

God's Decree

The next few issues of Grace Notes will deal with God's Decree as it is explained in Scripture. The positions of Calvinism and Arminianism will not be discussed beyond this introduction. Both these positions express some truths but also errors. These errors are a result of poorly translated or interpreted Scriptures, resistance to God's Word and the problem of human logic exercised beyond the bounds of God's revealed truth. God's decree is real. It is plainly revealed in Scripture and it is upon the Scriptures that this study will be based.

Many doctrines provide encouragement to the believer under one set of circumstances but frustration and perhaps even anger under others. God's decrees which includes the issue of election is one. God's decrees are in part related to His prerogative of sovereignty.

Sovereignty should be an encouraging truth for believers. As the account of Joseph comes to a close, his confidence in God is expressed in the words, "And as for you, you devised calamity against me; but God devised it for good ..." (Gen. 50:20). Joseph understood that God in His sovereignty was the one truly in control. "But we know, that for the ones loving God, all things work together for good ..." (Romans 8:28). While this verse is not a catchall for every believer, it is an encouragement for the saint who is loving God and lacks the knowledge to worship. He has assurance that these things will allow him to worship as well as to be conformed to the image of the Son. God's sovereignty involves the believer's life and death. The psalmist knew that God had written in a

book every part of his physical makeup (Ps. 139:14-16; 51:5). God has written the very number of a believer's days in one of His books (Ps. 139:16; 69:28). A man's days even his months are determined and the bounds are set so that he can not pass that number of days (Job 14:5). The grace believers should not fear death, but be comforted facing death knowing that the moment of his death and the means were written by God long ago. Death is not a random event. God's sovereignty is assuring.

These are three basic examples of the comfort of God's sovereignty which is available for the believer. This sovereignty is not ruthlessly exercised. God is also good, holy, love, righteous and true. God exercises His sovereignty in keeping with His attributes.

God's sovereignty is a result of His freedom. God is free. There is no one or nothing outside of God that compels God to act. When David desired restoration, he desired that the "willing" or "free" Spirit restore him and not be taken from him as he had observed in Saul's situation (Ps. 51:11-12). The Spirit was free to come and go. No one has counseled God how to accomplish anything. No one has ever instructed God. God is free, not counseled or taught by anyone else (Isaiah 40:13-14). God's purpose was not a result of any compulsion or counsel but His own desire (Eph. 1:11).

The relationship of God's sovereignty to the doctrine of salvation often frustrates and at times even angers believers. Yet, the Scriptures clearly indicate that salvation is part of God's decree. God's decree is not limited to salvation, as seen by the above examples. To ignore what

God has said concerning His decree and salvation can result in as much grief as can a lack of understanding regarding other circumstances.

There are several terms used to describe God's decree: omniscience, desire, counsel, council, determination, good pleasure, purpose, foreknowledge, predestination. The order of the preceding words is that given in Scripture when the syntactical relations between the words are compared.

The Key Words Concerning God's Decree

πανοιδα *panoidea* is God's omniscience, the attribute of knowing all things that are or could be.

θηλημα *thelēma* describes the result of God's desirous will.

βουλη *boulē* is God's counsel coming from the Trinity's counsel to decide what they will do.

βουλομαι *boulomai* is the act of determining or choosing.

ευδοκια *eudokia* is the good pleasure, that for which God's opinion was "good", from **δοκεω** *dokeō* - to have an opinion.

εκλεγω *eklegō* is the act of choosing or selecting.

προθεσις *prothesis* is God's purpose, that which God has "previously placed" or set out.

προγνωσις *prognōsis* is foreknowledge. **γινωσκω** *ginōskō* is experiential knowledge, therefore it describes God's previous experiential acquaintance with that which He has determined.

προωρισεν *proōrisen* and **προωριζεις** *proōrizō* are the fixing of boundaries or horizons, within

which God relates to those who are the object of His predestination.

The Key Passages for Ordering God's Decree

The key terms are used in the following passages. In each passage the general relationship of the words will be examined. Since no one passage provides the complete order of these words in the decree, it will be necessary to coordinate the relationships to provide the whole picture. In subsequent verses it might be found that other ideas intervene in this order. This will be done after examining all the passages.

Ephesians 1:5, "having predestined ... according to the good pleasure from His desirous will." The preposition *kata* translated "according to" indicates the good pleasure is a standard of measure which must logically precede the act of fixing boundaries. Desirous will is a Genitive which describes the source of God's good pleasure. Therefore, this order begins with God's desirous will, followed by His good pleasure and then predestination.

Ephesians 1:9 This mystery truth had its source in God's desirous will. The order in this verse is God's purpose or determination and then His good pleasure.

