

Are “Many” or “Few” Called In This Age?

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Perhaps you’ve heard it said that “only a few” are called in this age? Yet, Jesus taught just the opposite! He said, “many are called, but few chosen” (Matthew 20:16; 22:14). How is it that *many*, not a few as some think, but many, as Jesus taught, are called in this age?

Does the proclaiming of the gospel constitute a calling to those who hear it, and are they accountable for what they heard, regardless of whether they fully understand it or act on it or not? Is salvation now open to only a few who are specially “picked out” in advance, but closed to all others? Is God going to send calamitous punishments upon billions of people as the end of the age approaches because of a stubborn refusal to repent of their sins, without giving them a genuine opportunity to repent? Does the Bible teach that God plays favorites by “turning a screw” in the heads of some few (as some allege) so they understand the truth in spite of themselves, but deliberately blinding everyone else?

The Bible offers clear Scriptures to answer these questions and additional questions on this subject. If you take the time to carefully examine all the Scriptures referred to in this article you may attain a more complete understanding of God’s will for all mankind.

English Definition

Following are some definitions of the English word “call” relative to our purpose:

call. (v.t.) Includes 1. To say in a loud voice; utter or read aloud; announce; proclaim. 2. To summon. 3. To convoke: convene: to *call* a meeting. 5. To summon to a specific work: to *call* someone to the ministry.

– **to call out** 1. To say in a loud voice. 2. To order into service or action; summon.

call (n.) 1. A shout or cry; loud utterance. 2. A summons or invitation. 3. A signal, as on a bell or a horn. 4. A demand; claim: the *call* of duty. 7. An inward urge to some specific work, often regarded as divinely inspired; vocation.

(*Reader’s Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 1966).

Did (and does) God *call* Israel by sending his servants to reprove their deeds?

God’s word was proclaimed by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 7:2). The people of Judah were urged to repent, with consequent blessings (Jeremiah 7:3-7). God called them, the call being issued through the prophets (Jeremiah 7:13, 25-27). In rejecting the calling, the reproof, sent through the prophets, they were refusing to obey the voice of God (Jeremiah 7:25-28). God rejects them because they refuse to hear his word through the prophets and obey him, but continue to do evil (Jeremiah 7:25-30). Compare Jeremiah 35:13-15. While this prophecy was delivered initially to the people of the nation of Judah, it’s inclusion in the Scriptures means that it’s a message for all of us (cf. Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 9:10; 10:11; II Timothy 3:16).

Was there a possibility that Israel might repent at hearing God’s word through the prophets?

Could they have repented? Why would God have repeatedly urged Israel to repent if it was impossible for them? Nineveh repented, for a time, at the word of God sent through the prophet Jonah (Jonah 3:1-10). Jesus rebuked the cities that had witnessed the most of his mighty works for their unwillingness to repent, saying that if the same “had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes” (Matthew 11:20-21; Luke 10:13). And he said to the disciples he had sent out to preach the gospel, “He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me” (Luke 10:16).

Jeremiah was told to publicly read God’s words from a book in the ears of the people, allowing that, “It may be that the house of Judah will hear... that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin” (Jeremiah 36:1-7). At first, some of the leaders feared (Jeremiah 36:16). But when the words were read to the king, he cast the book into the fire (Jeremiah 36:23). Compare Ezekiel 12:2-3.

Did God give Israel the power to choose?

God set before Israel life and good, death and evil. He said, “...choose life, that both you and your seed may live” (Deuteronomy 30:15-19). Did Israel refuse to answer God’s call, refuse to hear his word, and choose that in which God does not delight? (Isaiah 65:12). Was this in contrast to those who tremble at his word? (Isaiah 66:2-5).

How did Israel react to their calling?

They were called but did not answer (Isaiah 50:2; 65:12; 66:4; Jeremiah 7:13; *et al*). In these same verses we are told they did not hear. They stiffened their necks, and refused to hear, believe, or obey the words God proclaimed through his prophets (2 Kings 17:14-15; Nehemiah 9:26, 29-30; Jeremiah 7:25-26; 19:14-15; Zechariah 7:4-13).

By what means are God’s servants empowered to speak His word?

