

# Church and Theology

## Where the Bible and the Local Church Meet

### Soteriology: What the Bible Teaches about Salvation<sup>1</sup>

Topic #2 (Audio Studies #2-#8) —Predestination: God’s Control of His Plan in Space and Time

Paul S. Karleen

For many years we had a great dog in our home—a goldendoodle named Chester. He was very intelligent as dogs go. But he had a very obvious characteristic: he could only think about one thing at a time. He could not make a plan. If he saw a bird or rabbit in the yard that he wanted to chase, he headed directly for it, regardless of what might be in the way. Many shrubs could testify to the fact that he tried to go right through anything between him and his target. He could not think ahead. He was just not made that way.

Our grandchildren, on the other hand, showed at an early age the ability to take logical steps toward goals. For example, if they were navigating around our house in a walker, they would usually realize that they had to turn the walker around and get it pointed in the right direction in order to get around obstacles. This is a trait of human beings that we possess at an early age. God made us in such a way that we identify goals and devise means to get to them. Like God himself, we make plans. Most of you made a plan for today already yesterday, or even earlier. You have probably made a plan, or laid out in your mind or on paper, a plan for tomorrow.

Through this study of God’s plan and predestination, I hope to encourage you to think in terms of God’s plan and how that it includes everything in the created universe, spiritual and physical, and so includes everything in your life.

#### 1. God’s plan

##### a. The existence of a plan

As we begin the systematic presentation of what the Bible teaches about salvation, it is important that we learn to think in terms of God’s plan—both for the salvation of individuals and for the universe. As we acquire this ability, we will find that pieces of biblical teaching fall into place much more easily than they would if we did not envision goals and purposes.

The organized study of what the bible teaches about salvation is called *soteriology*, a word that borrows parts of two Greek words—σωτηρία (*sōtēria*, ‘salvation,’ with the last vowel left off) and λόγος (*logos*, ‘topic,’ ‘declaration,’ ‘communication’). What grammarians call the ‘root’ parts of these two words are *sōtēr* and *log*. The English word, then, refers to a declaration, a statement, something that is communicated about salvation. Soteriology is one of the major divisions of systematic theology.

We cannot formulate a soteriology—a theology or doctrine about salvation—without identifying a plan behind what God is doing. We should realize that God does not do anything without having a goal or goals and without determining the means that must exist in order to reach his goals. So, for example, his creation of the universe must have been a step toward some goal. Robert Reymond comments on the necessity of God’s plan:

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It would be an irresponsible if not an irrational God who would create the world and direct its course of events with no prior plan or purpose behind such activity—or who would not direct the world he created at all. The Bible, however, has a great deal to say—much more than one might suppose at first blush—about the divine purpose standing behind and governing this world and the men who inhabit it.<sup>2</sup>

Here is an important question for you that will enable you to think biblically about God’s plan and how it applies to his creation:

Were **all** the things that happened in your life yesterday part of God’s plan?

The Arminian would say that God “allowed” you to do some things that he didn’t want to happen—God therefore has two wills, one for his ideal plan and one where he settles for less. The Open Theist would say that God couldn’t control some of what happened. God is “open” to the future in the sense that he is working on how to make things come out the way he wants. By the way, Open Theism is the logical and extreme outcome of Arminianism.

Sometimes, when we think about the prophetic aspects of Scripture, what God is doing with Israel and the Church, how in the latter days he will bring human life on earth as we know it to an end and create new heavens and a new earth, we tend to conclude that that’s all there is—a prophetic plan or some kind of outline for history. But the details of prophecy (including information in both the Old and New Testaments) are only part of a larger plan that is revealed in Scripture. This larger plan includes *everything* that God is doing with his creation. It includes creation itself, the Fall of mankind, the nation of Israel, the incarnation, the Cross with all its features, the Church Age, the end times and eternal enjoyment of God by the redeemed, along with eternal punishment for the unsaved and many more things—along with what you had to eat yesterday and how many hours, minutes and seconds of sleep you got last night, with the seconds extending to the right of the decimal point to infinity.

So, if God is really omnipotent and omniscient and sovereign, as the Bible actually says he is, then the answer to the question I asked you has to be a resounding “Yes!” **Everything** that happened in your life yesterday was part of God’s plan. Please remember to ask yourself this question frequently as we continue.

Theologians sometimes use the word decree in referring to God’s plan. We can define ‘decree’ this way:

The decree of God is his plan for the universe that includes all things and is certain to come to pass.

But for our purposes in this series, let’s simply refer to his plan. What we call it, however, isn’t as important as that we understand its features and how the pieces of it fit together. In this study we want to look at God’s plan as a way of laying the groundwork for our full study of soteriology in coming chapters, where we will see the major pieces of the plan with reference to salvation.

#### **b. The key word for the plan: *πρόθεσις* (*prothesis*)**

In this chapter we will spend a fair amount of time discussing four words. Here are the words, along with an easy way to remember their meaning:

*prothesis*: This is used of a plan, something that is laid out, set down, See our word thesis in it? A thesis is a layout of somebody’s thinking. In front of *thesis* is *pro-*, which means before.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 462.

*horizō*: This is translated *determine, set a boundary*. See the English word horizon in it? A horizon is the limit or boundary of our sight as we look into the distance.

*proorizō*: This is the preceding word with *pro-* stuck on the front, so it can be translated *determine ahead of time, even set a boundary ahead of time*.

*proginōskō* (verb) and *prognōsis* (noun): These words are made from *ginōskō* (*know*) or *gnōsis* (knowledge) and *pro-*. Can you see our word *know* in *gnosis*? Both words have our friend *pro-* on the front, making them refer to knowledge or the state of knowing before something else occurs.

So, when you see these words, think 1) thesis, 2) boundary and 3) know.

The Greek word *πρόθεσις* (*prothesis*) is used in the NT to denote God's plan. Understanding the word's meaning and use gives us significant insight into the nature of the plan. Three occurrences are of particular importance for us here: Eph. 1:11; 3:11 and Rom. 8:28.

Robert Reymond cites Eph. 3:11 as a passage that utilizes *prothesis* and shows the existence of a plan (although, of course, it does not give all possible details about such a plan).<sup>3</sup> Here are the NIV and the Greek texts (brackets are mine):

according to his eternal purpose [*prothesis*] which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

κατὰ πρόθεσιν τῶν αἰώνων ἦν ἐποίησεν ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν<sup>4</sup>

Reymond makes several key observations about this verse:

- The word translated 'purpose' can also refer in ancient Greek to a plan.
- The plan/purpose is eternal. Reymond comments:

There was never a moment when God had a blank mind or a time when God's plan with all of its parts was not fully determined. He never "finally made up his mind" about anything. This is just to say that God has *always* had the plan and that within the plan itself there is no chronological factor *per se*. The several parts of the plan must be viewed then as standing in a teleological rather than a chronological relationship to one another.<sup>5</sup>

- The person and work of Jesus Christ are central to the eternal plan.
- Because the plan is centered on Jesus Christ, it is mainly concerned with the matter of salvation. Similarly, Rom. 8:28 speaks of God's working everything for good for the ones who are called in keeping with his purpose (*prothesis*), and Rom. 9:11-13, where God differentiates between Jacob and Esau with regard to blessing, speaks of the 'according-to-election purpose (*prothesis*)' of God (same word again; my translation).

