

Few Are Chosen

Intro

I believe that it is the assumption of many Christians that the church forms the majority of the human population at the end. Indeed, even some respected Reformed theologians (such as BB Warfield) have argued for this.

However, this assumption has grown to be part of a modern triumphalist theology that is superficial and unbiblical. At its worst, this assumption feeds into a presumed universalism where everybody is saved at the end. A slightly lesser form of universalism is that all sincere individuals, whatever their religion, are saved, even if they never heard of Jesus Christ. Indeed, this was the teaching of John Wesley who is currently lauded by almost all believers without any warrant at all, and it is the teaching of many famous Christian leaders, such as Billy Graham and Richard Schuller.

Such assumptions lead to a weakness in the Gospel because man's need is less urgent: most people will be saved, the church is the majority of the world's population and will dominate the end times. All this is a far cry from the old fashioned Gospel which saw man's need as urgent and desperate. Preachers urged sinners to repent because the time was short, their sins were great and hell was waiting for them, into which they would fall at any time if they had no Saviour. No comfort was ever given to sinners until they had repented; now sinners are told that God loves them and that he is merciful to all and has a wonderful fulfilling plan for all. This is an unbiblical message. It is a lie.

If it is true that, actually, the number of those truly saved is a small proportion of all mankind, then the content of most current church Gospel teaching is false. Also the church hopes, aspirations, methods and presentations regarding the situation of sinful men are fanciful. All those schemes to grow the church by cuddling up to the world and offering sinners a slightly better life of joyful purpose - but minimising sin, conviction and repentance are nothing but paving the way to hell to those who believe these lies.

In fact, the Biblical record, from cover to cover, teaches exactly the opposite. It claims that few are chosen and that Jesus has a 'little flock'. We need to examine what the Bible actually says about this.

God's strategy

God's strategy is not like man's. Man always goes for the big, the spectacular, the influential, but God chooses to focus upon the weak, the small, and the insignificant.

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things [ignoble] of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. 1 Cor 1:27-29

This focus of God upon the weak, the innocuous, the despised and the ignoble is seen in every part of God's decrees, from creation to the consummation of salvation.

Earth

Our world is an insignificant planet, in an ordinary solar system on the edge of an average galaxy (27,000 light-years away from the centre). Our planet is much smaller than the planets Jupiter, Uranus, Neptune or Saturn. In fact, earth is not a great deal larger than some moons, such as Ganymede or Callisto (moons of Jupiter) or Titan (of Saturn).

Our sun is astronomically small. Recently a star was discovered (R136a1) that is 265 times the mass of our sun but many stars in the night sky are much larger than sol, such as Sirius, Pollux, Antares, Rigel, Aldebaran, Betelgeuse or Arcturus.

However, God is only interested in the establishment of his kingdom on earth (at this time).

Man

Mankind forms a population of creatures on the earth that is dwarfed by the numbers of other creatures. For instance there are over a million spiders in an acre of land (you are always within three feet of a spider) while there are trillions of flies in the world; 17 quadrillion is the best estimate; a number I cannot even imagine.

Many animals have more physical power than man (lions, buffalo), have larger brains (sperm whales, elephants or even dolphins) or live longer lives (aldabra giant tortoise, bowhead whale, tuatara, crocodiles and many species of fish).

Many animals can live happily where man cannot survive without power and technology. Man cannot naturally live underwater, in great heat, in great cold, exposed to radiation, at high altitudes or at great depths. He cannot live much more than three days without water or a couple of weeks without food, while some animals can survive weeks without water and months without eating. A kangaroo can survive 3-5 years without water. The 1mm long tardigrades (900 species of 'water bears') can survive temperatures as low as -457 degrees or as high as 357 degrees, or 5,700 grays of radiation (humans would die above 10-20 grays). They can also live for ten years without water.

Man is only significant because of his rationality and self-awareness. Yet God is only interested in the salvation of man. The purpose of other animals is to serve the purposes of God in the salvation of mankind.

Israel

God only chose Israel from amongst all the nations that existed.