The Spirit of God (Nehemiah 9:30; Zechariah 7:12; cf. Nehemiah 9:20; Psalm 143:10; 2 Peter 1:21). The speaking of the true message of God’s word is a manifestation of God’s Spirit. It is at work in the proclaiming of the message, and the words themselves are, in a sense, spirit (John 6:63). The word of God is the “sword of the Spirit,” and is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). While it has the power to convict (Acts 2:37; 1 Corinthians 14:24-25; Titus 1:9), it can be resisted if one hardens himself (Hebrews 3:7-8, 12-13, 15-19; 4:2-3, 7). In stiffening their necks and rejecting the word faithfully spoken by God’s servants, the people were resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51-53).

Did God hold Israel accountable for rejecting their calling by punishing them?

Because they refused to hear the words God sent through the prophets, his wrath came upon them, and they were scattered among the nations (Zechariah 7:12-14; cf. 2 Kings 17:13-20; Proverbs 1:24-32; Isaiah 65:12; 66:4; Jeremiah 7:13-15; 23-34).

Did Jesus call sinners to repentance?

Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Luke 5:32). Of course, all who heard him were sinners, whether they admitted it or not (Romans 3:23; 5:12). **How did Jesus call sinners to repentance?** “Jesus came to Galilee, **preaching the gospel** of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14). “Preaching” is from *kerusso* which includes the meaning of herald, proclaim, publish (*Strong’s Bible Dictionary*, see definition of call, above). “...saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:15). “Saying” is from *lego*, which can include the meaning of bid or call (*Strong’s*). The words for repent and believe are both in the imperative mood, the mood of command. **The command to all who heard Jesus was to repent and believe the gospel.** The one speaking in the imperative, “...expects those addressed to do exactly as he has ordered” (Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, p. 302). The use of the present tense stem implies a continuing repentance and belief (cf. *ibid.*, p. 303). An abiding belief in his message and repentance are the first steps toward a relationship with God (Mark 16:15-16; Luke 8:12; John 1:12; 3:15-18, 36; 5:24, 38; 6:40, 47, 69; 7:39, 48; 17:8; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:8-17; *et al.*).

Paul said the **command to repent** extends to **all men, everywhere, now** (Acts 17:30). **The gospel message is a calling**, as well as a warning and a witness.

Did Jesus send forth servants to call others?

Jesus sent forth messengers to preach (or proclaim) the same message he proclaimed, repentance and belief in the gospel, and to teach his commandments (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 3:14; 16:15-16; Luke 10:1-10; 24:47).

Are many to be called in this age or few?

Jesus’ disciples were commanded to go to all the world and preach (or proclaim, as several translations render it) the gospel to the whole creation, i.e., everyone (Mark 16:15). From time to time this has been accomplished (Acts 1:8; Romans 10:18; Colossians 1:5-6, 23), though not in every age.

In the parable of the “marriage feast” the king sends his servants to “call the called” to the marriage feast; i.e., the kingdom of God (Matthew 22:1-3; *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Robertson; *kaleo*, “call,” in both instances). The implication is that repeated calls are made, as is confirmed in the next several verses. God gave Israel repeated opportunities to repent, as he has continued to do with mankind (2 Chronicles 36:15-16; Jeremiah 11:6-8; 25:2-8; 29:19; 32:32-33; 35:14-15).

The summary point of the parable is that “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14; “are” [Greek: *eis*] is in the present tense, reflecting the reality of the present age). The obvious reason so few are chosen is that most now reject the calling given through the

messengers God sends forth (Matthew 22:3-6). But the fact they reject the calling doesn't mean they weren't called.

To be chosen one must be called. But he must also willingly receive the truth, believe it, and be sanctified through faith and by receiving the Holy Spirit, which follows genuine and lasting repentance (2 Thessalonians 2:13; cf. Mark 16:15-16; John 1:11-12; 17:17, 19-20; Acts 2:14, 38; 8:14-15; 11:1, 17-18; 17:11-12; 26:18; Romans 10:8-17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:2).

Through the message of the gospel God plants his words in men's minds, as the Israelites had it planted in their minds through Moses' teachings (Deuteronomy 30:14; Matthew 13:19). But those who, having the seed planted, reject it, or fail to act on it, become even more deceived, if anything, than before (Matthew 13:12; Luke 8:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Why is Mankind Blinded?