## 2. Predestination

### a. The controversy

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<sup>3</sup> Reymond, 463-64.

<sup>4</sup> Black, M., Martini, C. M., Metzger, B. M., & Wikgren, A. (1997). *The Greek New Testament* (Eph 3:11). Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies.

<sup>5</sup> Reymond, 463.

There is perhaps no more divisive word among Christians (genuine or nominal) than ‘predestination.’ Although the concept can be found in the creeds of many denominations and church groups and has been held by such figures as Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Augustine, Wycliffe, Owen, Whitefield, Hodge, Dabney, Shedd, Warfield, Kuyper, Boettner, Pink and Murray, it is always opposed by those of a Pelagian bent.

John Calvin faced the same opposition to the doctrine of predestination in his day as those who hold it face today. Concerning this teaching he said

I know full well that no mention whatever can be made of God's eternal predestination, but, in a moment, numberless unholy and absurd thoughts rush into the mind. Hence it is that many over-modest persons are found, who wish that the glorious doctrine of predestination were never named at all, lest occasion should thereby be given to wanton minds to exalt themselves against God. I, however, passing by all such over-careful speculations and leaving them to others, consider it unjustifiable in a Christian man thus cautiously to keep back the genuine confession of the truth, lest it should be exposed to the grin of the profane.<sup>6</sup>

While in the thinking of many predestination is associated most closely with the writings of John Calvin, we should be careful to note that, where Calvin was correct, he was only showing his agreement with the pages of Scripture. He was really only building on what Augustine had taught a millennium earlier, and, in turn, on what Paul and other biblical writers inscribed under the direction of the Holy Spirit. If the doctrine of predestination is equated by some with ‘Calvinism,’ it should only be done with a healthy asterisk that notes that Calvin did significant work on systematizing biblical evidences. As Loraine Boettner says,

The inherent principles of [Calvinism] had been in existence for long ages before Calvin was born. They had indeed been visible as patent factors in the world's history from the time of man's creation. But inasmuch as it was Calvin who first formulated these principles into a more or less complete system, that system, or creed, if you will, and likewise those principles which are embodied in it, came to bear his name....

Calvin's active and powerful intellect led him to sound the depths of every subject which he touched. In his investigations about God and the plan of redemption he went very far, penetrating into mysteries concerning which the average man seldom if ever dreams. He brought to light a side of Scripture which had as yet been very much in the shade and stressed those deep truths which in the ages preceding the Reformation had comparatively escaped notice in the Church. He brought to light forgotten doctrines of the apostle Paul, and fastened them in their full and complete sense upon one great branch of the Christian Church.<sup>7</sup>

You will see me quote a number of times from Boettner in this book. While I have consulted many articles and books in preparing this and related studies, I find that I have great appreciation for the comprehensiveness and warm spirit of Boettner's study. There are only a few places where I disagree with him. So, I make no apology for referring to him often. I encourage you to secure the book for yourself and read it a lot!

The ultimate questions with regard to the doctrine of predestination, then, are “Is it true?” and “Does it accurately reflect what is contained in the pages of Holy Scripture?” If we are comfortable with (hopefully

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<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism: A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God*, Trans. Henry Cole, 73-74.

<sup>7</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1932), 4.

due to biblical conviction) a God who is able to do whatever he wishes with his creation, then we will have little trouble with predestination.

### b. The occurrences of *predestination* (προορίζω [*proorizō*])

The Greek word προορίζω (*proorizō*) occurs six times in the NT. The King James Version (AV; 1611) renders four of these six occurrences with a form of *predestine*. The Geneva Bible of 1599 follows the same pattern. The English words predestination and predestine apparently appeared first in English writings in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. They come from Latin through French. The Latin referred to determining something beforehand. The following table shows the AV and the NIV:

<u>προορίζω</u>	<u>NIV</u>	<u>King James</u>
Acts 4:28	decided beforehand	determined before
Rom. 8:29	predestined	predestinate
Rom. 8:30	predestined	predestinate
1 Cor. 2:7	destined for	ordained before
Eph. 1:5	predestined	predestinated
Eph. 1:11	predestined	predestinated

Every one of the six occurrences of *proorizō* refers to the salvation aspects of God’s plan, and all but Acts 4:28 and 1 Cor. 2:7 refer to God’s arranging/planning the lives of elect individuals for salvation. Acts 4:28 and 1 Cor. 2:7 refer to the Cross and the Gospel message, respectively, but include the evil acts of those opposed to God.

Ephesians 1:11 is a very important verse for understanding God’s plan and its outworking and it connects predestination with the plan. Here is that verse in both English (NIV) and Greek, with the most important words underlined and numbered:

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out  
6 5 4  
everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. . . .  
3 2 1

Ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐκκληρώθημεν προορισθέντες κατὰ πρόθεσιν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐνεργοῦντος κατὰ τὴν βουλήν  
6 5 4 3 2  
 τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ<sup>8</sup>  
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I have numbered six key words in the English and Greek texts to help you as we look at the meaning of the words, their place in the sentence and their contribution to our understanding of God’s plan.

In overview, we see that this verse says that God has a plan (*πρόθεσιν; prothesin*) that concerns everything. Yes, that’s *everything*! That plan is actualized by God himself and it matches the ‘counsel’ or ‘desire’ of his will.

It will help us to see the importance of the elements of this verse, if we put its features in their logical order, which is roughly the reverse order from their sequence in the verse. Remember, however, that there are no steps in the mind of God, he knows everything at once, he never learns anything new to him and his plan is a unified whole in his mind. I believe that the Holy Spirit led the Apostle Paul to write this verse so that our minds could gain insight into something that is actually infinite. So, we are justified, as we are with all

<sup>8</sup> Black, *et al.*

of Scripture, in taking the verse apart (and then putting it back together with an explanation!). Here are the pieces of the verse in reverse order of how they appear:

Piece #1: God has a will or desire (θελήματος; *thelēmatos*) for the universe. Notice that his plan is an expression of his will. He wants certain things to come to pass. We will see later in our series on Salvation that this will is focused on obtaining a group of people that he will bless forever as a means of glorifying himself, as expressed in Rom. 9:23: “to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—<sup>24</sup> even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles.”

