



The Recent Controversy Over Acts 13:48

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Terry Arnold



T. A. Ministries
A Ministry of Teaching

PO Box 432, Babinda,
4861, Qld, Australia
Website: www.taministries.net
E-mail: taministries2@gmail.com

Ph. 0411489472

In recent times there has been debate as to how Acts 13:48 should be rendered. The KJV reads: *‘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’*.

Some Bible teachers have changed the word *‘ordained’* and restructured the verse. Most Bible versions render the Greek root word *‘τασσο’* [*‘tasso’*] as *‘ordained’* or *‘appointed’*. However, the Living Bible renders the verse *‘As many as wanted eternal life believed’*, accompanied by a footnote *‘or were disposed to; or ordained to’*. But there is a very important difference between *‘wanting’* eternal life and being *‘ordained to’* eternal life. One emphasises *the will of man*; the other keeps to the Greek Tense and Voice and emphasises *the will of God*.

The Greek root word *‘τασσο’* [*‘tasso’*] means *‘to arrange in an orderly manner, i.e. assign or dispose (to a certain position or lot); addict, appoint, determine, ordain, set’*. What is vital in this passage is the *Perfect tense* for *‘ordained’*. This tense describes an action or process that took place *in the past, the result of which has continued to the present*. The closest English equivalents are shown in the verbs *‘has’* or *‘have’*. The Greek *Passive Voice* also represents the subject as *receiving the action* of the verb. Acts 13:48 must be translated as showing *an action by God and done to the recipient, man!*

Bible teacher, Dave Hunt, turns this on its head and says the KJV here is tainted by the Latin Vulgate and that in Acts 13:48 *‘many Greek Scholars call it a wrong translation’*, that it should be translated *‘as many as disposed themselves’*. He inverts the worker and workmanship which the Greek emphatically does not do! Hunt’s comment *‘many Greek Scholars’* is also misleading. The *‘many’* are actually only *a few* in comparison to the massive weight of *most* translators and commentaries who agree with *‘ordained’* or *‘appointed’*!

Bible versions: Tyndale and his successors all followed the Greek rather than the Latin in this verse, the Vulgate being used as *a reference only*. In regards to Acts 13:48 the early Geneva Bible (before the KJV) had a marginal note: *‘None can believe, but they whom God hath appointed before all beginnings to be saved’*. The American Standard Version of 1901, the Revised Standard of 1952, JN Darby, Moffatt, Sir Edward Clarke and S. Sharpe all have *‘ordained’*. These men were not at all influenced by the KJV or by *‘Calvinism’*. They used the word *‘ordained’ because it is accurate to the Greek Perfect tense and Passive voice*.

Other versions have rendered the text *‘appointed to’* or *‘appointed for’*. These give a similar sense as *‘ordained’*. Versions that use *‘appointed’* are: the NIV, Youngs Literal, Berkeley, Wuests and the New American Standard. Again, none of these were influenced by the KJV or *‘Calvinism’*.

The European versions show similar translations.

Some versions such as the Amplified, J.B. Phillips and Weymouth, have *‘destined’* or *‘predestined’*, which again attempt to keep to the Passive Voice in the Greek.

Today's English Version has *‘chosen for eternal life’*; Good News For the World version has *‘chosen to love forever’*; and G.W. Wade - *‘all who had been pre-disposed by God for the gaining of eternal life became believers’*.

Greek Commentaries: The bulk of the Greek lexicons also agree with the rendering of *‘ordained’* or *‘appointed’*. Thayers Lexicon renders the verse: *‘As many as were appointed (AV ordained) by God to obtain eternal life, or to whom God had decreed eternal life’*. Liddell and Scott, Souter, Green and others wrote similarly.

Against this massive testimony there are the few that diverge, such as Benjamin Wilson's 1864 *‘emphatic Diaglott’*: *‘as many as were - having been - disposed for life age - lasting’*. This Diaglott was republished by the Jehovah Witness in 1942 to suit their *New World Translation*.

The Commentaries: Matthew Henry wrote: ‘God gave this grace to believe to all those among them who were ordained to eternal life (for whom he had predestinated, them he also called, Romans 8:30)’. Dr. Gill said ‘Some would have the words rendered - ‘as many as were disposed to eternal life believed’ - which is not countenanced by the ancient versions. The Arabic renders it as we do, and the Syriac thus - as many as were put, or appointed, unto eternal life.’ Many other commentaries could be cited to show the massive historic testimony to this verse...Bloomfield, Barnes, Wordsworth, Matthew Poole; Bengel; Alford; Brown & Faussett...the bulk of evidence is simply overwhelming! Barnes (1849) affirmed that ‘the Greek word is never used to denote an internal disposition or inclination arising from one’s own self. It does not mean they disposed themselves to embrace eternal life. It has uniformly the notion of an ordering, disposing or arranging from without, ie. from some other source than the individual himself...’

In ‘What Love Is This’ (P.211) Dave Hunt quotes from an A.T. Robinson (‘Robertson’s Word Pictures of The New Testament’): ‘There is no evidence that Luke had in mind an absolutum decretum of personal salvation...’ But Hunt fails to continue the quote!: ‘...It was saving faith that was exercised only by those who were appointed unto eternal life...who were thus revealed as the SUBJECTS OF God’s grace by the stand they took on this day...’ (emphasis ours).

Hunt compounds his error by further stating this same word ‘tasso’ is found eight times in the NT and that ‘not one of them carries the meaning of a decree from God nor of something that is unchangeable or eternal...’ But let us test Hunt in 2 of these 8 cases! Acts 22:10 says: ‘And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do’; Rom.13:1: ‘Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are **ordained** of God’.

The Greek tenses in both verses are *Perfect Tense* which means something decreed in the past. The Greek Voices are again in both verses *passive* which says the subjects had no action in this but it was being done *to them*! Both verses are in fact ‘decrees’ from God and ‘unchangeable’ and ‘eternal’ which Hunt denies! Sadly most will not bother to check Hunt’s references to find him in blatant error!

If a translator, commentator or teacher finds difficulty because of their predisposed theology then they must not misquote or change the meaning of Greek words or tenses! We are to ‘***diminish not a word***’ (Jer.26:2). ‘*As many as wanted to*’ or ‘*as many as were disposed to*’ is simply not the same as ‘*ordained to*’ or ‘*appointed to*’. The former violates the original text.

Notes

About the Author and the Ministry

Terry Arnold holds a Doctorate in Theology (Dth), a Masters degree (MABS) and several diplomas. He was founder and president of *South Pacific Bible Institute*, a Bible college training and equipping people for ministry. In addition he was the founder of Hervey Bay Bible Church in Queensland, Australia. He has for 25 years served as an elder and then pastor.

Terry is the author of several books and is involved in a full time ministry of *teaching, informing* and *equipping* the church. He is also editor of a growing worldwide publication '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

His ministry includes preaching/teaching and conducting seminars and conferences in a wide range of churches and colleges.

TA Ministries is a non-denominational and non-profit faith ministry founded in 1989 when the book '*To Catholics Whom I Love*' was written by Terry Arnold. This book went through several re-prints and served as a fruitful outreach to Roman Catholics.

In 1996 the ministry became a full-time operation with the introduction of a free newsletter, later named '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

Diakrisis is published bi-monthly to *teach, inform* and *equip* the church of Biblical truths and to warn of false teaching. It has also been a valuable reference aid to hundreds of pastors/elders.