For what great nation *is there* that has God *so* near to it, as the LORD our God *is* to us, for whatever *reason* we may call upon Him? And what great nation *is there* that has *such* statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? ... You shall be blessed above all peoples. Deut 4:7-8, 14

The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Deut 10:15

He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation; And as for His judgments, they have not known them. Praise the LORD! Ps 147:19-20

You only have I known of all the families of the earth. Amos 3:2

[God] in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Acts 14:16

God chose Israel because it was the smallest and most insignificant of nations.

For you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Deut 7:6-8

All these things point to the fact that God was more interested in things that were fewer, or less spectacular, than other things.

OT Examples of the principle of the few

Flood

God's salvation is repeatedly illustrated in the Bible by the historical example of the flood. Jesus refers to this, as does Peter. But what do we see in the flood story? Eight people saved out of millions. Think about this carefully. The flood is referred to in the NT as the key illustration of salvation and in this case there were only eight people saved while millions were left to die in their sins. Millions!

The men that built some of the great wonders of the world, such as the Sphinx¹ or the great pyramid (something we are unable to do today),² were wiped out by the flood but the family of an obscure farmer was saved.

Abraham

Abraham was born in 1967 BC. In Abraham's time, Mesopotamia was a region that boasted of many cities, some of them significant city-states. Both Assyria and Babylonia had virtual small empires that would later become large ones; in 2250 BC Babylon had been ruled by Hammurabi I. Chedorlaomer had left the Babylonian Empire and formed the Elamite Empire (Persian). Earlier in history Sumeria (the southern part of Mesopotamia) was the place where Nimrod had built several cities and established the prototype human empire immediately after the flood.

By Abraham's time Canaan had well established civilisations, Jericho being one of the earliest ever cities, established before the flood with a population of 1500. The Cretan Minoan civilisation was being developed³, while Egypt was in its twelfth dynasty founded

¹ This feature shows signs of water weathering, something that must have occurred at the flood.

² It is not just the 70 ton blocks of stone lifted up to great height, and placed them together so that a razor blade cannot be put in the gap, but the creation of much more. Egyptian pyramids are not tombs (mummies are not found in them) but astrological and engineering creations of great complexity involving natural sources of power unknown today. They are also keyed in to astrological features (such as lining up with Orion's belt) and placed at the centre of earth's landmass, to say nothing of the deep precision of celestial and terrestrial measurements. Some facts: the mass of stone means that the interior temperature is constant at the global earth average. The mortar cannot be reproduced but it is stronger than the stone. It faces true north with only a 3/60th degree of error. Analysis of some stones reveal that fixed point diamond drills were used with a drilling force of 2 tons. The height of the pyramid is the radius of a circle that is the same circle as the perimeter of the base. The length of the base side in Pyramid inches equals the number of days in a year (365.24). Half of the length of the diagonal of the base equals the average distance to the sun. There are many more such amazing facts. The modern idea that ancient man was primitive is nonsense.

³ C. 2,000 BC.

by Ammenemes I; Abraham's own city (Ur) was in its third dynasty. The Semitic empire of Akkad had been overcome by the Guti invasion.

These were all significant cities and important mercantile civilisations. Great feats had been achieved by these peoples, such as building the pyramids and other wonders. They built monumental megalithic structures that are impossible for us today – they were no mean people and certainly not primitive.

Yet of all the great civilisations and empires, God chose a single man to build his kingdom upon, calling him out of these civilisations into the Canaan desert to have no roof over his head and dwell in obscurity. God did not choose a great ruler, nor build his kingdom in the midst of a great empire, or even a great city, he called Abraham out of world commerce completely and began in obscurity.

For many years God's purposes were centred in a single man and his wife, who was getting old and had no children. Millions of people in great and prosperous civilisations were going into condemnation, except for one couple (and their entourage of servants) in Canaan.

Jacob's move to Egypt

Abraham eventually had his first child aged about 100 and Isaac himself had sons. However, one of these sons was lost and did not find repentance (Rm 9:13; Heb 12:16-17).