Piece #2: God’s will has wisdom and purposefulness associated with it (‘counsel’; βουλήν; *boulēn*). His counsel is his decision that it is right for him to do this.

Piece #3: God works out everything (τὰ πάντα; *ta panta*) in keeping with (κατὰ; *kata*) his counsel. This means that nothing at all is left out. Remember your yesterday?

Piece #4: God’s will is expressed or carried out through a plan (πρόθεσις; *prothesin*), the same word that we saw in Eph. 3, and which occurs in Rom. 8, which we will look at shortly.

Piece #5: God predestines in keeping with the plan (προορισθέντες; *prooristhentes*). Predestination is not the same thing as the plan.

Piece #6: God chooses/elects on the basis of all the key concepts that follow in the verse (5, 4, 3, 2, 1)

Here is a more compact description of the sequence (reversed from the order of the pieces in the text) in Paul’s explanation (remember, there is no sequence in God and all the pieces here are a unity in God’s mind):

- 1—God has a desire/will/purpose for his creation
- 2—This desire must fit with what is right for him to do (it must be consistent with himself)
- 3—Nothing is outside his control (‘everything’)
- 4—His desire/will/purpose requires the existence of a plan
- 5—The details of the plan are focused on the predestining of individuals
- 6—Choosing (election) is grounded in all five of the preceding points.

Jacob Arminius, and John Wesley following him, held that predestination is based on God’s foreknowledge, not his will. In this view God knows ahead of time who will believe and decides to *choose* them. Aside from the circularity of this position, the flow of and logical relations within Eph. 1:11 alone disprove it, since according to the Apostle Paul predestination is based on God’s plan, which in turn flows from the counsel of his will, which is the cause of everything.

Before we leave this passage, it would be worthwhile to see Calvin’s definition of *predestination*:

By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of those ends, we say that he has been predestined to life or death.<sup>9</sup>

### c. More on the meaning of προορίζω (*proorizō*): a story and a really, really old illustration (about 2500 years old)!

At this point we need to learn more about the word *proorizō*, the word labeled as feature #5 in our layout of Eph. 1:11. I believe that I can provide a crucial insight into the meaning of this word, information that I

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<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, iii, xxi, sec. 5, 1030-1031.

actually have never seen in anyone's writings—although I can't say for certain, of course, that no one in the area of biblical studies has seen this.

Before I tell my story, please remember that ancient Greek had the word *horizō* (ὁρίζω), which could mean *to mark out by boundaries, mark out, to limit, to determine, to appoint*. It is *proorizō* without the prefix *pro-* ('before,' 'beforehand').

In the NT this word occurs in the following places, with NIV translations and the rendering of the Greek words in question underlined:

Lk. 22:22: "The Son of God will do as it has been decreed"

Acts 2:23: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose"

Acts 10:42: "he is the one whom God appointed as judge"

Acts 11:29: "The disciples . . . decided"

Acts 17:26: "he determined the times set for them"

Acts 17:31: "by the man he has appointed"

Rom. 1:4: "who through the Spirit of holiness was declared to be the Son of God with power"

Heb. 4:7: "Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it today"

But now here is my story about a story!

Many years ago a professor in a class I was taking at the University of Pennsylvania assigned a reading in a book whose topic was the dialects of ancient Greek. Recall that the language of the New Testament is what is called koine Greek, with the word koine meaning 'common.' In the first century koine was the most extensively used dialect of Greek in the ancient world. Greek had previously existed in many more dialects. A dialect is usually defined as one of two or more mutually intelligible variants of a single language. Today, for example, English has several dialects found in the British Isles, several in the U.S., etc. Depending on who is doing the classification, ancient Greek had from three main dialects up to 15 or 20 dialects.

In that book was a reading that was taken from an inscription in stone, written in one of those dialects. The reading was the record of a surveyor who had been hired by some priests to find out precisely what the property lines were of the land occupied by a heathen temple. The account was written by the surveyor and constituted a report of what he and his crew did. The priests were in a dispute with the local farmers, who kept using temple land for grazing their sheep and goats. It's the work of the surveyor and the word used to describe it that is important for us. I have provided here in the notes a drawing of an ancient *groma*, used in surveying, and a digital color picture of a surveyor using a *groma*. It's amazing that this picture has survived the centuries.





It's been almost 50 years since I read the story, and I don't have at hand the book that it was in, but as I recall it went something like this (presented from the standpoint of the surveying crew): We struck a line from the big rock to the large tree in the meadow; then we struck a line to the stone wall by the river; then we struck a line along the river to the road; then we struck a line back to the starting point. In other words, the surveyors made boundary lines around the temple property and completely enclosed the area around the temple. The account says, in effect, "We marked a boundary line . . . we marked a boundary line . . . we marked a boundary line . . . we marked a boundary line . . . we marked a boundary line."

As I read the account, all of a sudden I realized that in what I was reading there before me was a fantastic insight into the biblical doctrine of predestination. I don't remember where I was at the time—I think I was in a library—but I almost fell off my chair. I may have yelled "Wow!" What I was seeing was a surveyor's technical term being used to state the striking of the lines, and it was the Greek word *horizō* (ὀρίζω) that was being used over and over to describe the laying out of the lines at the edge of the temple property. In fact, the lines that were horizo-ed (!) went all the way around the property to enclose it. The chief surveyor could go back to the priests and tell them exactly what parts of the landscape were to be legally associated with the temple. This was the final legal word.

Immediately I recognized the base verb here that is found in the NT word translated 'predestine.' This word is simply *proorizō*, where the *pro-* on the front of the verb means *before* (the *-h-* is lost when the preposition is added). I had found a beautiful illustration of the 'destination' part of predestination: striking a boundary line that ends up identifying and even enclosing an object.

Remember, our English word horizon is based on this word. Someone, sometime, borrowed this word from Greek and tweaked it a little to make it sound like English. A horizon is the outer boundary of our sight, a line on the earth that we imagine to be in place when we can see clearly across flat land. So, we can see now this very useful concept that predestination involves laying out something ahead of time. If we look in the standard lexicon (dictionary) of ancient Greek we will find that *horizō* (ὀρίζω) is defined as 'mark out' or 'determine', and *proorizō* is defined as 'to mark out ahead of time' or 'to determine ahead of time.'

The surveyor in my story was striking a line that in effect showed that some land was inside the temple property and some was outside: this hill belongs to the temple, but this meadow does not. In his plan God is like a surveyor who lays out features of his creation, except unlike our surveyor he does it ahead of time, in effect saying, these are the pieces that will be in my plan and therefore come to pass. In terms of Eph. 1:11, the predestining aspect of the plan says, "These elect people will be in my plan; but these other people will not. I will include features x, y and z in my plan for these people." And this part of the plan for them has always existed in the mind of God!

