

A. Chadwick Thornhill
The Chosen People:
Election, Paul, and Second Temple Judaism
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In this revision of his 2013 Liberty University dissertation (directed by Leo Percer), Thornhill examines the concept of election in the Pauline letters and in a variety of early Jewish texts. Thornhill's central thesis is that the concept of unconditional individual election is foreign to both the early Jewish and Pauline material. Rather, "God preserves the chosen people *as a whole*, [but] each individual's fate is [conditional]" (p. 82), though which conditions are emphasized as necessary for the individual to be included among the elect differ throughout the literature surveyed.

After a short introductory chapter, Thornhill spends chapters two through six examining specific aspects of election in several early Jewish sources and then applying the insights from those sources to the exegesis of specific Pauline passages on election. In the seventh chapter, he offers a rereading of Rom 8:26–11:36, arguing that Paul is working within a typical Jewish framework of conditional covenantal participation in the people of God. Chapter eight provides a brief closing summary.

With respect to the early Jewish material, Thornhill largely depends on and develops the work of Mark Elliott, Sigurd Grindheim, and Chris VanLandingham. He argues that E. P. Sanders' correction of the traditional caricature of early Judaism as a graceless religion of works-salvation "may have swung the pendulum too far as it relates to Jewish beliefs concerning election" (p. 20). Sanders' model, he argues, has led many to ignore the conditional aspects of the covenant. As for the Pauline material, Thornhill aims to dismantle predestinarian readings of Paul, particularly the doctrine of double predestination in which God unilaterally chooses individuals for salvation or damnation (the work of Thomas Schreiner serves as the primary foil for his argument here).

The topical structure of the book may make it more accessible to readers less familiar with early Jewish texts. This approach, however, also has the effect of flattening the differences among the texts and results in redundancies, as some texts are covered multiple times from slightly different angles. Partly as a result,

scholars of early Judaism are likely to find the treatment of that material somewhat thin and lacking in nuance, though Thornhill commendably does not fall into the all-too-common trap of introducing early Jewish material only to serve as a foil for views in Paul's writings. His argument that the deterministic aspects of early Jewish apocalyptic literature have frequently been overemphasized at the expense of the conditional and imperative statements found in the same works is both nuanced and penetrating (pp. 186–203).

The core of the book is the exegesis of key Pauline passages at the end of each of the topical chapters. Three sections, each of which focus on the spatial (or what Thornhill calls "spherical") aspect of Paul's language—that is, how Paul "speaks more in terms of [communal] 'identity' than [salvific] 'modality'" (p.136)—are especially noteworthy. In the first, he argues that in Gal 2:15–3:14 (pp. 135–45) Paul is participating in a long-standing Jewish discussion about "what condition or marker defines God's people" (p. 146). Specifically, it is the reception of Christ's spirit that marks "insiders" from "outsiders" ("who live as if the work of the Messiah had not occurred" [p. 145]). Similarly, in his discussion of Rom 3:21–4:17 (pp. 170–78) he argues that "Paul continues his understanding of Jewish advantage whereby the Jews already had a position 'from within' (ἐκ) the covenant while Gentiles came in as outsiders 'through' (διὰ) Jesus' faithfulness" (p. 174). That is, although both groups must ultimately participate in Jesus' faithfulness, for Jews (who are "insiders") it is a renewal of the covenant, whereas gentiles are newly incorporated from outside. Analyzing Rom 8:1–17 (pp. 212–18), Thornhill rejects a "unilateral or meticulous view of divine agency, to the extent that the role humans play becomes minimal or nonexistent" (p. 212). He rightly recognizes that the primary problem in this section is not the law but sin, as "Paul contends that God has rescued the law, which 'sin' prevented from fulfilling its purposes, has condemned 'sin,' and placed the law in the proper sphere of the Spirit" (p. 218), thereby enabling proper fulfillment of the law within that sphere. Although (perhaps overly) brief, these sections are incisive and make a worthy contribution to reconstructions of Paul's soteriology.

Unfortunately, Thornhill does not always apply comparable exegetical precision to the Jewish sources. For example, much of chapter two relies on the argument that when the terms "elect" and "holy" are paralleled, this "emphasize[s] the *character* or *office* of the elect rather than their soteriological status" (p. 33). This, however, misconstrues the meaning of "holy" (שָׁדֵךְ; ἅγιος), which does not refer to piety or character but rather denotes being set apart or consecrated—by definition the consequence of election. And although many early Jewish texts do express hope for the eschatological salvation of at least some gentiles, that does not necessarily mean "the inclusion of the nations in the people of God," as assumed on p. 167 and elsewhere. Jewish parallels do exist for Paul's argument that gentiles may be saved through their inclusion within the *ekklesia* (for example, Thornhill cites 1 Enoch's Animal Apocalypse, which suggests something resembling such inclusion). But many other Jewish sources, such as Tobit, the Testament of Moses, and the Sibylline Oracles, only suggest that many among the nations will worship YHWH and participate in the blessings of the es-

chaton, not that they will be incorporated into YHWH's people. The repeated assertion that the Dead Sea Scroll sectarians regarded themselves as the "true Israel" (e.g., pp. 62, 77, 156) is also problematic, as the sectarian literature instead suggests that they regarded themselves as a faithful subgroup of Israel rather than claiming their group was all that remained of Israel. A more sustained engagement with the work of Graham Harvey, E. P. Sanders, and especially John Bergsma on this point would have been beneficial.

It is a pity that one of the book's most important observations—that election need not mean salvation but often refers to selection for a particular function—appears in chapter two but is inconsistently applied in much of the rest of the book, where the two concepts are often treated as equivalent. Thornhill's exegesis of the potter / clay passage in Rom 9 may have benefited from application of this insight, for example.

These flaws notwithstanding, the book does successfully demonstrate that early Jewish and Pauline texts represent the concept of election in a variety of ways and that election cannot simply be glossed as the unconditional predestination of individuals for salvation (or otherwise). Rather, Thornhill shows that studies of election must take seriously the corporate and conditional aspects of the covenantal framework. Given how frequently this conditionality has been ignored in scholarly discourse, Thornhill's volume provides an important corrective and a potentially fruitful starting point for further discussion and more precise future scholarship on the concept of election.