in the contemporary context, Christian theology needs to present the biblical doctrine of election as the only satisfactory answer to the baleful consequences

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4. See Clark H. Pinnock, ‘From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology,’ in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 27. According to Pinnock, the doctrine of election requires radical modification in order to make peace ‘with the culture of modernity’. In Chapter 8 of this study, I treat the ‘open theist’ view of election, which is the ‘radical modification’ that Pinnock believes will help to make peace between Christian theology and modernity.

of the postmodern mind. Rather than make peace with modernity, the doctrine of election needs to be formulated as a radical challenge and alternative to the obvious vulnerabilities of postmodernism – a little god who cannot really help us, and an autonomous self with insufficient resources to handle a world where anything is possible but nothing is certain. Whereas postmodernism can only produce a meaningless world and an uncertain future, the biblical doctrine of election focuses our hearts and minds upon God’s immeasurable and deep-rooted love for fallen sinners in Jesus Christ. In the biblical view of election, we meet the true and living God, who has graciously chosen to save His people in Christ. The doctrine of election introduces us to the God and Father of Jesus Christ, who alone promises to work all things together for good in the lives of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:31-39). From the standpoint of the biblical doctrine of election, rather than living in a decentered world occupied with autonomous selves, we find ourselves the beneficiaries of God’s undeserved mercy in Jesus Christ. Rather than being left to our meager resources or devices, we find the God who is for us in Christ, and whose gracious purposes are certain to be fulfilled. While we may still have unresolved questions, we will not be left as fatherless orphans to face them. Rather, we will be able to face them as those whom God has lovingly predestined to adoption as sons (Eph. 1:4-5).

## Predestination and Election:

### A Preliminary Definition of Terms

Before turning to the plan I propose to follow in this study, a brief definition of terms that will recur throughout is necessary. In any theological reflection upon the teaching of Scripture, we must always remember the dictum, ‘he who distinguishes well, teaches well’ (*qui bene distinguit, bene docet*). Part of what is required for distinguishing well is the recognition of the meaning of terms and their proper use. While I will treat a considerable number of additional terms during the course of this study of the doctrine of election, a few key terms require comment before we engage the topic directly.

The two terms that I will use most often are ‘predestination’ and ‘election’. The first term, ‘predestination,’ derives from a Latin root,

*praedestinatio*, which is a composite of *prae-*, ‘before,’ and *destinare*, ‘to destine’ or ‘to ordain’.<sup>5</sup> Within the framework of historic Christian theology, the doctrine of predestination concerns God’s eternal purpose or will for the salvation or the non-salvation of fallen sinners. Whereas the ‘general decree of God’ (*decretum Dei generale*) in its comprehensive meaning refers to all God wills respecting creation and providence, predestination is the ‘special decree of God’ (*decretum Dei speciale*) respecting the salvation or damnation of fallen human beings.<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, the doctrine of predestination was treated in the system of theology as a part of the broader doctrine of providence (as a ‘special providence’, *specialis providentia*). Whereas the doctrine of providence deals with God’s sustenance and governance of all created things, the doctrine of predestination especially focuses on God’s eternal purpose regarding the salvation of fallen human beings. The doctrine fundamentally assumes that all things occur within history according to God’s eternal purpose and decree(s). In the Christian distinction between the triune God, who is the Creator of all things and the sole Redeemer of His people, and the created world, the entire creation in its existence and history is governed by God’s counsel and not by chance or fate.

In the history of theology, predestination is ordinarily viewed as consisting of two parts, ‘election’ and ‘reprobation’ (double predestination or *gemina praedestinatio*). Election, from the Latin word *eligere*, ‘to choose out of,’ refers to God’s choice to save some fallen sinners and to grant them faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.<sup>7</sup> Reprobation, from the Latin word *reprobare*, ‘to reject,’ refers to God’s choice not to save others but to leave them in their sins.<sup>8</sup> The decree or purpose of God to elect or to reprobate expresses God’s sovereign freedom either to save and grant faith in Jesus Christ to some or to not save and thus to leave others in their

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5. See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985, 2017), q.v. *praedestinatio*, 274-6. My definition of terms in this section makes free use of Muller’s fine dictionary, but deliberately simplifies his far more subtle and scholastically-defined definitions.