God has allowed the world to be deceived. But who lied to Adam and Eve? Who chose not to believe God and chose to believe Satan instead? Mankind has been blinded by Satan's deceptions, because Adam and Eve chose to reject the truth and mankind has been following that pattern ever since then (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

As a result, nearly all humans have been shut up together in unbelief (Romans 11:32). The Greek word translated “committed” (or KJV “concluded”) is *sugkleio*, which means to shut together (like a net, Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). Darby's reads, “God hath shut up together all in unbelief....” Robertson points out, “This is a resultant (effective) aorist because of the disbelief and disobedience of both Gentile and Jew.” In other words, the world is shut up or trapped in a net of unbelief, **because** of their unbelief (cf. Isaiah 29:9-14). The word “unbelief” here is *apeitheia*, which means both unbelief and disobedience. *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* defines it in part as, “obstinacy, obstinate opposition to the divine will.” It's from a cognate word, *apeithes*, which means unpersuadable.

Note that all, hyperbole, virtually or nearly all, are shut up in a net of unbelief, so that he may eventually have mercy upon all. Ultimately God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4; cf. 2 Peter 3:9). Allowing the world to stumble along blindly in unbelief and ignorance for the time being is merciful on God's part. The end result will be mercy for all.

For now, however, God has mercy upon whom he will (Romans 9:15, quoting from Exodus 33:19). Is this completely arbitrary? How does God decide on whom he will have mercy? It begins with God's purpose. God chose Jacob over Esau from the womb, because it suited his purpose, which is eventually to show mercy to all [Romans 9:10-13; “hated,” is better rendered “loved less” (see Robertson's *Word Pictures*), he preferred Jacob over Esau, cf. Hebrews 11:20]. The wisdom of God's choice was borne out by the behavior and choices of the two men as they lived their lives (cf. Hebrews 11:21; 12:16). Some have been given in this life a greater opportunity for a knowledge of God than others. But with that opportunity comes greater responsibility.

Refusing to hear and be instructed, refusing to take God’s word seriously, choosing to sin, hardens and eventually deceives us, if we allow it (Hebrews 3:13). Note how rejecting God leads to being deceived and to greater and greater sin (Romans 1:18-28; Isaiah 5:21; 6:9-10).

God has mercy on those who hear and obey his word (Exodus 20:5-6 ; Deuteronomy 7:9-13; Isaiah 66:2; Ezekiel 33:10-16). Those who harden themselves will be hardened. Pharaoh hardened his own heart (1 Samuel 6:6), and God further hardened Pharaoh’s heart by, in part, calling on him to do the right thing and showing him mercy. Pharaoh refused to humble himself before God (Exodus 8:15; 9:34; 10:3). God did not take away his freedom to choose, but through circumstances brought about by God’s intervention Pharaoh’s already hard heart was further hardened.

God does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13-18). However, if we persist in refusing God’s word and choose unrighteousness, God will allow us to be blinded by agents of deception (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). When one refuses to accept the truth, what option is there other than to be blind?

God set Ezekiel the prophet as a “watchman” to warn Israel of judgment coming upon them for their rebellion against God’s laws. God spoke to Ezekiel, and said to him, “Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; **for they are a rebellious house**. Therefore, son of man, prepare your belongings for captivity, and go into captivity by day in their sight. You shall go from your place into captivity to another place in their sight. **It may be that they will consider, though they are a rebellious house**” (Ezekiel 12:2-3). The World English Bible renders verse three as follows: “Therefore, you son of man, prepare your stuff for moving, and move by day in their sight; and you shall move from your place to another place in their sight: **it may be they will consider, though they are a rebellious house.**” Note the reason they did not see nor hear. **It was because “they are a rebellious house.”** It is their obstinate refusal to listen to God and the word sent through his prophets that makes them blind to what he is trying to get across to them. God had told Ezekiel, “... the house of Israel will not listen to you; for they will not listen to me: for all the house of Israel are obstinate and hard-hearted” (Ezekiel 3:7, World English Bible). Nonetheless, God through the prophet was (and is) giving his people a chance to repent at his word. “He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house” (Ezekiel 3:27).

Despite the fact that some have greater opportunity to hear the gospel, salvation is open to any who hears and responds in genuine faith (Romans 10:13-21). Paul was sent by Jesus Christ to both Jews and Gentiles, “...to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me [Jesus Christ]” (Acts 26:18). He did this by declaring the message of repentance and faith (Acts 26: 20; Acts 17:2-4; 19:8-10).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life,” said Jesus (John 5:24). “I say these things that you may be saved,” he said (John 5:34).