In Ephesians 1:11 Paul uses four of these terms. "In Whom also we were made an inheritance having been predestined according to a quality of purpose from the one energizing all things according to the determination coming from His desire." Predestined is measured by and therefore follows God's purpose. The purpose is from the one who energizes all things according to His counsel or determination.

What God has determined comes from His desirous will. The order here is God's desire, His determination, purpose, predestination.

Romans 8:28-29 has three terms. "... the ones called according to a purpose, because, whom He foreknew (was previously acquainted with), He also predestined ..." This order is simple, purposed, foreknew, predestined.

Romans 9:11 uses the term chosen, "in order that the purpose of God according to election (choice) might remain." Here, election is the measure or standard of the purpose. The order would be election followed by purpose.

Each of the above passages provides us both a logical and grammatical order of these words. By paying attention to this order and collating the material one is able to arrive at the above order. God knows all. God desired some things. God determined some things. God is well pleased with His choice. God chose [elect] because He is well pleased with that choice. God purposed based on that election. God is fully acquainted with all He has chosen to do. God set boundaries within which He carries out these parts of His plan.

Distinguishing God's will from His will

Not everything that God has willed He has willed. Without clarifying the meaning of the word "will" the preceding sentence appears contradictory. When the New Testament was written, two Greek words expressed the idea of will but each with a different emphasis. As previously noted *boulē* and *boulomai* express the idea of determination or the determinative will. They both involve the act of choosing or decid-

ing. *Thelō* refers to the act of desiring and *thelēma* the result of a desire or the thing desired. Our English New Testaments do not always make the distinction between these two clear. Even Greek lexicons do not always maintain good distinctions. Sometimes the lexicographers translate the words based upon accepted popular interpretations of certain passages.

Thelō, Thelēma

In some passages the idea of desire is easily deduced. 1 Timothy 2:4, "Who **would** have all men to be saved and to come to a full experiential knowledge of truth." Since we know that not everyone will be saved, we know that this is what God desires. God desires all to be saved but He has not determined that all will be. This desire is seen in the translation "But now God has set each of the members in the body even as it **pleased** Him" (1 Corinthians 12:18). "But the one doing the **will** of My Father in heaven." This pair of words describes "the will of God" which so many Christians are interested in knowing. God has revealed many aspects of His will. He desires believers to give thanks in all things, to be sanctified, to give themselves in service to other believers (1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:18; 2 Corinthians 8:5). This is God's desirous will for the believer. The believer may or may not do God's desirous will. (Matthew 7:21). In John 5:21, the Son's desire is expressed in His act of giving eternal life to those to whom He desires to give it.

Boulomai, Boulē

Other Scriptures describe God's determinative will, those things which God has de-

terminated He will bring to pass. When Christ prayed to His Father in the garden, He prayed, "Father if you are **determining**, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my desirous will but yours." (Luke 22:42). When the Son was delivered up to be crucified all that happened was according to the Father's **determinative will** (Acts 2:23; 4:28). God's **counsel** is immutable, it can not be changed (Hebrews 6:17). It was by His choice, His determinative will that He caused us to be born (spiritually) by the word of truth (James 1:18). These words are not always translated correctly and thus are misleading. The American Standard Version of 1901 translates *boulomai* "desiring" in Jude 1:5, rather than, "Now, I determine to remind you,".

It also translates this word "wishing" in 2 Peter 3:9, though for many the King James' translation "willing" is so understood. Peter's statement was not with regard to everyone but specifically believers. Some believers were influenced by the false teachers who mocked God's coming judgment. Still, God is not slow! He does not tarry! He has determined that none of us will perish but all will come to repentance. The object of God's longsuffering and determination is not the unsaved world but "us" [A.V. "us-ward"]. No believer will perish or come to complete ruination. Every believer will make it because God has determined that every believer will!

The meaning of foreknowledge

The Greek *prognōsis* translated "foreknowledge" has been misunderstood and misrelated to the above terms. Foreknowledge is not mere objective observation ahead of time. It is

not prior knowledge of facts as would be represented by *proeidon* (cp Acts 2:31; Galatians 3:8). It is derived from *gnōsis* - experiential knowledge not *eidon* objective knowledge based upon observation of facts. Part of our problem is that the Greek uses different words to describe different qualities of knowledge while in English we use mainly the word "know". Foreknowledge is a result of that which God has determined to do. It expresses God's intimate acquaintance with people or events concerning which God has made some determination. Because God determined something, He is fully acquainted with it. He can know an individual like one knows a friend even before that person exists, in fact, even before the world came into existence.