6. *ibid.*, q.v. *decretum*, 287.

7. *ibid.*, q.v. *electio*, 104.

8. *ibid.*, q.v. *reprobatio*, 312-13.

sins. A distinction is also often drawn between election, which is a positive expression of God's gracious will to grant salvation to otherwise undeserving sinners, and reprobation, which is a negative expression of God's just determination to 'pass by' some of the fallen human race, all of whose members are justly worthy of condemnation and death for their sins. In this understanding, reprobation, which manifests God's justice, is not exactly parallel to election, which is rooted in God's undeserved mercy. For this reason, a distinction is sometimes drawn between what is termed 'preterition' (from the Lat. *praeterire*, 'to pass by'), which expresses God's negative will not to save the reprobate, and 'condemnation,' which expresses God's justice in punishing the reprobate for their sins.<sup>9</sup> Although God's will is the ultimate reason for the salvation of some and the non-salvation of others, the proximate reason for the non-salvation of the reprobate is their own sinfulness.<sup>10</sup> Because my interest in this study is primarily upon God's gracious and positive will to elect His people in Christ unto salvation, not His just will to leave others in their sins, I will most commonly use the term 'election' rather than 'predestination'.

In the history of Christian theology, two related terms are employed to distinguish the doctrine of predestination and election from alternative views regarding God's work in the salvation of sinners. Since a robust doctrine of predestination and election accents the truth that salvation is grounded in God's gracious and sovereign choice, this doctrine is a form of *monergism*. The only effective cause in the initiating of conversion is God's sovereign grace. This stands in contrast to *synergism*, which teaches that the divine and human wills co-operate in the believer's response to the gospel. Synergism implies that the salvation of believers is not solely authored by God in consequence of His electing purpose. Instead, salvation ultimately

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9. *ibid.*, q.v. *praeteritio*, 285-6.

10. The definitions provided in this paragraph do not necessarily entail a particular view of the 'order of God's decrees' (*ordo decretorum Dei*). Nor do they prejudge the question whether or not the topic of the order of God's decrees is a legitimate topic for theological reflection. Later in this study, I will identify the two most common views on this order in Reformed theology ('infralapsarianism' and 'supralapsarianism') and offer an opinion on the question. To define these views at this point would be premature.

depends on the free and independent co-operation of the human will in embracing the gospel promise of salvation in Christ.

## The Aim and Plan of the Book

As the subtitle of this book indicates, my aim is to treat the doctrine of election in biblical, historical, theological, and pastoral perspective. These perspectives roughly correspond to the sequence of the three main parts of the study, as well as the specific chapters in each part.

In the first and foundational part of the study, I dedicate three chapters to a broad overview of the scriptural teaching regarding the doctrine of election. My purpose in providing this summary is to provide background for subsequent parts of the study, which address the history of theological reflection upon the doctrine of election and more recent attempts to revise traditional formulations. Despite the effort on the part of some to marginalize the doctrine of election, suggesting that it may only be a principal theme in some of the writings of the apostle Paul, these chapters illustrate how pervasive the theme of God's gracious election is in the Scriptures, beginning in the Old Testament with the election of His people Israel, and then fulfilled in the person and work of Christ according to the witness of the New Testament. Since the theme of God's gracious purpose of election receives its most thorough and extensive treatment in the epistles of the apostle Paul, I reserve a separate chapter for summarizing the doctrine of election in them. While these chapters on the biblical foundations for the doctrine of election deliberately avoid much direct engagement with formulations produced throughout the history of theological reflection on the Scripture's teaching, they provide a touchstone by which to evaluate the biblical fidelity of these historical developments and formulations.