To Whom Is Understanding Given?

Why did Jesus say to his disciples, “...it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (Matthew 13:11). Jesus answers, “For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them” (Matthew 13:15).

Some have concluded that this verse, especially the phrase, “Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them,” implies that God does not want the people to understand and repent, despite many scripture passages to the contrary. The verse is more clearly translated in some other versions. For example the New International Version renders it as follows: “For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.” Or, consider the Bible in Worldwide English translation: “The hearts of these people have no feeling. They do not hear well with their ears. And they have shut their eyes. They do not want to see with their eyes. They do not want to hear with their ears. They do not want to understand in their hearts. They do not want to turn to me. If they did turn, I would heal them.”

Adam Clarke in his commentary on this verse remarks that they, “obstinately resisted the truth of God, and shut their eyes against the light.” He goes on to say, “The fault here is totally in the people, and not at all in that God whose... nature is love.” (See our article “[Does God Want People to be Deceived?](#)”).

Note the reasons given for the lack of understanding, and note that but for these reasons they *could have* seen, heard, and understood, repented, and been “healed.” (1) Their hearts were “dull,” or gross, fat, callous, insensible. (2) Their ears were hard of hearing. (3) Their eyes *they* had closed. The crowds came out to hear Jesus, but more for entertainment than any serious purpose (cf. Ezekiel 33:30-33). Jesus did not commit himself to the crowds, that is instruct them in the deeper mysteries of the kingdom, because they were not committed to him, and he knew what was in their hearts (John 2:23-25). “Believed” (*pisteuo*) in verse 23 is in the aorist tense, the aspect being undefined, but often implying action at a point in time. For most of them their belief, such as it was, was shallow and fleeting.

The miracles that Jesus did attracted great multitudes (John 6:1-2). When he miraculously fed a crowd in Tiberius, having taught them and worked other miracles which they witnessed, they sought him out after he had departed. Jesus said to them, “...you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled” (John 6:26). Having seen the miracles that Jesus worked, having been miraculously fed by him, they said, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?” (John 6:30). They heard but didn’t hear, saw but didn’t see. Jesus said to them, “...you have seen Me and yet do not believe” (John 6:36). “Believe” here is in the present indicative, implying an abiding, continuing faith.

Some of Jesus’ disciples left him at that time (John 6:66). But others, especially the twelve, remained. Peter said, “...we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ” (John 6:69).

Because of their belief and commitment the closest disciples were given to know the mysteries of the kingdom. Understanding and knowledge are given to those who receive and treasure God’s word, hear and apply their hearts to understanding, cry out for it in faith and seek it (Proverbs 2:1-7; James 1:5-6). Truth is for those who are prepared to receive it and live by it (John 8:30-32).

When someone has an opportunity to hear God’s word he has an opportunity to listen, consider what is said, and act on it. Jesus said, “Take care about what you hear. The measure you use will be the measure you receive, and more will be added to you” (Mark 4:24, *NET Bible*). “Turn at my rebuke [i.e., repent]; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you” (Proverbs 1:23; cf. Psalm 111:10; Daniel 9:13; 2 Corinthians 3:16).

Access to the mysteries of God is open now more than ever to those who are willing to receive the truth and act on it in faith (Ephesians 3:8-12). “Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops” (Matthew 10:27). Paul wrote that the mystery of the gospel is now revealed to all nations by the commandment of God, “for the obedience of faith” (Romans 16:25-26; cf. Colossians 1:23; 2 Timothy 4:17). Those who do not believe the gospel remain blind for now, as God allows (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Does it really make sense that God would demand repentance, yet make it impossible for all but a tiny few, by refusing to “call” the others, if that’s all it takes? Paul wrote of the Gentiles, “They are darkened in their understanding, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts. Because they are callous, they have given themselves over to indecency for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness” (Ephesians 4:18-19, *NET Bible*). The description also fits Israel.

God now calls men to repentance through the preaching and publishing of the gospel. But most are so hardened and steeped in their false beliefs and lawless practices that they are not likely to respond to such a gentle approach. That’s why eventually there will be a tribulation and plagues poured out (Deuteronomy 30:2-7; Revelation 9:20-21). Nevertheless, through the gospel message, some in this age can be saved (Romans 11:13-14; 1 Corinthians 9:22-23).