Several scriptures illustrate this meaning. In 1 Peter 1:20, Christ was foreknown as the lamb slain. The Trinity had counseled together and determined that the Son would become man and die upon a cross for our sins. Because the Trinity determined this, They were fully acquainted with Christ's human nature and work. The crucifixion did not surprise God. He planned it. Peter combined this word with predestined [see above] regarding the events of the Son's crucifixion. God planned it so God was fully acquainted with it. The rulers involved in the crucifixion did everything which God determined as part of His foreknowledge. God did not look down through time and see what they would do to the Son. That would have been "foreseen" [*proeidon*] God determined to provide salvation for mankind in this manner. Foreknowledge is the basis of all which was done to

Christ in His humiliation and crucifixion (Acts 2:23). God did not look down through time to see what men would do. Rather it was the determination of the Trinity that Christ would be humiliated and then crucified. Because God determined this, God was fully acquainted with all that would happen.

Finally in Romans 11:2, Paul referred to God foreknowing His people Israel. This is not salvation, as most of the nation was not spiritually saved and most of the nation persistently disobeyed God. God determined to limit His work to the nation Israel for 2,000 years, the time from Abraham to Christ. God determined to take them as nobodies in the world and make them a great nation. Because this was God's determination, the nation was foreknown. God was fully acquainted with the nation as the object of His work.

Foreknowledge has confused the issue of God's decree because of the mistranslation of 1 Peter 1:1-2. In every English version with which the author is acquainted the key words are translated "elect according to the foreknowledge of God". In reality these two words are not connected. Elect is not a verb in the verse as the English seems to indicate. It is an adjective modifying "sojourners". These people had been scattered and were sojourning, living in a land which was not their home. Peter encourages them, "you are chosen sojourners." They had a special relationship to God even though in the world they had a lowly status. The word foreknowledge modifies "dispersion" not the adjective "elect" or "chosen". The dispersion which scattered these believers throughout Pontus,

Galatia, Cappadocia and Bithynia was not a chance happening or a random exercise of earthly governments. It was something which God had previously determined and was therefore fully known to God. God used this dispersion to drive these Jewish Christian from Jerusalem and Judea into the uttermost parts of the earth just as Christ had commanded (Acts 1:8; 8:1-4). Therefore, election is not according to foreknowledge.

Foreknowledge indicates fixity in God's decree. It describes God's full acquainted with His plan because God had determined specific events. It is not God's foresight of events. It assures believers that chance happenings are not taking place but rather events which God has fully known because He planned them.

Benefits of understanding God's decree in relationship to salvation

While the nature of spiritual salvation is not always clear in the Old Testament, it is clear that God did save some (cp Romans 4:3-8). God did not save them on the basis of obedience to the law or through any of the sacrifices specified in the law (Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:1). Our salvation is based upon Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 4:25). This is also the basis of those who lived before Christ died and rose again. Because God is eternal and knows completely what He has determined to accomplish, He saved them on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection. We were redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, as an unblemished and spotless lamb (1 Peter 1:18-19). Before the foundation of the world, God was fully ac-

quainted with Christ as a lamb slain (v. 20). It is only at the present time [lit. "upon the last times"] that this has been plainly visible (v. 20). Therefore, even though men could not plainly see Christ slain, God did and on the basis of this, He saved those Old Testament people who believed His revelation for them at that time.

When Christ died and rose again, the Father set Him out as the place where God is satisfied [A.V. "propitiation"] (Romans 3:25). Doing this, God displayed His righteousness because of the sins which had already been done and which He had passed over. For the sake of spirit beings and mankind, God demonstrated that He is righteous and did not violate His righteousness when He declared many people righteous throughout Old Testament times. Those people sinned just as believers today and Christ's work reached back to deal with their sins just as it reaches to the present to deal with ours. Because God determined to provide salvation in this manner, knowing exactly what He would do, He could save Old Testament people on the basis of Christ's death without conflict with His righteousness.

The book of Acts records many occasions when Paul evangelized large groups of people. Paul could honestly announce that Christ has indeed died for their sins (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). He could have pointed them to God's act of giving the Son as His perfect act of love (Romans 5:8; John 3:16). He could also assure his whole audience that those who would believe in Christ would be forgiven of their sins and be declared righteous (Acts 13:38, 39). Paul also knew that God had chosen some. There-

fore, when Paul did announce the gospel to these groups, he did so in order that the elect might obtain salvation (2 Timothy 2:8-10). Paul did not become wearied over those who did not believe. He knew that only those who were chosen would believe. Understanding this does not remove the believer's responsibility of speaking the good news as the Spirit leads but it does remove the weight with which believers are sometimes unnecessarily and unbiblically burdened. Understanding this does not remove the individual's responsibility to believe the gospel.