The second part of the study consists of three chapters, each of which focuses upon a particular theologian or period that is of special significance in the history of theological reflection on the doctrine of election. In the early history of theology, the first period of significant reflection is associated with the names of Pelagius and especially Augustine, the arch-opponent of Pelagius and Pelagianism. No name in the history of Christian theology deserves to be more closely associated with the doctrine of election and predestination

than that of Augustine. In many respects, Augustine's formulation of the doctrine of election has served as a kind of benchmark for all subsequent developments, including the re-emergence of a broad Augustinian consensus in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth-century. For this reason, a separate chapter is devoted to Augustine's formulation of the doctrine in his anti-Pelagian writings, as well as the abiding influence of these writings during the medieval period. After I treat Augustine's formulation, separate chapters are devoted to the formulation of the doctrine of election in the period of the Reformation and in the post-Reformation response of Reformed theology to the writings of Arminius. The chapter devoted to the Reformation view of election seeks to demonstrate that the leading Reformers, both Lutheran and Reformed, broadly adhered to an Augustinian view of election in opposition to developments in late medieval theology that leaned toward a semi-Pelagian doctrine. Though there is some diversity of formulation among the Reformers regarding the doctrine of election, they commonly appealed to Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings to demonstrate that their emphasis upon salvation by grace alone through the work of Christ alone was the prevalent view of the ancient catholic church. I conclude the historical part of the study with a chapter on Arminius and the Reformed response to his views at the Synod of Dort. My purpose with this chapter is to establish the parameters for developments in the modern period that reflect the ongoing debate between an Augustinian/Calvinist and an Arminian/semi-Pelagian formulation of the doctrine of election.

In the third and last major part of the study, I consider two revisionist views on the doctrine of election, each of which illustrates the abiding influence of the Augustinian and Arminian alternatives on the theme of election. The first of these revisionist views is associated with the name of Karl Barth, whose doctrine of election was intentionally formulated to redress certain problems that he detected in the more classical Augustinian/Calvinist view. Barth's revision of the doctrine of election represents one of the most important developments in the history of Reformed theology in the modern period. No contemporary treatment of the doctrine of election may bypass Barth's view, which represents perhaps the most extensive consideration of the topic since Augustine's engagement with Pelagianism in the patristic period and

then the Reformers', especially Calvin's, appropriation of Augustine's teaching in the period of the Reformation. Whereas Barth's doctrine of election involves a revision of classic Augustinianism, the second of these revisionist formulations, 'open theism,' aims to build upon and draw out more rigorously the implications of an Arminian view of human freedom for the doctrine of election. Since the open theist revision of Arminianism especially aims to accommodate the doctrine of election to modern views of human freedom and autonomy, it provides a striking illustration of the challenges to the doctrine of election faced by Christian theology in the modern era.

In the concluding chapter of the book, I address a number of issues that often arise in any reflection on the doctrine of election. Rather than simply summarizing the findings of the three main parts of the book's treatment of election, this chapter aims to apply the book's findings to several questions of a more practical, homiletical, and pastoral nature. These questions include, among others: Does the doctrine of election unnecessarily complicate the simplicity of the gospel message? Is God unjust or unfair in electing to save some fallen sinners and not others? Does election diminish the urgency of gospel proclamation and evangelism? What about the well-meant offer of the gospel? How can believers be assured of their election? While many of these questions are extraordinarily difficult to answer, I believe they need to be addressed, even though we will have to admit that our best answers do not provide a full resolution. These questions remind us of the way the doctrine of election intersects with a variety of theological topics, and of the ongoing task of Christian theology to provide a faithful account of the Scripture's teaching.



## CHAPTER 1

# The Doctrine of Election in the Old Testament

*'And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.'* DEUT. 4:37-39

THE doctrine of election taught in the New Testament can only be understood against the background of the story of Israel's redemption recounted in the Old Testament. Though God's gracious election of His people to salvation is often mistakenly viewed as a uniquely New Testament (and Pauline) theme, it is scarcely possible to follow the great drama of redemption that unfolds throughout the Scriptures without recognizing that its main Author and Actor is the true and living God. The biblical story of redemption is one in which God graciously initiates and ceaselessly works to restore His people to fellowship with Himself. At the heart of this redeeming work lies God's purpose to gather His chosen people to Himself and grant them salvation. While the New Testament sheds greater light upon the theme of the triune God's merciful election of His people in Christ, the Old Testament provides a compelling background to its testimony.