#### d. The contributions of 1 Cor. 2:7 and Acts 4:28

While God's plan includes everything that happens in space and time, *proorizō* stresses the certainty of the outworking of the plan in space and time. Key to understanding this are 1 Cor. 2:7 and Acts 4. Here is 1 Cor. 2:7, with the Greek text and then the NIV provided and with the form of *proorizō* underlined, along with its translation (underlining is mine):

ἀλλὰ λαλοῦμεν θεοῦ σοφίαν ἐν μυστηρίῳ τὴν ἀποκεκρυμμένην, ἣν προώρισεν [a form of *proorizō*]  
ὁ θεὸς πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς δόξαν ἡμῶν<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Black, *et al.*



No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began

Here *proorizō* is translated 'destined.' But notice the connection between eternity past on the one hand and space and time on the other. God determined in eternity past what would happen in space and time, and it has not failed to come to pass. The content of Paul's gospel existed in the plan before time began, was kept hidden or unrevealed until Paul was commissioned to reveal it and was publicly proclaimed in time exactly as God planned for it to be—and this could not fail to happen.

So, we learn from this verse that God determined that his wisdom in the Gospel would bring us glory before time began. The glory comes in space and time (some of the glorification still future). The 'destining' connects aspects of the plan with events in space and time and in doing so *guarantees* that events will come to pass. Before Gen. 1:1 the plan existed but none of it was actualized as concerns the unfolding of time and the physical and spiritual universe. Just as in the surveyor idea, where the legal layout was determined and fixed for subsequent years, the 'destining' in God's eternity-past plan contains events in a plan from eternity past that are fixed and certain to occur in space and time. Predestination is *horizō* plus *pro-*. It is the term that describes the aspect of God's plan that assures the certainty that the plan unfolds perfectly in space and time. The plan includes a sub-plan that is the guarantee that the plan will happen.

Very helpful for us also is Acts 4:28, once again with the form of *proorizō* underlined in the NIV (I provide v. 27 also, so we can see the context):

<sup>27</sup> συνήχθησαν γὰρ ἐπὶ ἀληθείας ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ ἐπὶ τὸν ἅγιον παῖδα σου Ἰησοῦν ὃν ἔχρισας, Ἡρώδης τε καὶ Πόντιος Πιλάτος σὺν ἔθνεσιν καὶ λαοῖς Ἰσραὴλ, <sup>28</sup> ποιῆσαι ὅσα ἡ χεὶρ σου καὶ ἡ βουλή [σου] προώρισεν γενέσθαι.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. <sup>28</sup> They did what your power and will had decided beforehand [*proorizō*] should happen.

Here the NIV translates *proorizō* as 'decided beforehand.' Notice the great stress on the inevitability of the playing out of the details of God's plan in space and time: this is what God planned, and it had to happen. The use of 'what' in v. 28 of the NIV is somewhat misleading. I would translate it 'whatever things.' The Greek text stresses the plurality of the objects of God's power and will as they existed in the plan, along with the scope of the pieces. It's not just 'the things' (and certainly not the singular 'what' of the NIV) but 'the whole extent of the pieces' of the plan. Everything about the Cross was decided beforehand and could not fail to happen just as planned. Nothing was left out.

Romans 8:29 and 30 shed similar light on the meaning of *proorizō*, and therefore of 'predestination.'

<sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

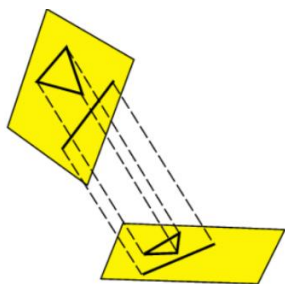
As we have seen in Acts 4 and 1 Cor. 2, God's plan is connected with certainty of fulfillment in space and time. Verses 29 and 30 stress the absolute inevitability of the plan's unfolding as God wants it to.

#### **e. Predestination as a kind of projection**

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<sup>11</sup> Black, *et al.*

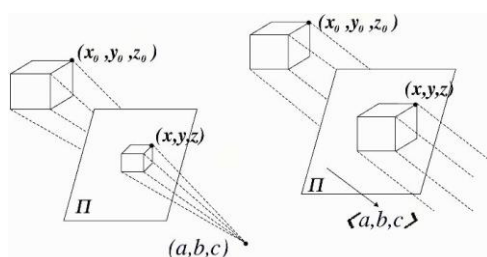
Before I summarize what the Greek words teach us, I want to introduce the concept of projection. I believe this will be very helpful in enabling us to grasp what is happening with predestination. Here is a graphic from Wolfram Mathworld, the online information base, which is a rich repository of information on just about anything, particularly mathematics and the sciences. I have reproduced this graphic and part of the text from the article on ‘Projection,’ which gives one of the mathematical uses of the term. This is the usage from geometry:



“A projection is the transformation of points and lines in one plane onto another plane by connecting corresponding points on the two planes with parallel lines. This can be visualized as shining a (point) light source (located at infinity) through a translucent sheet of paper and making an image of whatever is drawn on it on a second sheet of paper. The branch of geometry dealing with the properties and invariants of geometric figures under projection is called projective geometry.”<sup>12</sup>

We can view predestination as the projection of the details of God’s plan onto space and time. The lines ‘map’ or connect one figure with another. The upper yellow plane with its geometric features is equivalent to details of the plan as they existed from eternity past, and the lower plane, with its details derived from the upper plane, is the actualization of the plan’s details in space and time. The connecting lines, which show the derivation of the lower features from the upper features, are like predestination. There will be a correspondence between the upper features and the lower features, and the lower features could not exist without the upper. Of course, in this graphic the two yellow cards are located in different planes, so the lower details are shaped differently from the upper drawing.

Here is a second graphic<sup>13</sup> where in the right-hand drawing the details of the cubes on the right correspond exactly to each other. But in the left-hand drawing the cubes are dissimilar. In fact, in the yellow-planes example above and in the left-hand cubes example, there is a distortion or change introduced.



Again, think of the lines between the two figures as being like predestination. The top figure in each of the graphics is like the eternal plan. The bottom figure is the realization of the details of the plan in space and time. But this analogy is only true for the right-hand cube drawing, and most definitely not for the left-hand cube drawing or the yellow planes drawing. This is because, as predestination projects the details of God’s plan onto space and time, the correspondence between the plan and the realization is exact. That’s what predestination stresses.