God's act of choosing the Thessalonians was a cause for thanking God (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). The word "chose" in this passage is not "elect" but derived from the Greek *αἰρεῶ* *aireō* to pick out or select. God had picked them out from a beginning to salvation. Paul thanked God not the Thessalonians for this choice. The choice was the basis of Paul's charge to stand firm and hold to the tradition taught (v. 15). This choice by God is also the basis of assurance as God provides eternal (not merely temporal) comfort and hope. The certainty existed because it was God who had chosen. This comforted them as they suffered at the hands of those who willingly refused a love for the truth that they might be saved (2 Thessalonians 1:4-9; 2:10).

"Knowing God" often describes one who is saved. Paul restated this from God's perspective, "or being known by God." (Galatians 4:9). "Being known by God" is a powerful thought. This expresses God's full acquaintance with the believer.

Personal responsibility

God's decree does not remove personal responsibility. God still holds all people accountable for their choice. When Paul spoke the gospel at Pisidian Antioch, he concluded that, those who rejected it had, "judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life." (Acts 13:46). Yet Luke records just two sentences later, that those who believed the message Paul was announcing had been appointed to eternal life (v. 48). The term appointed is **τάσσω** *tassō* and refers to the act of putting in order or organizing. As God organized His plan, He set or scheduled certain ones to believe at certain times. The responsibility of the Grace believer is to give the good news. He is not to be burdened with getting the individual saved.

Why are all men held responsible? Paul wrote twice "all sinned" (Romans 3:23; 5:12). The English "all have sinned" communicates a Pelagian idea that each individual sinned at a time in his own life and fell. "Pelagius taught that God created every soul directly (he despised the traducian theory), and that every soul therefore was innocent and unstained." [Paul Enns: *Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 311]. The tense of "sinned" is Aorist and John Witmer explains, "So the entire human race is viewed as having sinned in the one act of Adam's sin (cf. "all have sinned," also the Gr. past tense, in 3:23)." [**Romans** in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 458] He concludes, "As a result God considered all people as participating in the act of sin which Adam committed and as receiving the penalty he received." [ibid]. All men have since been corrupt from the moment of conception (Psalm 51:5).

This means, that if God placed any other two people in the garden instead of Adam and Eve, they also would have made the same choice, because, all did make that choice in Adam. It was in the garden that all mankind exercised their free will against God's will. God gave Adam every good tree bearing fruit for food (Genesis 1:29 2:9, 16). Adam, along with all mankind, chose the one tree from which he was not to eat (Genesis 2:17). It wasn't necessary that God create Adam with a free will but He chose to do so.

Paul demonstrated in Romans that mankind has persisted in exercising his will against God's will. When mankind knew God, they would not worship Him as God (Romans 1:21). This is from the time of the flood to Babel. At that time man didn't even find it acceptable to have God in their experiential knowledge [**ἐπιγνώσις** *epignōsis*] (1:28). Paul then singled out the Gentiles and demonstrated their willful rejection of God (2:3-5). The Jew willfully rejected God and His revelation (2:17-29). His final conclusion concerning both Jews and Gentiles is found in Romans 3:10-18. Verse 11 is especially important for, "There is none who understand, there is none who seek God." This is man's willful choice. As a result all men are responsible for this willful choice.

Every believer was placed into Christ at the moment of salvation (1 Corinthians 12:13). He was placed exactly where God desired and determined he should be (12:11, 18). That placement included a spiritual gift appropriate to his placement. God operates (energizes) in the believer for the use of these gifts (12:4) but it

is the believer's responsibility to properly relate to others in the body and to use his gift for the profit of the whole body (12:7). God previously prepared good works for each believer (Ephesians 2:10). These good works are the proper use of one's gift within the new man (body of Christ), which is God's creation (Ephesians 2:10, 15, 16). While God has previously prepared these good works, it is the believer's responsibility to use that gift and do these good works (1 Peter 4:10).

The grace believer is to work out [render out or use] his salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). It is God who operates in the believer to desire things well pleasing to God and also to energize those same things into action (v. 13). The believer's responsibility is to use his salvation to do these things while it is God who originates or makes it possible.

Christ held the cities of Chorizan and Bethsaida accountable for their rejection of Him in spite of His the works of power [A.V. "miracles"] which He did (Matthew 11:21-24). God's plan and determination are seen. Christ stated that if those same works of power had been done in the cities of Tyre and Sidon and Sodom which He had performed in Chorizan and Bethsaida, the former cities would have still been in existence as a result of the people's repentance. If that was so, then why didn't Christ appear then and perform those miracles? Because it wasn't what God planned. We should note that God the Son appeared to Abraham with two angels before Sodom was destroyed (Genesis 18:1, 16ff). He was right there and could have gone down to Sodom and performed those works of

power God had a different plan with a different objective. The people were still held personally responsible. Christ didn't let the first cities off the hook because they didn't see the miracles. Even those cities bore responsibility for their choices.

God's decree encompasses salvation. Those whom God has chosen will be saved. However, all mankind bears the responsibility for their own choice.