Consequently, before we consider the teaching of the New Testament on the subject of election, we need to identify the most important features of the Old Testament's teaching. Without recognizing these, we cannot expect to understand what is taught in the New. These

features include the following: (1) the Old Testament's understanding of God's all-comprehensive counsel and providence; (2) the election of Israel from among all peoples and nations; (3) the election of particular persons or individuals among the people of Israel who are the special recipients of God's promises; (4) the election of a 'remnant' from among the people of Israel; and (5) the election of the Messianic King and Servant through whom God's promises will be fulfilled.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I will examine these themes largely within the boundaries of the Old Testament. At some points, it will be necessary to make reference to the way Old Testament themes and passages are interpreted and applied by New Testament authors. Even at those points, however, I will endeavor to treat the Old Testament's teaching as background to the New Testament's teaching. In doing so, I will resist the temptation to appeal too quickly to what we know from the New Testament. Though it is true that the 'new is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new revealed', my aim in following this approach is to recognize the progressive nature of scriptural revelation and teaching.

## God's Counsel and All-Comprehensive Providence

Before discussing the Old Testament's view of God's election of Israel as His chosen people, it is important to observe that this view is a corollary of the general Old Testament understanding of God's counsel and all-comprehensive providence. The Old Testament reveals God as a personal being whose actions in history are rooted in His counsel or plan for all that transpires in the world that He has created. The Old Testament begins with an account of creation, which represents the

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1. For surveys of the Old Testament's teaching regarding the doctrine of election, see Th. C. Vriezen, *Die Erwählung Israels nach dem Alten Testament* (Zürich, 1953); H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: James Clarke and Co., 1950); Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, trans. Leo G. Perdue (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995); Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007); D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994 [1981]), 9-40; William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 25-41; Robert A. Peterson, *Election and Free Will: God's Gracious Choice and Our Responsibility* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2007), 37-52; and Stephen N. Williams, *The Election of Grace: A Riddle without a Resolution?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 13-58.

covenant Lord of Israel as the One who calls the heavens and earth into existence by means of a series of royal decrees (cf. Gen. 1:3ff., ‘let there be light,’ etc.). On the sixth day of creation, God’s creation of man in His own image and likeness is portrayed as the outcome of God’s taking counsel within Himself (Gen. 1:26, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ...’). Whatever the significance of the plural form of the verb in this passage, it clearly presents God as acting in a way that is purposeful and expressive of willful deliberation.<sup>2</sup> Then, in chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis, the stage is set for the biblical story of redemption to unfold. When the relationship or covenant that the Lord God establishes between Himself and the human race in Adam is broken through the fall into sin, we are told in the ‘mother promise’ (the *protevangeliium*) of Genesis 3:15 that God intends to ‘put enmity’ between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, and that the seed of the woman will ‘crush’ the head of the serpent. In this first word and promise of God after the fall into sin, we are given a kind of prequel of the redemption story that will find its fulfillment in the coming of Christ in the fullness of time. Adam’s fall into sin and liability to God’s judgment-curse is not the end of God’s purposes in history, but the occasion for the commencement of a great work of redemption in which He will restore the seed of the woman to fellowship with Himself.

It must be admitted that the biblical narrative in the early chapters of Genesis does not expressly speak of God’s eternal purpose in its account of creation, the fall, and the beginning of redemption’s history. Indeed, it may be acknowledged that the Old Testament nowhere speaks as fulsomely as the New Testament about the eternal plan and foreknowledge of God (cf. e.g., Acts 2:23). In the Old Testament, God’s actions in the course of history, particularly His initiatives in redeeming His people Israel, are in the foreground.<sup>3</sup> What God does to

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2. In the history of interpretation, opinions vary regarding the significance of the plural subject in the Hebrew. Some interpreters regard it as a ‘plural of majesty’. Others suggest that it represents God’s kingly deliberation in the presence of the heavenly host of angels. In the Patristic period, it was commonly viewed as an intimation of the Trinity.

3. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2: *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 343: ‘Scripture as such does not offer us an abstract description of these decrees; instead, they are made

achieve His good purposes receives most of the attention. Nevertheless, the Old Testament represents God's actions as the expression of His will and intention. God acts in time to realize His eternal plan for the world He has created and for the redemption of His people.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, before we turn more directly to the Old Testament theme of God's election of His chosen people Israel, it is important to recognize that this theme finds its place within the larger framework of the Old Testament's teaching regarding God's eternal counsel and all-comprehensive providence.<sup>5</sup> The covenant Lord of Israel is the God who creates, preserves, and rules over all things by His Spirit and Word (Pss. 33:6; 103:19; 104:24; 121; Job 38; Prov. 8, etc.). He knows all things, including the future course of history, and He knows them because He is their Creator and Sovereign King. For this reason, Israel's covenant Lord can prophecy what will take place in the future and how it will occur (Gen. 3:14ff.; 6:13; 9:25ff.; 12:2ff.; 15:13ff.; 25:23; 49:8ff.). Since God exhaustively knows the future, He is able to declare in advance what will take place in various circumstances (Isa. 41:21-3; 42:9; 43:9-12; 44:7; 46:10; 48:3ff.; Amos 3:7). According to the Psalmist, a person's days are numbered before they occur, and they are recorded in God's book 'when as yet there were none of them' (Ps. 139:16; cf. Pss. 31:15; 39:5; Job 14:5). Consistent with this teaching of God's exhaustive knowledge of all things, past, present, and future, the Old Testament anticipates the New Testament's language of the 'book of life' that records the names of those whom God wills to save (Isa. 4:3; Dan. 12:1; cf. Rev. 17:8; 21:27). In the same way that the names of a city's inhabitants or a nation's citizens are recorded in

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visible to us in the progression of history itself.' For similar assessments, see Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 37; and Carson, *DSHR*, 30-34.

4. This could even be said of God's work of creation. As the creation account in Genesis 1 intimates, God 'elects' to create the world and human beings as His image-bearers. To speak this way seems to be a good and necessary consequence of all the Old Testament tells us about God's wisdom, knowledge, power, and person.

5. Carson, *DSHR*, 35: 'The idea that God really is the sovereign disposer of all is consistently woven into the fabric of the Old Testament, even if there is relatively infrequent explicit reflection on the sovereignty-responsibility tension.' Carson's study is a comprehensive reflection upon the way this theme is correlated with an equal emphasis upon the responsibility of human beings who bear God's image. Though these themes may seem to us incompatible, they are both taught throughout the Old Testament and as well in the New.

a registry, the names of God's people, the righteous, are recorded by God in this book of life.

Thus, the Old Testament's testimony to the sovereign rule of God over all things also includes the idea of God's plan or counsel for all things. When God sovereignly acts to accomplish His purposes, He does so in accordance with His wise, just, good, and beneficent plan for His creatures. God's acts in history express His power and understanding (Job 12:13; Prov. 8:14; Isa. 9:6; 11:2; 28:29; Jer. 32:19). The course of history is determined neither by fate nor blind chance. Rather, history unfolds in accord with God's own wisdom and counsel. God always chooses the most suitable means to accomplish His ends, and He does so without consulting any creature (Isa. 40:13; Jer. 23:18, 22; Ps. 89:7-9). God's decree represents His self-determination and intention to act in a particular way in order to realize His purposes and, as such, is not liable to change or frustration (Isa. 14:24-27; 46:10; Ps. 33:11; Prov. 19:21; Dan. 4:24). In this respect, God's counsel is radically dissimilar to the counsels of His creatures, especially His enemies, that are always nullified when they resist Him (Neh. 4:15; Ps. 33:10; Prov. 21:30; Jer. 19:7).