Jacob then had 12 sons; so, many years after the covenantal promise there is still only a small community of those who are saved out of millions on earth.

Late in Jacob's life his small tribe are saved from famine by going down into Egypt where God had sent Jacob's son, Joseph, to be their saviour (typifying Christ). Even at this stage the tribe is only 70 strong (Gen 46:27). The number of those God saved is a tiny fraction of the world's population.

Exodus

Over time the family of Jacob, now called Hebrews, multiplied in Egypt and were placed in slavery by pharaohs that had become hostile to the interlopers and had forgotten Joseph. In time God raised up another saviour for his people in the form of Moses and the nation of Israel is formed at the Exodus from Egypt.

At the time of the Exodus there were perhaps between 700,000 and 1½ million people who went into the wilderness for forty years. However, virtually all of these died without faith (Heb 3:10-11, 16-19) except Joshua and Caleb (plus Moses and others who died in faith before Jordan). The number of the saved community is still tiny.

Israel

After the entrance into the Promised Land, the nation's population built up steadily to unknown millions. However, the nation repeatedly fell into sin and apostasy time after time from the very beginning. Thus God's prophets affirmed, again and again, that only the remnant would be saved (e.g. Isa 37:31). That is, only a tiny percentage of those with faith were saved out of the nation of Israel.

Of the population of Israelites, only a small proportion found faith and were saved. Out of the millions of people in other nations, only a tiny fraction was saved who found faith as a proselyte of the religion of Israel (such as Naaman, Ruth or Rahab).

Exile

As punishment for all her spiritual adulteries, God first sent the Northern Kingdom into exile where the ten tribes were mixed with Gentile populations and were effectively lost (apart from any representatives in the south). But in time the sins of Judah also resulted in condemnation and exile into Babylon. Here a proportion of the people kept themselves pure and a mixed company returned to Jerusalem after 70 years. Those that returned with Gentile wives had to separate from them.

It is suggested that about 250,000 returned in faith. However, before very long God sent prophets to chastise these people who were living at ease in Zion with no temple. According to Zechariah only a remnant of these were chosen

By the time of the appearance of the Messiah, the number of the remnant appears to be in single figures.

Throughout OT history, the community of the elect called out from the nations is always a tiny minority compared to the world population. This is a certainty that cannot be ignored.

NT Examples

Gospels

At the time of the appearance of Christ as a baby, only a handful of people were waiting for the Messiah – including Anna and Simeon.

Only a few people witnessed the infant Jesus' entrance into the world – some shepherds and the Gentile wise men. All the religious leaders who claimed to believe in the Messiah were not ready for him and failed to notice his appearance.

Even after Jesus had found great fame as a miracle worker and teacher, he called his followers, 'a little flock' (Lk 12:32).

Jesus specific teaching – few are chosen.

For many are called, but few chosen. Matt 20:16, 22:14

What could be clearer. Here the Lord categorically states that those who are chosen are few in number. The Greek word for 'few' is *oligos* and means: little, small, few; of number, quantity, size, time, degree or intensity.

Jesus specific teaching – the narrow gate

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Matt 7:13-14

Again the Lord makes it plain that only few find salvation but broad is the way to destruction. The Greek word for 'few' is again *oligos*.

Acts

Those who were gathered and waiting for the promise of the Spirit were only 120 (Acts 1:15). Even later churches were very small and met in homes (Acts 20:1-7).

Although Jerusalem contained a large church it persecuted by the vast Jewish majority.

Although Christianity had spread throughout the Roman Empire, it was still considered as a small sect for hundreds of years (until 313 AD). Many cults vied with it for influence,

such as emperor worship, Mithraism and Gnosticism. In the Eastern Empire Zoroastrianism was very strong.

Though the early church was very successful in witnessing and many churches were planted, it is wrong to imagine that Christianity dominated the empire or formed the majority of the population.

NT Letters: threats from within and without.