**f. Summary and definition of predestination based on analysis of the usage of προορίζω (proorizō) and horizō (ὀρίζω) and the concept of projection into time**

Here then is a summary of what we have learned about predestination in our key texts (with some help from analogies supplied by geometry!):

**God determines every feature of his plan and makes sure that nothing can keep the plan from coming to pass and coming to pass exactly as he desires. He has decided all the details and**

<sup>12</sup> <https://mathworld.wolfram.com/Projection.html>

<sup>13</sup> Tom Farmer, “Geometric Photo Manipulation–Projections,” in *Journal of Online Mathematics*, available at <https://maa.org/book/export/html/115545>.

their place in the plan. His sovereignty operates to assure that the ‘boundaries,’ the details and their interrelationships, of this plan will be implemented in space and time. The plan has existed from eternity. Its features are projected onto the created universe with absolute certainty that they will happen and happen with perfect correspondence to their pre-time configuration. Nothing can interfere with the outworking of the plan. The noun *prothesis* describes the plan, with its pieces and their relationship, and the prefix/preposition *pro-* on *horizō* refers to the before-space-and-time nature of the plan that God projects into space and time as history unfolds. In a sense, predestination is included in God’s plan, in that the plan includes the certainty of its own unfolding through God’s sovereignty.

We can now provide a more concise definition of predestination as a theological concept:

**Predestination is God’s control of the outworking or projection onto space and time of his eternal plan for the universe under his sovereign control.**

**g. Other Greek words that contribute to our understanding of God’s projecting his plan onto space and time.**

**1) ‘Foreordain’ or ‘foreknow’—πρόγνωσις (*prognōsis*)**

Many theologians use *foreordain/foreordination* as a synonym of *predestine/predestination*. This word as a theological concept is certainly drawn from the King James translation of the verb προγινώσκω (*proginōskō*) or the related noun πρόγνωσις (*prognōsis*). The following table shows translations of this verb and the noun that are relevant to this study:

<u>προγινώσκω/πρόγνωσις</u>	<u>NIV</u>	<u>King James</u>
Acts 2:23	foreknowledge	foreknowledge
Rom. 8:29	foreknew	did foreknow
Rom. 11:2	foreknew	foreknew
1 Pet. 1:2	foreknowledge	foreknowledge
1 Pet. 1:20	chosen	foreordained

This word, when used of God’s plan of salvation, really refers to his choosing or selecting work. It does not simply mean that God is aware of something ahead of time. The main reason for this is that because God establishes his plan, he knows every part of it perfectly, including its unfolding in space and time. It would be superfluous to say that God knows something ahead of time. He has by definition always known it because he planned it. The best text that shows this in regard to salvation issues is 1 Pet. 1:20, where Jesus was ‘foreknown’ from the creation of the world. The NIV is correct in translating this as ‘chosen.’

Acts 2:23 uses *horizō* (‘determine’) and *prognosis* (‘foreknowledge’) in an interesting and significant way:

τοῦτον τῇ ὀρισμένῃ βουλήν καὶ προγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ ἔκδοτον διὰ χειρὸς ἀνόμων προσπήξαντες ἀνείλατε,<sup>14</sup>

This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Here God’s determination foreknowledge are instruments in bringing about the events of the Cross. This shows that the Cross was an integral part of God’s plan and that his ‘foreknowledge’ makes things happen.

<sup>14</sup> Black, *et al.*

It is not ‘awareness ahead of time.’ ‘Foreknowledge’ here means ‘to plan ahead of time for something to happen.’

## 2) Tasso—τάσσω (*tassō*)

The word *τάσσω* (*tassō*) found in Acts 13:48 is translated ‘appointed’ in the NIV and ‘ordained’ in the King James:

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

Please note that the text here does not say that all who believed were appointed for eternal life, as the Arminian and many Amyraldians would.

I cannot resist leaving the Greek of the NT for a moment and quoting this great OT predestination text—Ps. 139:16:

Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

This brings us to a few words about God’s sovereignty, which has been implied in what we have said so far about predestination.

### **h. Divine sovereignty as the ability to control and the control itself**

We can think of God’s sovereignty as the quality in God himself that enables him to do whatever he wants to do. God’s sovereignty is not the same thing as his plan. It can be defined as God’s control over his universe. Here are some texts that teach God’s sovereignty:

Job. 12:10-23: <sup>10</sup> In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. Does not the ear test words as the tongue tastes food? <sup>12</sup>Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding? <sup>13</sup> “To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his. <sup>14</sup> What he tears down cannot be rebuilt; the man he imprisons cannot be released. <sup>15</sup> If he holds back the waters, there is drought; if he lets them loose, they devastate the land. <sup>16</sup> To him belong strength and victory; both deceived and deceiver are his. <sup>17</sup> He leads counselors away stripped and makes fools of judges. <sup>18</sup> He takes off the shackles put on by kings and ties a loincloth around their waist. <sup>19</sup> He leads priests away stripped and overthrows men long established. <sup>20</sup> He silences the lips of trusted advisers and takes away the discernment of elders. <sup>21</sup> He pours contempt on nobles and disarms the mighty. <sup>22</sup> He reveals the deep things of darkness and brings deep shadows into the light. <sup>23</sup> He makes nations great, and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them.

Prov. 16:4: The LORD works out everything for his own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster.

Prov. 19:21: Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.

Prov. 45:7: I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

Ps. 33:11: But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

Isa. 46:8-10: <sup>8</sup> Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels.<sup>9</sup> Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. <sup>10</sup> I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

### 3. The theological use of ‘predestination’

The preceding portion of this study was designed to show that students of Scripture have drawn from the study of some key Greek words to describe a large doctrine that includes many features that go beyond those particular words.

In the passages we have seen, *proorizō* is used (six times in all) of elect individuals, the Cross and the Gospel message. But theologians also use the English word predestination to talk about God’s whole larger work of making sure that everything that happens matches his plan—that his plan is carried out to the smallest detail. Some writers use the word as equivalent to the plan itself.

In either usage—the limited usage that we have seen in our passages or the wider generalized usage—it means the same thing: God applies his plan perfectly to space and time, to the people, events and things that are in his plan. It is the projection of his plan onto history, the connection of his plan with what actually happens, with his sovereignty backing up the precise unfolding.

What is this wider theological category that is referred to as ‘predestination’ or, sometimes, ‘foreordination’?

Here is the relevant section of the Westminster Confession (III- “Of God’s Eternal Decree”):

I. God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

II. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions; yet has He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.

III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.

Notice that Sections I and II speak broadly of God’s ordaining whatever comes to pass. But in Section III the Confession begins to speak about God’s sovereign work in salvation.