## The Election of Israel as God's 'Chosen' People

Within the context of the Old Testament's pervasive teaching that the God of Israel is the creator of all things and the sovereign Lord of history, the centerpiece of redemption's history is God's election of Israel as His 'chosen' people. In the words of G. E. Wright, 'The Old Testament doctrine of a chosen people, one selected by God "for his own possession above all the people that are on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6), is the chief clue for the understanding of the meaning and significance of Israel.'<sup>6</sup> The theme of God's gracious election of Israel runs like a thread throughout the course of the Old Testament's account of the history of redemption subsequent to the fall into sin.

Though Israel's election is often associated with what might be called the 'formal establishment' of the covenant of grace at the time God called Abraham from Ur of Chaldees (see esp. Gen. 12; 15; 17), its roots are deeper than that. The story of God's gracious election of Israel is

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6. G. E. Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* (London: SCM, 1957), 47. Cf. Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: an Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 470.

anticipated already before the time of the Old Testament Patriarchs.<sup>7</sup> After Adam's fall into sin and subsequent expulsion from the garden of Eden, the story of redemption proceeds in a way that anticipates God's sovereign and gracious choice of Abraham. In the Genesis account of the early history of redemption, the story is arranged according to the sequence and order of the generations after Adam (cf. Gen. 5:1; 6:9; 10:1). Consistent with the mother promise of Genesis 3:15, God separates the human race into two communities, the one community in whom the promise of blessing is realized and the other community in whom sinful alienation from God increases. The line of God's blessing and favor proceeds from Seth until Noah, and the line of His judgment and disfavor proceeds from Cain until the generations contemporary with Noah. After the great flood-judgment in the days of Noah, the history of redemption continues to move forward in the same way. God blesses Shem and Japheth, but pronounces His curse upon Canaan (Gen. 9:25-7). The history of Israel as God's chosen people is of a piece with the history of the Patriarchs. Just as God bestowed His favor upon Seth and his descendants after him, so at the formal beginning of Israel's history God chooses to show His favor to Abraham and his descendants after him.

Though the Old Testament often speaks of God's election of specific individuals who play a distinct role, the dominant use of the language of election refers to His gracious choice to bless the people of Israel among all the nations of the earth. For this reason, I will consider in this section some important Old Testament passages that speak of God's election of Israel. However, when I take up the theme of God's election of particular persons in the next section, it will become apparent that the distinction between God's election of Israel and His election of particular individuals is somewhat artificial.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Cf. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, who begins his treatment of election with the stories in Genesis of Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers.

8. For a survey of the use of the language of election, especially the Hebrew term *bāḥar* ('to choose') and related expressions, see Klein, *The New Chosen People*, 26-7, fn5; and Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:27-36. These surveys illustrate how variously the theme of 'election' is understood in the Old Testament. It not only includes the election of the people of Israel, but also the election of specific individuals, places, and institutions through which God's purposes are realized in the history of redemption.

God's gracious election of Israel only occurs by means of His election of particular individuals who play a particular role in Israel's history.

Throughout the Old Testament, God's election of His chosen people Israel is demonstrated by two great events in the course of redemption's history: the calling of Abraham and Israel's redemption in the exodus under Moses.<sup>9</sup> These events are constitutive for Israel's entire history. They were formative for the Old Testament's teaching regarding election set forth in the Pentateuch, the prophets, and the writings.

Several key passages in the book of Deuteronomy strikingly summarize the testimony of the Old Testament to God's election of Israel:

And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day. (Deut. 4:37-8)

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deut. 7:6-8)

Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. (Deut. 10:14-15)

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9. See Rowley, *BDE*, 19-24, who embraces a long-standing consensus among Old Testament scholars in the 'critical' school that these two instances of election in the history of Israel, first of the patriarchs and then of Israel in the period of Moses, were originally two disparate, independent traditions. Despite his adherence to this critical view, Rowley does recognize that the Old Testament views these two events together as belonging to a single history. Rowley acknowledges that Israel's exodus under Moses was a fulfillment and continuation of the promises God made earlier to Abraham (23).

