

Our Hope

2 Thessalonians 2:13

The Apostle Paul had just finished telling the Thessalonians why they have not missed the Rapture and why they are not currently going through the Tribulation. He now turns his thoughts to their future hope. Since the Thessalonians were saved under Paul's Gospel, they were members of the Body of Christ. What Paul tells them is just as meaningful for us today.

Chosen unto salvation (verse 12)

As we have pointed out previously, many people have an erroneous understanding of the doctrines of the Rapture and Second Coming as presented in the two letters to the Thessalonians. Another misunderstanding often arises concerning the doctrine of election. Many use this particular verse to support their belief that God has chosen only a few people to live an eternity with Him. They combine this verse with others to support what they believe. Let's take a look at some of those verses.

Romans 9:18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

This verse is commonly understood to mean that God shows mercy to those who will obtain salvation while the rest will have their hearts hardened. The context of the verse is about God hardening Pharaoh's heart so he will not let Israel go. This verse has nothing to do with salvation. In fact, it shows Pharaoh hardening his own heart before God is said to harden it.

John 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

This verse is said to show that God the Father selected those who were going to be given to the Son for salvation. The context of the verse is about believers within Israel who were now being passed on to the Son from the Father. All who were believers before the coming of Jesus Christ would absolutely believe in the Son. None would be lost in the transaction.

John 15:16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit...

Although used to show God elects people to be saved, it is quite obvious that Jesus is only speaking of Him choosing His 12 Disciples.

Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

This verse is a little harder to understand because on the surface it appears that God does ordain certain people to obtain eternal life. The key comes in understanding what the word ordained actually means in this verse. The Greek word *tasso* (G5021) means to place in a certain order, or to appoint. I believe the Gentiles who were listening were thinking through what was being said. They were literally trying to put these words and thought in order. Thinking through the words of the Gospel led them to believe. This particular usage is found in 1 Corinthians 16:15 where the believers had "addicted" themselves to the ministry of the saints. They were putting things in the proper order for these saints to help them in their ministry.

Ephesians 1:4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

This verse is not saying that God looked into the future to pick out individuals who would be saved. It is referring to the Body of Christ. All who become members of the Body of Christ were chosen for all the blessings listed in Ephesians. Notice that the verse does not say He chose us before the foundation of the world, but that He chose us IN HIM. Those who are in Him are chosen to obtain all these things.

Finally, we get to 2 Thessalonians 2:13:

...because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

It's important to understand the context of the verse by reading the verses or chapters surrounding the verse you are studying. We know that Paul had just finished telling the Thessalonians details pertaining to the seven-year Tribulation. He was proving to them that they will not be going through the Tribulation. Now Paul ends saying that they have been chosen for salvation. Since the topic was about the tribulation, the salvation Paul is speaking of is being saved from going through the terrors of the Tribulation. This fits in perfectly with what he told them in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, that they are (past tense) delivered from the wrath to come. They are not appointed for wrath, but to obtain salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:9). This verse has absolutely nothing to do with God choosing some to be saved and others to be sent to hell.

Elect unto...

If election is a biblical concept, but we are not elected for salvation, what is election all about? First, observe that Jesus Christ was chosen or elected (Isaiah 42:1). He was chosen by the Father to die for the sins of the world and finally rule over the earth. Matthew 12:18—21 and 1 Peter 2:4—6 make it abundantly clear that the person in the Isaiah passage is indeed Jesus Christ. Christ was chosen by the Father to carry out His plans and serve Him.

Israel was also chosen by God to carry out His plans. Isaiah 45:4 calls Jacob God's servant and Israel His elect. This ties in with Romans 9:13 that says "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Many interpret this to mean that God was speaking of individuals before they were born when, in fact, this verse is actually speaking of nations formed out of these two men many years after they had died (see Genesis 25:23). The nation coming from Jacob was chosen to serve God.

Jesus also chose the Disciples after spending all night in prayer (Luke 6:12—13). The choice actually came from the Father. These men were chosen to serve Jesus Christ and continue with His ministry after His ascension.

Notice how, in each case above, salvation could not be in view when it comes to election. Jesus was certainly not elected for salvation. Israel only had a small remnant of true believers, even though God elected the whole nation. All of the 12 Disciples were chosen, although one of them certainly was not saved. Each of the above examples shows they were chosen for service, not for salvation. Those who try to force fit salvation into these verses often do so because they are viewing Scripture through the doctrine of Calvin. The traditions of men once again can be seen to take precedence over Scriptural teaching.

Believe

The last part of verse 13 makes it clear that the Thessalonians would be physically saved from going through the Tribulation because they believed the truth of the Gospel that Paul was preaching and because of that, the Holy Spirit sealed them (2 Corinthians 1:22). The reason they were going to be physically saved from the coming Tribulation was because they were spiritually regenerated and were looking forward to the Rapture. As Paul had just assured them, the Rapture was going to happen before the beginning of the Tribulation. Being spiritually saved will lead them to be physically saved from the torment of the Tribulation.

The things that Paul taught them are just as relevant today as it was over 2,000 years ago. Believers today are members of the same Body of Christ as were these Thessalonians. We will one day get to meet these people who were being persecuted for following Christ and we will all be able to stand in amazement with them at God's great and perfect plan of redemption.

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