Similarly, Loraine Boettner in his extensive treatment of predestination says,

This doctrine of Predestination represents the purpose of God as absolute and unconditional, independent of the whole finite creation, and as originating solely in the eternal counsel of His will. God is seen as the great and mighty King who has appointed the course of nature and who directs the course of history even down to its minutest details. His decree is eternal, unchangeable, holy, wise, and sovereign. It extends not merely to the course of the physical world but to every event in human history from the creation to the judgment, and includes all the activities of saints and angels in heaven and of reprobates and demons in hell.... Everything outside of God Himself is included in this all-embracing decree....<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Boettner, 2.

It appears that Boettner is using *predestination* as equivalent to the decree or God's plan.

While theologians may speak of predestination as equivalent to the outworking of God's control over the whole universe, it ultimately focuses on God's saving work—particularly his sovereign acts in bringing some human beings to salvation and some to eternal punishment. God's management of the universe through his plan has as its ultimate goal his bringing to completion his goals for individuals; on the other hand, his plan for individuals is one manifestation of his control over the universe.

The focus of Scripture is human beings and God's purpose for them. The Bible is the story of the Fall and its reversal. It tells us a lot about God's purpose for both the saved and unsaved, but very little about what will happen to stars, planets trees and mountains. This fits with what we will see in a coming study about the ordering in the logical steps in God's planning for his creation: the existence of the universe is subordinate to God's purpose for human beings. In other words, God's first interest is in bringing some human beings into his presence, with the earth and other portions of the physical universe (and even the spiritual universe) being the vehicle for bringing about the ultimate place of people.

Predestination is not the same thing as providence, which is God's care for and upholding of his creation, including what we regard as nature, animal life, the affairs of nations, as well as the lives of human beings. God uses what we call his providential acts to move things, people and events toward his desired ends.

We can know nothing about God's purpose for human beings and the rest of his creation apart from Scripture. General revelation tells us that God is sovereign and divine and that we are responsible to him, but it does not tell us about his redemptive purposes. Nor can we understand God's goals from reason or from history or anything else around us. Wisdom concerning predestination can only come through careful study of Scripture. It is not surprising that there should be lack of appreciation and even rejection of predestination and related doctrines in a time such as ours when there is such great weakness of understanding Scripture in the Church.

We should be careful not to claim that we have full understanding of predestination and related works of God. We need to try to explain and state everything that Scripture says. But there are many things that we ultimately cannot understand. And, of course, when we understand a doctrine, we must embrace it, believe it and live it out.

#### **4. Some general characteristics of God's plan, projected onto space and time as predestination and guaranteed by his sovereignty**

While subsequent studies will fill in the details and features of God's plan for the universe, we can state at this point some of the general characteristics of the plan.

##### **1. The plan is unified**

There is only one plan, as described in Eph. 1:11. Human beings can only see part of the plan at any one time and can never in this life know the whole plan. In addition, we cannot see all the connections between parts of the plan. But in the mind of God there is a unified plan in which all the parts are integrated.

##### **2. It is the best possible plan.**

It is entirely appropriate to base our evaluation of God's plan on his nature. He is perfect in his person and therefore perfect in all that he does. If he conceives of a plan, it is perfect; there could be no better plan. There could not even be a plan of equivalent value.

### 3. It is eternal.

Here are some scriptures that demonstrate this.

2 Tim. 1:9: God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

Ps. 33:11: But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

Isa. 37:26: “Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone.

Isa. 46:9, 10: Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. <sup>10</sup> I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

2 Thess. 2:13: But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. <sup>14</sup> He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mt. 25:34: “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

1 Pet. 1:20: He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

Jer. 31:3: The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

Acts 15:18: “ ‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, <sup>17</sup> that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’ <sup>18</sup> that have been known for ages.

Ps. 139:15-16: My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, <sup>16</sup> your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

### 4. It is unchangeable

Jas. 1:17: Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Isa. 14:24: The LORD Almighty has sworn, “Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.

Num. 23:19: God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Mal. 3:6: I the LORD do not change.

5. It includes everything.

One verse is sufficient to demonstrate this—Eph. 1:11:

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

6. God’s plan is wise

This should be one of the greatest comforts when we wonder about our circumstances. There is wisdom that we cannot see or understand.

Ps. 104:24: How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

We should see what are usually regarded as great ‘tragedies’—the tsunami that takes thousands of lives, the death of a loved one “before his time”—as having God’s wisdom written all over them.

7. It involves complete control by God.

There is no part of God’s plan and its outworking where he does not or cannot control what happens.

Daniel 4:35: All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?”

Jeremiah 32:17: “Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

Ephesians 1:11: In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

Isaiah 46:9-11: <sup>9</sup> Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. <sup>10</sup> I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. <sup>11</sup> From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.

Job 42:2: “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.

Psalms 115:3: Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

Isaiah 55:11: so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Romans 9:20, 21: <sup>20</sup> But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ “ <sup>21</sup> Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?



8. God's plan is completely free of outside influence.

Isa. 40:13-14 <sup>13</sup> Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor?  
<sup>14</sup> Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?

These verses show us that we have no claim on any part of God's decree nor can we think that we might have a better plan. This points us in the direction of trusting confidence in God.

9. God's plan is absolute and unconditional.

Nothing can change it, nor does it need to change. Nothing in the plan depends on something else to enable it to go ahead at any point. God did not provide at the Cross for salvation but then has to see who will respond, as in Arminianism and Amyraldianism.

Isa. 46:10: I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

10. There are different levels of relationship within the plan.

God's plan includes different levels of relationship with the objects of the decree. So, while his plan includes sin, and God orders and controls his plan, he is not the author of sin in the same way that he is the author of good. Human beings and angels bear the blame for sin, not God. This is exactly why James says what he does about God and sin (Jas. 1:13-17), answering someone who suggests that God tempts us and leads us to sin:

<sup>13</sup> When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup> but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. <sup>16</sup> Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. <sup>17</sup> Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Our sin comes from within ourselves; we are responsible when we sin.

11. It includes things that are described as seemingly occurring by chance.

Prov. 16:33: The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

Jonah 1:7: Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

Acts 1:24-26: Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup> to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs."  
<sup>26</sup> Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

Job. 36:32: He fills his hands with lightning and commands it to strike its mark.

1 Ki. 22:27-34 (shading mine): The king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king's son <sup>27</sup> and say, 'This is what the king says:

Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.’ “<sup>28</sup> Micaiah declared, “If you ever return safely, the LORD has not spoken through me.” Then he added, “Mark my words, all you people!”<sup>29</sup> So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead. <sup>30</sup> The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “I will enter the battle in disguise, but you wear your royal robes.” So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. <sup>31</sup> Now the king of Aram had ordered his thirty-two chariot commanders, “Do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel.” <sup>32</sup> When the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they thought, “Surely this is the king of Israel.” So they turned to attack him, but when Jehoshaphat cried out, <sup>33</sup> the chariot commanders saw that he was not the king of Israel and stopped pursuing him. <sup>34</sup> But someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor. The king told his chariot driver, “Wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I’ve been wounded.” <sup>35</sup> All day long the battle raged, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans. The blood from his wound ran onto the floor of the chariot, and that evening he died.