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Deut. 14:2)

In these descriptions of God's election of Israel to be His people, several themes stand out. God's choice of Israel is born out of His love for her. The unique privileges that Israel enjoys flow from God's good pleasure to call Israel into fellowship with Himself, and to grant her a unique status as His treasured possession. Whatever blessings Israel enjoys in distinction from all other nations stem from God's distinguishing affection toward her. All of God's redeeming acts on Israel's behalf – His promises to and calling of her fathers, His mighty acts of redemption in Israel's exodus from Egypt, His embracing of Israel as His peculiar people and possession – find their source in God's electing love and grace.<sup>10</sup> Because Israel's existence and privilege are wholly based upon God's loving election of her, she is expressly reminded that her election was unmerited. Though other nations were mightier than Israel, God nonetheless set His love upon her in particular. God's election of Israel was not dependent upon anything Israel possessed that would make her deserving of God's choice. To the contrary, Israel is represented as a most unlikely recipient of God's electing love.<sup>11</sup>

Another prominent theme associated with Israel's election is the responsibility that corresponds to Israel's privileged status. Though God does not choose Israel to be His people because she is holy, He does choose her in order that she might be holy. This theme is especially prominent in Deuteronomy 7. Israel is called out from among the nations as a 'people holy to the LORD your God' (Deut. 7:6). By virtue of Israel's election, she has become

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10. The Old Testament's emphasis upon the way Israel's election was born out of God's peculiar love for her is echoed in the New Testament, which associates God's purpose of election with His love toward those whom He chooses (see, e.g., Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Tim. 1:9). This theme also finds its echo in the New Testament's understanding of God's surprising choice of those who are weak and powerless by worldly standards (cf. 1 Cor. 1:27-9).

11. Rowley, *BDE*, 18. The Old Testament also associates God's election of Israel as His chosen people with His granting of the promised land as her inheritance (Exod. 3:6-10; Deut. 6:21-3; Ezek. 20:5-6; Ps. 105:5-11), and His election of Jerusalem as His peculiar dwelling place (Zech. 2:11ff.; Ps. 78:68ff.).

God's 'treasured possession' and as such she has the obligation to serve the Lord and not the gods of the nations surrounding her (Deut. 7:1-5). This privilege undergirds Israel's obligation to live in accordance with the Lord's commandments (Deut. 7:11). For this reason, when the prophets indict the Israelites for their disobedience, they recall Israel's status as God's chosen people (e.g. Ezek. 20:5). The responsibility that status entails is sometimes expressed in the Old Testament by what might be termed an 'elective' use of the verb 'to know' (*yāda*).<sup>12</sup> In the prophecy of Amos, for example, the people of Israel are reminded of God's electing love toward them, which distinguished them from all other families: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth.' This reminder underscores the prophet's warning that the Lord's judgment will fall upon them for their iniquities. The language of God's 'knowing' Israel in a distinctive way is equivalent to saying that Israel is His chosen people. Israel's election heightens her responsibility to live as a holy people. Or to put it negatively, Israel's election, and the privileges that this entails, only magnify the seriousness of her failure to live as God's treasured possession.

## The Election of Specific Individuals for Salvation and Service

In the Old Testament, the election of Israel as God's chosen people is closely linked to the election of specific individuals. God's election of Israel does not mean that all members of the elect community are necessarily the beneficiaries of God's blessing or the instruments through whom God's saving purpose will be fulfilled. As we noted earlier, the line of the promised seed in Genesis is one that passes from Seth to Noah and eventually to Abraham. But even among Abraham's seed, God's election distinguishes between Isaac and Ishmael, as well as between Jacob and Esau. Not all who belong to the people of Israel are equally the recipients of the blessings of the

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12. See Klein, *The New Chosen People*, 31. Klein's study is burdened by his insistence that God's election to salvation is always corporate, the election of a people, some of whose members are saved when they choose to believe and obey God. According to Klein, when God elects individuals, He only elects them to a particular kind of service, and not to salvation.