Whom Does God “Draw”?

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him,” said Jesus (John 6:44). He went on to say, “And they shall all be taught by God” (verse 45). Jesus further said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32).

Nothing in these verses implies God and Christ seek to draw only a few. Indeed, they suggest that God seeks to draw all to Christ. God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). But most who heard Christ did not believe, and thus did not have God’s word abiding in them (John 5:38).

How does God “draw” men to himself (or to Christ)? The word translated “draws” (John 6:44, *(h)elko*), can have any of several meanings depending on how it is used, such as draw, drag, pull or attract (cf. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary*). One can be “drawn” by God to Christ, or “drawn” by his lusts to sin (James 1:14 [same word, *(h)elko*, with the Greek preposition *ek*, translated there “drawn away”]; cf. Deuteronomy 30:17; Acts 20:30; Hebrews 7:19).

All will be taught by God, sooner or later, one way or another. That doesn’t mean all will accept the teaching and abide by it. To come to Christ requires a willingness to hear and be taught by God. Those who believe can have everlasting life (John 6:47).

God said of Israel, “I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them. He shall not return to the land of Egypt; But the Assyrian shall be his king, Because they refused to repent” (Hosea 11:4-5; cf. Jeremiah 31:3). Paul asks, “...do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4).

One way God seeks to draw people to himself is through acts of loving kindness and mercy, the many gifts and blessings he gives. Surely sending his messengers to call men to repentance is one of the tools God uses to draw men to him. “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

But most are not willing to be drawn to God at this time. To such Paul wrote, “But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Romans 2:5). To those who refused to accept him Jesus said, “But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:40; cf. Matthew 22:3). Those who refused God’s message “rejected the will of God for themselves” (Luke 7:30). Jesus said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37).

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you,” (James 4:8). For one to be “drawn” by God to Christ, to be led to faith and repentance, requires a response on his part appropriate for the enticements God has set before him, for the mercy and goodness God has shown. Now, in this age, God is using gentle methods for the most part to “draw” men to Christ.

He will later send tribulation and other curses, to more forcibly bring men to repentance (Leviticus 26:40-42; Deuteronomy 30:1-3; Ezekiel 20:33-38; 41-43; Hosea 5:15 – 6:1; Zechariah 14:16-19). He will rid the world of Satan and his works (John 12:31; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 20:1-3), and establish a new system where his law is universally taught (Isaiah 2:2-4). Sooner or later, one way or another, all will be taught of God, though not all will accept his terms for salvation.

Whom Would God give to Christ?

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Those who were not willing? (John 5:40). Those who did not believe? (John 12:37). Those who would not obey? (John 7:19).

Or would he give to Christ those who would receive him? (John 1:12). Those willing to deny themselves? (Mark 8:34). Those willing to obey? (Luke 6:47-48). Those willing to hear and learn? (Matthew 11:28-30; John 6:45). Those who believe? (John 3:16; 17:6-8). Those who repent? (Isaiah 66:2). Those who abide in his word? (John 8:31; James 1:21-22). Those willing to worship in spirit and in truth? (John 4:23). Those who seek him? (Luke 11:9-13; Hebrews 11:6).

Who Are “The Called”?

Paul in a few Scriptures (e.g., Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 1:24) uses the term “the called” (with the definite article). In these instances the definite article appears to limit the reference to a specific subset. As, for example, “the men” might be used to designate a specific group of men as a subset of “men.” This is a common use of the article in both Greek and English. “The called” is not all who have been called, but Paul uses the term to refer to those who have responded to their calling, and are members of the Church. *The Peoples New Testament Commentary* on Romans 8:28 explains it as follows: “To them who are the called. These have been called by the gospel and have accepted the call. Many others are called Jews and Gentiles, but only those who hear and obey are chosen (Mt 20:16; 22:14). Paul uses the term of the latter class; those who hear and obey.”

What is Ekklesia?

Among the Greeks the word *ekklesia* was used to denote a convened assembly of the citizens of a community. In the Scriptures the word is used of the Church (or a local church assembly), as those called to assemble before God. In order to be a part of the assembly, in either case, one had to respond to the summons.