Job. 5:6: For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground.

Mk. 14:30: “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”

## 12. It includes human actions described as not yet occurring.

God’s sovereign outworking of his plan includes predicting what will happen and then bringing events to pass. Here are some scriptures that show this. Ultimately, all prophecies demonstrate this feature.

Dan. 2:28: but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these:

Jn. 6:64: Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.

Mt. 20:18-19: <sup>18</sup> “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death <sup>19</sup> and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”

## 13. It includes events that are described as fixed or certain; it assures that particular things will happen.

This is seen most clearly in regard to prophecy, but we can trust that it applies to everything in our lives, too.

Mt. 16:21: From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Lk. 18:31-33: <sup>31</sup> Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. <sup>32</sup> He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. <sup>33</sup> On the third day he will rise again.”

Lk. 24:45-46: <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,

Acts 2:23: This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Acts 13:29: When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

Lk. 22:22: The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.

Jn. 8:20: He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come.

Mt. 24:36: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Gen. 41:32: The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.

Hab. 2:3: For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

Lk. 21:24: They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Jer. 15:2: And if they ask you, 'Where shall we go?' tell them, 'This is what the LORD says: "Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity.'

Job 14:5: Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.

Jer. 27:7: All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.

14. It includes sinful human acts.

Recall that in studying the plan of God in previous sessions we encountered three key questions:

- a. Does God's plan include sin?
- b. Are we robots? We will address this later in this study.
- c. Who is responsible for sin? Remember, one of the objections to predestination is that it makes God the author of sin.

The following scriptures show us that God's plan includes human sinful acts, without God being blamed for those acts:

Gen. 50:20: You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Isa. 45:7: I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

Amos 3:6: When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?

Acts 3:18: But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.

Mt. 21:42: Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

Here we face one of the most difficult aspects of God’s plan—the presence of sin in a plan that God designed and controls. Boettner says further,

No one can rationally deny that God foreordained sin if, as the Scriptures assert, He foreordained the crucifixion of Christ, and these other events to which we have referred. That sinful acts do have their place in the divine plan is repeatedly taught. And if any persons are inclined to take offence at this, let them consider how many times the Scriptures declare the judgments of God to be a “great deep.” Hence those who hastily charge that our doctrine makes God the author of sin, bring that charge not only against us, but against God Himself; for our doctrine is the clearly revealed doctrine of the Scriptures.<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately we cannot fully understand how God works in this. Here is Boettner again:

And while it is not ours to explain *how* God in His secret counsel rules and overrules the sinful acts of men, it is ours to know that whatever God does He never deviates from His own perfect justice. In all the manifestations of His character He shows Himself pre-eminently the Holy One. These deep workings of God are mysteries which are to be adored, but not to be inquired into; and were it not for the fact that some persons persist in declaring that the doctrine of Predestination makes God the author of sin, we could let the matter rest here.<sup>17</sup>

Remember that human beings always bear the guilt for sin. Acts 2:22-38 and 4:27-28 clearly teach this (shading mine):

<sup>22</sup> “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. <sup>23</sup> This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.... <sup>36</sup> “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” <sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” <sup>38</sup> Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Acts 4:28: <sup>27</sup> Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. <sup>28</sup> They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

Both passages say that while God controlled what would happen, human beings are still guilty for their sins.

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<sup>16</sup> Boettner, 140.

<sup>17</sup> Boettner, 129.

15. God's plan included the Fall.

This can be easily demonstrated. First Peter 1:20 says that Christ was planned for as a sacrifice for sin before the foundation of the world. Similarly, the writer to the Hebrews speaks of the blood of the eternal covenant. So, if the plan of salvation has its roots in eternity past, the Fall must also have eternal roots. Otherwise, there would be no point to having the Cross in the plan. Boettner says,<sup>18</sup>

Consistent Arminianism, however, pictures God as an idle, inactive spectator sitting in doubt while Adam fell, and as quite surprised and thwarted by the creature of His hands. In contrast with this, we hold that God fore-planned and fore-saw the fall; that it in no sense came as a surprise to Him; and that after it had occurred He did not feel that He had made a mistake in creating man. Had He wished He could have prevented Satan's entrance into the garden and could have preserved Adam in a state of holiness as He did the holy angels. The mere fact that God fore-saw the fall is sufficient proof that He did not expect man to glorify Him by continuing in a state of holiness.

16. God knows what is going to happen in the unfolding of his plan in space and time because the events in the plan were set in place.

The biblical view of God's plan for the universe sees his controlling acts as determining what he knows. First his plan, then his knowledge of it. God cannot know the future with any certainty unless he makes sure that it happens in a particular way. This is not to say that he is limited in his omniscience, but that there are no other possible occurrences outside of what he would plan.

But because his plan includes everything happening in a particular way, then God cannot fail to know what will happen before time unfolds. If we deny foreordination, then nothing that is future can be certain and God cannot know it: all is random. Remember also that God is not bound by time, so is never waiting to find out what will happen in the future. We do not know the future, because we are bound by time. God created time and therefore is in no sense subject to it.

Perhaps the most blatant example of the rejection of the sequence foreordination → foreknowledge is the Arminian's assertion that a person is one of the elect because God sees ahead of time or knows ahead of time that he will believe and then labels him as 'elect.' If we think about this for a moment, it means that God cannot have any certainty of anyone's act of believing. In addition, coming to Christ is then entirely up to the individual. (The logical and theological outcome of this is Open Theism, where God *does not* determine the future, *could not* determine the future if he wanted to (remember, he fails often) and *cannot* therefore know what will occur in the future.) In terms of God's plan, the Arminian and Amyraldian would have to say that God leaves a blank in his plan next to certain events in the future, then looks through time to see what is going to happen, then goes back and fills in the blank. But since God cannot learn anything and is not bound by time, this theological position is untenable.

17. God's plan preserves human responsibility.

God's plan is not fatalistic, as some claim. To say that God's plan makes human beings robots is to misunderstand the very nature of God. Boettner explains this:<sup>19</sup>

Although the sovereignty of God is universal and absolute, it is not the sovereignty of blind power. It is coupled with infinite wisdom, holiness and love. And this doctrine, when properly understood,

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<sup>18</sup> See Boettner, 132-33

<sup>19</sup> Boettner, 18.

is a most comforting and reassuring one. Who would not prefer to have his affairs in the hands of a God of infinite power, wisdom, holiness and love, rather than to have them left to fate, or chance, or irrevocable natural law, or to short-sighted and perverted self? Those who reject God's sovereignty should consider what alternatives they have left.