The letters show an increasing falling away, both in terms of warnings about errors and heretics, admonitions to not fall away and denunciations of people that had fallen away, including people on apostolic teams (e.g. 1 Tim 1:18-20; 3 Jn 1:9). This worsened up to 100 AD so that the later letters contain very strong warnings about heresies, heretics, the need for separation and admonitions to avoid falling away (e.g. 2 Jn 1:7-11).

The idea of the early church being some sort of perfect utopia is false.

Degeneration of theology and practices

The only feature that is common to every book of the NT is a warning against heresy and heretics. Every book has this warning.

Every church had its own problems and some were severe. Leaders apostatised while some blasphemed. There were various sorts of heresies, the most serious being first, the Judaising of extreme Jewish focused groups, which led to the heresy of Ebionism (countered by Galatians and Hebrews). The second was the tendency towards mysticism, which led to Christian Gnosticism (countered by Colossians and 1 Jn). [These are evidenced today by the Jewish Root Movement, on the one hand, and the Charismatics on the other. See my paper, *'The twin problems affecting thr early church'*.]

Thus the apostles warn believers to test all things (1 Thess 5:21), to check what people preach (Acts 17:11) and to test the spirit of teachers (1 Jn 4:1). They are also commanded to separate from false doctrine and false teachers (Rm 16:17; 2 Cor 6:17; Eph 5:11; 2 Thess 3:6).

There was a plethora of false doctrines, false practices, aberrations, sins and heretics in the church from the beginning. There was no time when it was perfect and when it filled the earth.

Persecution

Persecution was common in the early church right from the start (Acts 8:1). Even one of the key apostles was brutally murdered at the beginning of the church's work, being baptised with suffering as Jesus warned (Matt 20:22-23 with Acts 12:2).

In fact few understand that the church is called pre-eminently to suffer in this age. The claims of Charismatic abundant living are false. Jesus and the apostles warned us about this (Jn 16:33; Acts 14:22); indeed we are to fulfil the sufferings predetermined for the body of Christ, commensurate with the suffering of Christ himself (Col 1:24).

Thus the ideas of a global church ruling the world in peace, security and victory are fanciful.

The whole world?

Paul speaks euphemistically about the Gospel being preached in the whole world (Col 1:6). By this he means that it had spread throughout the Roman Empire and does not mean it literally. In fact, we know that the vast majority of the world's population, including the

empires in North, Central and South America, most of China, sub-Saharan Africa, Scandinavia, Australia, the South Seas and Mongolia, knew nothing of the Gospel at that time. There were 800 tribes of Native American Indians alone and several South American empires.

There are always relatively few in the world that are true believers, though there may be very large churches filled with professing Christians.

The prophetic statement

"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, Against the Man who is My Companion," Says the LORD of hosts. "Strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered; then I will turn My hand against the little ones. And it shall come to pass in all the land," says the LORD, "That two-thirds in it shall be cut off *and* die, but *one*-third shall be left in it: I will bring the *one-third* through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'This *is* My people'; and each one will say, 'The LORD *is* my God.'" Zech 13:7-9

This appears to be a very important statement. Zechariah is not only a prophet who spoke to his own people to wake them up from slumber, but whose message often has truths that speak into the far future.

This passage is clearly a reference to the Lord Jesus as shepherd of the sheep, the elect, God's people.⁴ It states that in the land (that is outside of God's elect) two thirds will die. However, one third will be brought through the fire (of judgment) and be refined (purified) and they alone will call on God's name. This is clearly a statement about those who are saved; those who become God's people. It is categorically stated that it is a third of the world's population.

God seems to be interest in thirds. When he allowed Satan to lead a rebellion of the angels, he took away a third of the host of heaven and two thirds were elected to remain faithful (Rev 12:4). Thus, two thirds of the angelic company are elected but two thirds of mankind are reprobated.

This seems to end all debate on the matter as far as I am concerned.

Without any doubt the number of those saved are a small proportion of mankind, the few that are chosen, but the actual proportion seems to be a third.