Election , Chosen, Selected

The term "elect" is probably the most troubling term regarding God's decree. The words "elect" or "chose" represent three Greek cognates: **ΕΚΛΕΓΟΜΑΙ** *eklegomai* -"I choose", **ΕΚΛΕΚΤΟΣ** *eklektos* -a chosen one or thing, **ΕΚΛΟΓΗ** *eklogē* -the act of choosing. Yet it is used in various forms with reference to different aspects of salvation in thirteen passages. It is used more than 20 times to describe other aspects of God's decree involving both the Son's humanity, men and angels (cp. 1 Pet. 2:4; Jh. 6:70; Acts 1:2; 15:7; 1 Tim. 5:21). In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul uses a different word [**ΑΙΡΕΟΜΑΙ** *aireomai*], "because God selected you from a beginning to salvation by sanctification by the Spirit ..." God does reveal that He chose some. Ignoring or rejecting this truth will not alter the fact that it true. God has revealed it in His Word. Perhaps, for some ignorance is easier but for many, lack of understanding this is more grievous.

Election or the act of God is the measure of God's fixed purpose (Romans 9:11). His election also precedes His "predestination" [this is

not a good translation of this term] (Ephesians 1:4, 5). "Chosen" is the main verb and "predestine" is a participle indicating action which follows the choosing. Because God chose us to be something, He then set bounds in which deals with us.

Various views have been set forth to describe the term elect. Some denigrate election to a minor matter though the word occurs many times throughout the New Testament. Some consider "elect" to describe only groups, such as Israel or the church. This is corporate election, the choice of a group or body of individual. However, "elect" and its cognates are used of individuals. This is individual election. Elect also has various uses.

Christ was the one God chose to be Savior and the corner stone of God's holy temple (Luke 23:35; 1 Peter 2:4, 6). Paul was an elect vessel, chosen by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). God chose to use Peter to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7). These are all elect individuals. In each instance elect does not refer to salvation but ministry.

Israel is called an elect nation, one which God chose from among the many nations upon which to display His work (Acts 13:17; Romans 11:28). Christ's disciples/apostles were elect for a special ministry (Lk. 6:13; John 6:70; 13:18). Elect is used several times of the those from Israel and the Gentile nations who will live during Daniel's 70th week. God will deliver them from that time and for them He will shorten the days of that time. Because elect is often considered to refer to groups, many have

confused the saints of the Church, called elect, with the saints of the Tribulation and used this as a reason, that the Church saints should go through the Tribulation. Yet "elect" does not designate one particular group. "Elect" can refer to any group or anyone who has been the object of God's selection. That choosing may be for different purposes.

Among the elect nation Israel both now and in history, God had a chosen remnant, individuals who were chosen by God's grace (not merits, Romans 11:5, 7). It is/was only these chosen individuals out of the chosen nation who obtained salvation. Therefore, both a corporate and individual election is found in this passage. Though all twelve of Christ's disciples were chosen for that ministry, only eleven were chosen out of the world for salvation (John 15:16, 19). Thus some of the disciples were both corporately as well as individually elect. The Church is an elect (chosen) race, distinct from the race of the Jews and that of the Gentiles (1 Peter 2:9; 1 Corinthians 10:30). The Church is also made up of individuals who are elect. Therefore, Grace believers are both corporately and individually elect.

When Peter wrote, "make your calling and election sure" he was encouraging them to know they were genuine believers in the face of false teachers (2 Peter 1:10). The elect don't wear badges labeled "elect" by which they can be identified. The authenticity is borne out by one's salvation worked out, therefore, this is not corporate but individual election. It isn't a group making certain it is elect but individuals.

Elect describes angels once (1 Timothy 5:21). Since the Scriptures reveal no application of Christ's saving work to angels, this is not an election to salvation. Since some angels followed Satan and thus fell, it is consistent that just as God has chosen some men to salvation, He chose some of His angels to not fall. This is a deduction in light of other Scriptures regarding God's decree and cannot be pressed completely.

Benefits of Understanding Election

Election is not only valuable when witnessing or evangelizing, it is also valuable to individual believers in their daily lives. It is a source of security. Who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect ones (Romans 8:33)? If it was God who chose the individual, how could another bring a charge which would nullify that choice? Election is also the basis of Paul's charge to live up to the election in conduct (Colossians 3:12). It is this status as elect individuals that was an encouragement to the believers who were sojourners, dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia ... (1 Peter 1:1).

Election encourages proper perspective. Believers are not saved because they are superior to those who are not saved. Paul told the Corinthians to consider their calling. God chose not many important, wealthy, wise and powerful people. Rather, for His purposes and to display His purpose, He chose from among the weak, foolish and insignificant to put to shame the people and things the God-rejecting world holds in high regard (1 Corinthians 1:27-28).

