

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."



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Does Acts 13:48 Teach Calvinism?

-- By Terry Carter

Acts 13:48b says, "...as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." NKJV.

The KJV says, "...as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."



This leads some to conclude that Luke was endorsing Calvinism, specifically the idea that God has ordained only certain individuals to eternal life. The other side of that belief is that God has ordained other

individuals to eternal condemnation. But is that what this passage is teaching?

The Greek word for "ordained" or "appointed" here is "*tetagmeno*": a form of "*tasso*". Strong defines it as, "*to put in order, to station*". It is translated in the KJV as "appoint", "ordain", "set", "determine", and "addict". Strong goes on to say it often has the idea of one being appointed to a military command or being assigned to a post.

There is nothing inherent in this Greek word that indicates man is left without freewill. We can see this by looking at how that word is used in Scripture. Since it is only used eight times, let's look at each of its uses. The word can be used to describe something that God has determined.

In **Romans 13:1** it is translated "ordained" (KJV) or "appointed" (NKJV) in saying that the powers that be are determined by God. This is the closest it comes to being used for something God determines contrary to or apart from man's freewill. But even here, there is no indication that God violates the freewill of man to place particular men in positions of power. In fact, the passage doesn't mention particular men at all. The idea is simply that government is ordained, determined, or appointed by God for the good of man.

In **Acts 22:10** it is translated "appointed" in reference to what Paul was appointed to do. However, this does not indicate a lack of freewill on Paul's part. It only indicates that Jesus had an assignment for him. There is no reason to think that Paul could not have refused to carry out this assignment. Jonah fled from God at first but later repented.

The point is that God does not force men to serve Him in violation of, or apart from, their freewill.

In **Matthew 28:16**, it is translated "appointed" in reference to Jesus meeting the apostles at a particular place. While it is true that Jesus was God in the flesh, this passage has nothing to do with man's freewill or lack of it. It simply refers to a determined place to meet.

Other times the word is used to indicate what man has determined.

In **Luke 7:8**, it is translated "set" when the centurion says he is set under authority; that is, given a military command. This indicated his post in the army. It had nothing to do with God's determining anything. The army had determined this position for him.

In **Acts 15:2**, it is translated "determined" where the Church at Antioch determined to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to meet with the elders and apostles about whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised. It was not God who did the determining here. This was something that men determined and then carried out.

In **Acts 28:23**, it is translated "appointed" in reference to a day they determined to hear from Paul about the Gospel. This was men determining the day of meeting. It had nothing to do with God determining anything here.

In **I Corinthians 16:15** it is translated "addicted" (KJV) or "devoted" (NKJV) where Paul says that the house of Stephanus had addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints. Again, this was not something that God had determined. Men determined, addicted, or devoted themselves to ministry. The decision was theirs to make or not.

We can see from the above uses of the word that it has the idea of something being "determined" but it indicates

nothing about who is doing the determining. It can be used of man determining something or it can be used of God determining something. But even when it is used of God determining something, it nowhere violates man's freewill.

It is actually a pretty generic word for something being determined, appointed, or set in order. As is always the case with generic words like this, the context must determine how they are to be translated.

This brings us back to the passage in question, **Acts 13:46**. How shall it be translated here?

Donald Nash, in his translation renders it, "...as many as had determined themselves for eternal life believed." This indicates that it was the individuals who were doing the determining here, not God.

Gareth Reese says he would translate it, "...those who were determined to have eternal life believed." This makes good sense in light of the context.

1. In **verses 38-40**, Paul warns them to "Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you." There would be no reason to warn them if they had no choice to make. If God had already ordained some to life and others to condemnation, this was a useless statement.
2. In **verse 42**, we read that the Gentiles "besought" (KJV) or "begged" (NKJV) for these words to be preached to them the next Sabbath. That is, they were determined to hear the Gospel again.
3. In **verse 46**, we read about the Jews' rejection of the Gospel. They rejected the Word of God and judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life. This was clearly something they did of their own volition, not something God did to them.
4. The verse in question, **verse 48**, sets the reaction of the Gentiles in contrast to the reaction of the Jews in **verses 45-46**. Both parties heard the Word of God. What they did about what they heard is quite a contrast as seen below:

Jews, verses 45-46

Filled with envy, contradicted,
Blasphemed and opposed Paul rejected the Word of God.
Judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life.
Refused to believe.

Gentiles, verse 48

Were glad.
Glorified the Word of the Lord.
Determined themselves for eternal life.
Believed.

Not only do the above translations by Reese and Nash fit the context, they fit other teaching of Scripture where men chose of their own freewill to believe or reject the Gospel.

Adam Clarke says of the translation of the word "*tetagmeno*" in this passage the following:

"This text has been most pitifully misunderstood... [*tetagmeno*] includes no idea of pre-ordination or pre-destination of any kind...it has been considered here as implying the *disposition* or *readiness* of several persons in the congregation...yet of all the meanings ever put on it, none agrees worse with its nature and known signification than that which represents it as intending those who were *predestined* to eternal life: this is *no* meaning of the term, and should never be applied to it." [Emphasis his]

Henry Alford in his book, *The New Testament for English Readers*, says the following about this passage:

"As many as were disposed to eternal life. The meaning of this word "disposed" must be determined by the context. The Jews had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life: The Gentiles as many as were disposed to eternal life believed. By whom disposed is not here declared...to find in this text pre-ordination to life asserted, is to force both the word and the context to a meaning which they do not contain."

Finally consider what A.T. Robertson says about this translation in his "Word Pictures of the New Testament". Consider that he was a Baptist, which is a Calvinistic denomination.

"A military term to place in orderly arrangement. The word "ordain" is not the best translation here. "Appointed," as Hackett shows, is better. The Jews here had voluntarily rejected the Word of God.

On the other side were those Gentiles who gladly accepted what the Jews had rejected, not all the Gentiles. Why these Gentiles here ranged themselves on God's side as opposed to the Jews Luke does not tell us.

This verse does not solve the vexed problem of divine sovereignty and human free agency. There is no evidence that Luke had in mind an *absolutum decretum* of personal salvation. Paul had shown that God's plan extended to and included Gentiles.

Certainly the Spirit of God does move upon the human heart to which some respond, as here, while others push him away."