William Barclay elaborates as follows: “...originally the word does not mean, as is so often stated, a body of people who have been ‘picked out’ from the world. It has not in it that exclusive sense. It means a body of people who have been ‘summoned out’ of their homes to come and meet with God; and both in its original Greek and Hebrew usages, that sense was not exclusive but inclusive. The summons was not to any selected few; it was a summons from the State to every man to come and to shoulder his responsibilities; it was a summons from God to every man to come and to listen to and to act on the word of God” (*New Testament Words*, p. 70).

Who May Come?

While God must draw men before they may come to him, he invites anyone who desires to come to him on his terms. “... let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17, cf. 2 Chronicles 15:2; Isaiah 55:1-3; Matthew 5:6; 11:28-30; Luke 11:9-13; John 4:10).

Did Paul Write That “Not Many” Are Called?

If many are called, what are we to make of the following statement in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians: “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (I Corinthians 1:26). Actually, the words “are called” at the end of this verse are not found in the original Greek. The words are added in the New King James Version, and the King James and some other translations. A number of other translations more faithful to the original do not add the words “are called” at the end of the verse.

The Darby translation, for example, reads as follows: “For consider your calling, brethren, that there are not many wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many high-born. But God has **chosen** the foolish things of the world,…” (I Corinthians 1:26-27, Darby Bible). Some other versions, such as Young’s Literal Translation, use similar wording.

It is true that although many have been called, very few of those esteemed in the world as being extraordinarily wise, or powerful, or of privileged birth, have been among the chosen of God in this world. Just as Jesus said, many are called, but few are chosen, in this age, and very few among those of reputation for worldly wisdom, wealth, power, etc.

A ruler who was very rich was offered the opportunity to join Jesus in his ministry, but turned down the offer because of the sacrifice it would have required. Jesus said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” (Luke 18:24). Peter said in response, “See, we have left all and followed You” (Luke 18:28). It’s not that a rich person cannot be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, as we have the example of Joseph of Arimathea, who was a rich man, and a disciple of Christ (Matthew 27:57), and others could be mentioned as well. But such are the exception in today’s world.

The “calling” mentioned in I Corinthians 1:26 is from the Greek word κλήσις (*klesis*), which is a “verbal noun” (cf. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*). The “calling,” in the sense in which this word is used in the New Testament, is the object or condition to which God calls us, having to do with a saving relationship with him, a hope, a destiny, a way of life, etc. (cf. Ephesians 1:4, 18; 4:4; Philippians 3:14; II Timothy 1:9).

Those who respond in a positive way to the message of the gospel, have faith in God, repent and receive the Holy Spirit enter into this “calling,” and are among the “chosen” or “elect” of God, destined for eternal life in his kingdom if they remain faithful (Hebrews 3:1; II Peter 1:10).

Note on Acts 13:45-48: “And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (verse 48, NKJV), is a misleading translation. Some other translations are even more misleading in how they translate this phrase. As the context shows, many of the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia had opposed and rejected the word of God brought by Paul, and hence had judged themselves “unworthy of everlasting life” (verse 46). Note that this was a consequence of rejecting the message, not something that had been preordained.

On the other hand, a number of Gentiles in the area were receptive to the message and believed. The Greek in the disputed passage reads more literally: “And the Gentiles hearing, were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord, and believed; as many [i.e., the same number, or so, it could be translated] were appointed [or disposed] to eternal life.” In the Greek “were” (*ēn*) before “appointed” is imperfect, and should be translated “were,” not “had been.” The A Conservative Version (ACV) translation of the phrase is: “...as many as were appointed for eternal life believed.” The same translation is given in The Revised King James New Testament (RKJNT).

The following are the same except use “to” in place of “for”: English Majority Text Version (EMTV), English Standard Version (ETV), New Heart English Bible (NHEB), World English Bible (WEB), and The Common Edition New Testament.

The Living Oracles New Testament (LO) translates the phrase, “as many as were disposed for eternal life, believed.”

The Jews involved in this episode were unworthy of eternal life because, motivated by envy, as we’re told (Acts 13:45), they refused to believe, rejecting God’s word. By contrast, some Gentiles who heard, believed, and hence were “appointed,” or set apart, to eternal life; that is, they were converted. They were set on the road to eternal life because they believed. There is nothing in this passage of Scripture suggesting their belief was the result of God having selected them out beforehand. Compare John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 26:18; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

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