Election should also be the source of rest in Christ for the Grace believer. There remains a sabbath type rest for the believer who believes

God will provide this rest and ceases from his works as God did from His. God's works have been completed from the foundation of the world (Hebrews 4:4). God foreknew Christ as a lamb slain before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20) and on the basis of Christ's work redeemed mankind. Before the foundation of the world, God chose believers to be holy and blameless in Christ before Him in love (Ephesians 1:4). Since God chose this for the believer in Christ and redemption is applied in Christ, God considered the works completed long ago. Keeping this in mind becomes the basis of rest. It adds a whole dimension of depth to the thought that the believer has been graced in Christ (Ephesians 1:6). Here God's election in Christ is not to be in Christ. God chose what the believer in Christ would be - "holy and blameless before Him in love."

Therefore, when one reads "elect" or "chosen" he must determine in that context to what it refers. It does not always refer to salvation. Israel was an elect nation. Individuals can be chosen for an area of service. Sometimes it may even refer to an aspect of salvation but not to God's choice for one to be saved.

God's Decree and Dispensational distinctions

Prior to the ministry of Paul, the dispensation of grace was hidden from ages and generations (Ephesians 3:9). Ages would indicate spirit beings and generations humans. God's plan for this present dispensation was fully known to God but it was hidden from His created intelligent beings. God planned to govern the daily lives of his people by the principle of

grace. He hid this fact until He brought Paul on the scene, one whom He separated even at his birth and called him to reveal His Son (Galatians 1:15-16). Through the apostle Paul, God revealed this present purpose, known from eternity to the Godhead but only known to believers for the past 2,000 years.

This principle of grace by which God governs the lives of His people expresses something concerning His wisdom (Ephesians 3:9, 10 note: the A.V.'s "fellowship of the mystery" supported only by the Textus Receptus should be "the dispensation consisting of a mystery" supported by the Majority Byzantine texts as well as others.). Two ranks of spirit beings, principalities and powers, are mentioned in Ephesians 3:10. These spirit beings are learning something about God's wisdom by watching God use this grace to govern the lives of believers today. This aspect of God's wisdom was planned before the foundation of the world. God has only revealed this wisdom in the form of a mystery in the present time [since Paul] (1 Corinthians 2:7). Grace believers are part of a lesson in God's wisdom for these angels, planned in the past but only present now.

From the time of Sinai until the day of Pentecost, God kept his people (Israel at that time) locked up from the faith concerning Christ (Galatians 3:22). Under the Mosaic Law, no one could mature. God had long ago, marked His calendar for the exact moment that His Son would become a man and enter the world (Galatians 4:4). Through the Son, God released those who were under law from the Law and made it possible for believer to mature today. He has

graduated His people (today the body of Christ - Galatians 3:27-29) from immature childhood to adult status as sons (Galatians 4:5-6). This had been God's plan though He had not revealed this prior to the Pentecost.

From the time which God separated Abraham and began to form the nation of Israel, Israel was God's people. However, for the past 2,000 years the Church not Israel has been God's people (cp 1 Corinthians 10:32; 2 Corinthians 6:16). Israel is still part of God's plan. God is not done with them as a national people but they have been set aside nationally for the past 2,000 years. God has not rejected them so that they have been displaced by the church as much of Christendom teaches (Romans 11:1-2). During the present, God is taking a small remnant out from Israel and placing them into the church just as He does with Gentiles (Romans 11:5). That remnant is part of the body of Christ by God's choice [elect] by grace. God did not choose them based on anything in them which would make them acceptable to Him and His plan. Rather He choose them based on His own grace and as a result they are part of the one new man which is no longer Jew or Gentile but the Christ (Ephesians 2:15-16; 1 Corinthians 12:12). God planned this as part of His decree but did not reveal it until the present time. Paul calls these truths "mysteries" (Ephesians 3:3-4; Colossians 1:26).

God revealed much in the Old Testament concerning the future kingdom from the heavens. Unrevealed in those prophecies was the truth of a corporate entity known as the Christ, a new man consisting of all grace believers as

the body of Christ and Jesus Christ as the head, hence the title "the Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 2:15 see above).

God has a prophetic purpose for this entity in that future kingdom. God has planned that this entity will be involved in heading up or governing all things in that kingdom (Ephesians 1:10). That Jesus Christ would rule over that kingdom is no mystery. The Old Testament clearly revealed that. The mystery is that Christ does not rule this alone but with His Body, also known as the Bride or the Church. The church is united with Him as one. God had planned this. It was a mystery [an unrevealed truth during the Old Testament]. It was a mystery regarding God's desirous will which was measured by His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself (Ephesians 1:9). It was part of God's decree but God didn't reveal this until He brought Paul on the scene.