But still many people

We have proved that out of the billions of people that will have existed on the earth only a few are saved. However, that 'few' is still millions of people. Abraham was promised a huge number of followers to be included in his covenant (Gen 26:4), while Jude prophesied that the Lord would come with ten thousands of his saints (Jude 1:14). The number of creatures

⁴ Some see a reference to Jews here, the theocratic people of the time of Zechariah. Thus it refers to the death of two thirds of Jews after the cross which was by war, pestilence and famine. This much is true, but it is not true that the remaining third of all Jews were all purified and saved by calling on the name of Jesus. Restricting this to Jews fails to ensure a common sense reading of the passage. The timing in Zechariah is in the day of the Messiah who would come as God and as the son of David and be pierced (12:8, 10). In that day there is a cleansing available for sin (13:1). This passage must refer to the elect in Christ who are saved and the two thirds in the land who are not.

praising Jesus in heaven is ‘thousands of thousands’, but this includes angels, Cherubim and saints (Rev 5:11).

We do not know the number of the saved, but it is not small. However, it is still only a third of all who ever lived.

Conclusion

Why this is important?

Talk of global revival is nonsense.

World population rose dramatically in the 20th century and onwards. Indeed, there are more people alive today that in all previous ages combined.

When Charismatics and triumphalists talk about ruling the earth and a global revival, they have in mind billions of people submitting to the Lord. The church thus dominates the earth. Well apart from this being the opposite of what NT prophecies say about the end, it would negate everything that I have said in this paper thus far. The population of heaven would be the vast majority of mankind - something that I have shown cannot be true.

The ideas of a global modern revival are a pipe dream. Both Jesus and his apostles taught very clearly that at the end there would be a great falling away from the faith; something that has already begun in our time (e.g. 2 Thess 2:3).

Better evangelism

Since the encroaches of Arminianism in western church increased at the turn of the 20th century, the church has adopted more and more false methods and doctrines in preaching the Gospel. What this has done is to fool many people into thinking that they are Christians when they are not. In turn this leads to churches being filled with non-believers who attend meetings. As long as people are fixated in getting large numbers this will continue.

What is important is the truth; it is only the truth that sets people free. Our job is to witness to Christ and preach his Gospel his way. This has no fascination with numbers or human successes, but proclaiming the truth as it is in Christ.

When we understand that the numbers that are truly saved are few, we realise that we have to be really careful in our Gospel presentation. Thus we shun all the methods of men and the world and simply preach the truth. We will also take care to wait until we are really sure that a convert is bearing the fruit of salvation before we make claims for them.

Pure church

The argument that few are chosen is just one of many that cause us to ponder about how many people in churches are truly saved. Over and over again I find evidence that very many church goers are not saved at all. I believe that certain churches are filled with merely professing believers, perhaps as many as 90% (I include supposedly ‘evangelical’ churches in this). This is why aberrant practices and false doctrines can find so many adherents in churches. It also explains why there is such a crying need for psychological counselling, something that was never necessary in historic churches that were more pure having good teaching.

This means that many churches are not really churches at all. This is nothing new:

I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Rev 2:9

Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Rev 3:16

The fact is that many churches are not only unbiblical, but they are not churches. They are led by false teachers (some of whom clearly are not Christians at all), they teach false doctrines, their practices are false and the people in the churches exhibit unrighteousness and are not really saved.

Final word

Our thoughts on speculative matters must be rooted in Scriptural principles. Thus postulations about the numbers in heaven and hell must be based upon the principles that we see God using throughout history. This clearly implies a smaller population of heaven than of hell. But when we find specific teachings in the Bible that directly relate to this question, such as the Zechariah passage or Jesus' statements on 'the few', then there can be no doubt. The elect are a smaller company than the reprobate and the likelihood is that the proportion is one third redeemed to two thirds condemned.

Thus the more obscure teaching of OT prophecy affirms that fewer are saved than go to hell, but more importantly we have very clear, objective, didactic teaching of Jesus, in several places (at least three) which states that only few are saved. Thus we have a sure and certain foundation for the argument that those in heaven are a much smaller proportion than the majority in hell.

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