One of the most striking examples of this in Scripture is the account of Joseph's revealing of himself to his brothers. While God controlled the events of the brother's mistreatment of Joseph, the ultimate purpose is for a loving God to bring about good and bless Joseph and his family.

In Rom. 9:19 Paul cites a hypothetical objector who questions the fairness of God in response to his hardening of Pharaoh:

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

The answer is that as the Potter God can do what he wants with what he has created. This includes the charging of sin to human beings. After all, we are born in sin and bear the guilt of Adam.

Gen. 50:20: You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Acts 2:23: This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

God's plan and control are not antithetical to human freedom. One criticism of predestination is that it takes away human freedom—something that supposedly we must be left to exercise. The biblical picture of human beings is that they are free to choose (they are free agents), but without a new nature—the result of regeneration—will never and can never choose to do the will of God, and that includes obeying the gospel message. The picture that the libertarian free will advocate paints of human nature does not square with the Bible. Instead of having free will that enables us to choose for God—something that supposedly absolves God of responsibility for sin—we are only free to choose within our bondage to sin.

Reymond has a great paragraph on this, which he writes in his evaluation of Clark Pinnock's concept of free will:

There simply is no such thing as a will which is detached from and totally independent of the person making the choice—suspended, so to speak in midair and enjoying some "extra-personal vantage point" from which to determine itself. The will is the "mind choosing" (Edwards). Men choose the things they do because of the complex, finite persons that they are. They cannot will to walk on water or to flap their arms and fly. Their choices in such matters are determined by the total complexion of who they are. And the Bible informs us that men are not only finite but are *now* also sinners, who by nature *cannot* bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:18), by nature *cannot* hear Christ's word that they might have life (John 8:43), by nature *cannot* be subject to the law of God (Rom. 8:17). By nature *cannot* discern truths of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14), by nature *cannot* confess from the heart Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), by nature *cannot* control the tongue (James 3:8), and by nature *cannot* come to Christ (John 6:44, 45, 65). In order to do any of these things they must receive powerful aid coming to them *ab extra*. So there simply is not such thing as a free will which can always choose the right.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Reymond, 353-54.

***I encourage you to read Gordon Clark's God and Evil: The Problem Solved.*<sup>21</sup> *Clark's book demolishes the free will position, while also showing that, while God's plan includes sin, God is righteous in blaming human beings for it.***

It's appropriate that we conclude this study on predestination and the plan of God with some scriptures that show the Christian's direct relation to God's plan with regard to our becoming believers and also to our subsequent walk with God.

18. God's plan includes the salvation of sinners and the life of sanctification.

Eph. 2:8-9: <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Phil. 2:12-13: <sup>12</sup> Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

May we always thank God for who he is and for his all-encompassing plan and resolve to obey him and enjoy the blessings of his plan.

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### **Running Compilation of Definitions:**

1. Soteriology is the study of what the Bible teaches about salvation.
2. The decree of God is his plan for the universe that includes all things and is certain to come to pass.
3. Predestination is God's the certainty of God's outworking or projection onto space and time of his eternal plan for the universe under his sovereign control.

### **Valuable reading for this subseries on Predestination and the Plan of God:**

- Boettner, Loraine. *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, available at <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/boettner/predest.html>
- Clark, Gordon H. "Determinism and Responsibility," available at <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/PDF/077DeterminismandResponsibility.pdf> . This provides almost the same important content as Clark's *God and Evil*.
- Clark, Gordon H. *God and Evil: The Problem Solved* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2004).
- Clark, Gordon H., *Predestination* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2006).
- Crampton, W. "Clark's *God and Evil: The Problem Solved*," available at <https://www.thebluebanner.com/pdf/bluebanner8-11&12.pdf> and [http://dr94bacon.bluedomino.com/blue\\_banner\\_articles/godandevil.htm](http://dr94bacon.bluedomino.com/blue_banner_articles/godandevil.htm)
- Pink, A. W. "Objections to God's Sovereignty Answered," available at [http://www.the-highway.com/objsovereignty\\_Pink.html](http://www.the-highway.com/objsovereignty_Pink.html)
- Pink, A. W. "The Sovereignty of God," available at <https://reformed.org/books/pink/index.html>

### **Key resources for all studies in this series:**

- Reymond, Robert L. *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998).

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<sup>21</sup> Clark, Gordon H. *God and Evil: The Problem Solved* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2004).

- Packer, J. I. “Introduction” in John Owen’s *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007). Available at <http://www.apuritansmind.com/arminianism/introduction-to-the-death-of-death-ji-packer/>
- Steele, David N., Curtis C. Thomas and S. Lance Quinn. *The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended and Documented* (P&R Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ, 2004).

### Valuable readings for the next topic, Election: Choosing for Salvation

- Boettner, Loraine. “Unconditional Election” in *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, available at <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/boettner/predest.html> or [http://www.the-highway.com/election\\_Boettner.html](http://www.the-highway.com/election_Boettner.html)
- McMahan, C. Matthew, “Amyraut and Hypothetical Universalism,” available at <http://www.apuritansmind.com/PuritanWorship/Amyraut%20Universalism.htm>
- Pink, A. W. “The Sovereignty of God in Election,” available online at <http://www.reformed.org/books/pink/index.html>
- Sproul, R. C. *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997). See especially the chapters on Arminius and Chafer.
- Ware, Bruce, “Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006). Skip the infralapsarianism part for now.

### Questions for further study

#### The plan of God

1. What is soteriology?
2. What do our plans do for us in everyday life?
3. What is the relation between God’s plan and God’s sovereignty?
4. What do we learn from Eph. 3:11 and 1:11?
5. Is God’s sovereignty an easy or difficult doctrine for you to internalize?

#### Predestination

6. Why do some people have difficulty with the doctrine of predestination?
7. Are there any differences between God’s plan/decreed and predestination?
8. What is predestination? Where does the term come from? What is the difference between the term as found in Scripture and the theological concept? In what ways is ‘predestination’ used?
9. What differences are there between *horizō* and *proorizō*?
10. What can we learn from the surveyor story?
11. What do we know about the words that are translated ‘predestine,’ ‘predestinate,’ ‘predestination’ or ‘foreordain’ in the NT?
12. In what ways is predestination an example of mathematical projection?

#### General features of the plan of God

13. Suggest ways in which knowing each of the general features of God’s plan should affect the Christian life?
14. What do we learn about the following portions of Scripture with respect to God’s plan?

Rom. 11:33; 11:11	Gen. 50:20	Acts 3:18
Ps. 2:4	Ex. 4:21; 9:12	1 Pet. 1:20
Job 1	16:10, 11	