Christ ended the Law as a means of righteousness for the Grace believer (Romans 10:4). The believer is no longer under law (Romans 6:14). In practice, when the believer is led by the Holy Spirit, he is under no kind or quality of law (Galatians 5:18). Under the Law, God set apart one day out of seven as a day in which all physical work was to cease [a verb form of sabbath] and this day is commonly known as the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10, 11). The Sabbath was a sign between God and His Old Testament people Israel (Ezekiel 20:12).

When the church began at Pentecost, the first of the week was the day in which the Church remembered and celebrated the resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; cp.

Matthew 28:1). The Sabbath is not a prominent feature of the New Testament writings. Paul often spoke on the Sabbath as recorded in Acts as he was evangelizing the Jews, who were gathered on their sabbath. No mention is made that Paul was personally observing the Sabbath (cp Acts 13:14ff; 16:3; 17:2).

As important as the Sabbath was to Israel, it is noteworthy that a sabbath is mentioned only twice in the New Testament letters (Colossians 2:16; Hebrews 4:9). Writing to the Colossians, Paul instructed them not to let anyone judge them with respect to the sabbath (Colossians 2:16). This was not accomplished by observance of a sabbath but by the refusal to come under the legal regulations and judgments imposed by others. They were free from the Law, which Christ had removed (Colossians 2:14). The Grace believer does have a sabbath, a sabbath which God had previously set out with boundaries (Hebrews 4:7). Because Joshua did not give the people the rest which God had promised due to their unbelief, there remains a rest for the Grace believer (vv. 6, 8, 9). This sabbath rest is not a cessation of physical labor as under the Law. It is a spiritual rest from our works (v. 10). God's works were completed from the foundation of the world (v. 3). They were completed in Christ, Whom God foreknew before the foundation of the world as a lamb slain (1 Peter 1:20-21). God had chosen the believer in Christ and there applied Christ's work (Ephesians 1:4). The grace believer who knows this, is able to rest, ceasing from his works to gain God's approval or to maintain his standing with God and ability to enter God's presence. This

Old Testament idea of being worthy to stand in God's presence, to speak with God is often reiterated today by Grace believers who have failed to see that within God's decree, there is a sabbath type rest available for him. This rest allows him free access to the throne of grace, where the believer **sits** in Christ (Hebrews 4:16; Ephesians 2:5,6). The throne is not the throne of the believer's works or merits but of grace. This is part of God's present plan for this rule of life [dispensation], decreed in the past, being worked out in the present.

God's Decree and human government

God's decree also involves earthly activities, governments, kings, people. God made all men from one man [Adam] (Acts 17:26). God has set out the boundaries for mankind upon the earth. He has fixed the times and boundaries of where man dwells. Many nations have lived and died. Every people group that has existed upon the earth, lived within the time which God marked off on His "calendar". Every people group was limited in their dwelling by the boundaries which God imposed. God has been sovereignly in charge of history and even the history which hasn't yet happened.

Some believers might, by observation, question God's sovereignty in human government. Observing in history, the present and the pages of Scripture, the immorality of those in power, the persecution of believers and the blatant opposition to righteousness, it is easy to wonder what God is doing. However, the Scriptures are quite clear regarding God's sovereign authority, in human government. Human gov-

ernment is part of Satan's cosmos [world] system. It is his means of attempting to control or box in the sin natures of his subjects - unsaved man. God's estimate of these earthly governments is seen in Daniel 7 in which four of these governments are pictured as wild beasts. Yet even these beastly governments, directed and exercised by Satan, are under God's sovereignty.

The Apostle Paul, writing while under the unrighteous, idolatrous and immoral Roman government, assured the saints living in Rome, "for *there* is no authority except that by God, but the ones existing have been set in order by God." (Romans 13:1). The verb *tassō* [τάσσω] is the act of setting in order or organizing. In this context it expresses the idea of a calendar and events set in their order to be fulfilled. The picture is that God put down on His calendar [decree] the time during which the Roman government would be in authority. God had decreed that the Romans would rule.

When Daniel lived in Babylon under their idolatrous rule, God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian king, "That the Most High is ruler over the kingdoms of men and He gives it to whom He wishes, and sets over it the basest of men." (Daniel 4:17b, 25). God is the one ruling but He rules through those men who are in authority. He is the one who places rulers in their position of authority.

As well as placing kings in their position of authority, God also deposes kings (Daniel 2:21). 1 Kings 22 records God's sovereign work through spirit beings and prophets to depose Ahab (1 Kings 22:20). God allowed a fallen spirit

being to be a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets (v. 22). Disguised, Ahab went off to war and was killed by the random arrow of a bowman, an arrow which found the very joint in Ahab's armor (vv. 30, 34). God deposed Bels-hazzar, the son or grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, through Darius the Mede (Daniel 5:25-31). God remains sovereign.

How do we reconcile God's righteousness with unrighteous Babylonian and Roman governments? We must understand what God is accomplishing through means of human government. God has demonstrated in the past from the time of Babel to the time of Abraham, that mankind fails under human government. When Noah and his family disembarked from the ark, God gave them governmental rules to be enforced regarding the penalty for murder (Genesis 9:5, 6). However, the first city, built in opposition to God's instructions to scatter and fill the earth (Genesis 9:6, 11:3-4) was the kingdom of a man named Nimrod (Genesis 10:8-10). Nimrod means "rebel." The description, "He was a mighty hunter before the Lord." is better translated "He was a mighty hunter against the Lord" [J. Dwight Pentecost *Thy Kingdom Come* p. 49] or "He was a hunter of the mighty before the Lord." The first human government was quickly perverted from God's instructions. The first ruler Nimrod became well known as one who opposed even hunted those who were mighty before God. Therefore, was it God's purpose to make men righteous through such instructions or was it His purpose to demonstrate that men fail?

God used Pharaoh to demonstrate His power to Israel while delivering them from Egypt (Romans 9:17). God had used Egypt and Joseph to divinely provide for Israel. The nation of Israel started in the land, but God had prophesied in His first covenant to Abraham that his descendants would be sojourners in a foreign land (Genesis 15:13). His descendants would serve as slaves the people of the foreign land and would be afflicted. God cause this to happen, so the people would see His power and would know that their possession of the land was by His divine power, not their own (Deuteronomy 8:10-18; Romans 9:17). They possessed the land because of God, not their own righteousness (Deuteronomy 9:4). For this reason, when Moses went before Pharaoh, God strengthened Pharaoh's heart so that Pharaoh would not be moved to human pity or compassion (Exodus 4:21; 7:3, 13 et al). God then displayed His power to the nation Israel. God exercised His sovereignty in the unrighteous government of Egypt and in the unrighteous heart of the king to demonstrate something about Himself.

God also demonstrated His righteous judgment through His sovereign actions in governments. Both the Assyrian and Babylonian governments were used by God to punish Israel and then Judah (Isaiah 10:5-7; Jeremiah 50:23; 51:20-24). God used their aggressive natures to accomplish this. God punished Assyria severely because of their ferocity (). In both cases, God held them responsible for their action though in His sovereignty He used them to judge His people.

God has also sovereignly used kings and people in government to accomplish His good and faithful purpose. 150 years prior to his rule, God named Cyrus through the prophet Isaiah (44:28; 45:1). Jehovah stirred up Cyrus' spirit to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23). God divinely protected Israel from annihilation by bringing a Jewish queen into favor with the the Persian King Ahasuerus [Xerxes] (Esther 2:15-17). Her uncle Mordecai told her, "And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

The final human ruler over this world system will be the man of lawlessness also known as the Beast (Revelations 17:10-13). When he comes on the scene it will be by Satan's power. God puts the idea of placing their kingdoms in the control of this man into the minds of the world's rulers (Revelation 13:2-4; 17:17). In fact, Satan can not bring him on the seen until God permits, for God the Spirit is presently restraining him (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8). It will be God the Son who will personally judge and make war against him (Revelation 19:11, 20).

Perhaps like the Jews of Moses' or Esther's day, believers today might question what God could possibly be accomplishing through the actions of governments which at so many points seem opposed to God. Yet the divinely recorded history provides examples that assure believers that God is still sovereignly in control. God's purposes in specific events may not be clear at the present but be assured, God remains good, righteous and faithful.

Predestination? Purpose?

The etymology of the English "predestine" appears to match the etymology of the Greek *prohoridzō*. Both have a prefix "pro" and "pre" describing that which precedes or goes before. However *horidzō*, which can refer to a "horizon," does not in this combination refer to a "destiny" which has been previously determined. *Prohoridzō* describes boundaries which are set out ahead of time. This term refers not only to where one is going but how God deals with one on the way and how God gets him there. Therefore, *prohoridzō* means to mark out beforehand.

In God's decree, the Son's betrayal was marked out (Luke 22:22). Each step, each event was part of God's plan. Many of the events fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. In this verse, "determined" is *horidzo*, the mark or boundary.

The shorter form, *horidzo* is also used in Acts 17:26. God has marked out or set the boundaries for all nations. Every nation has had boundaries drawn by God within which they may operate. As seen in the last study, God limits how far a king and his nation may expand. This was true in the past and Paul indicates it is still true.

In God's decree, it was not simply determined that Christ would die. The Trinity determined that Christ would die an ignoble death preceded by intense humiliating abuse (Isaiah 53:1-6; Psalm 22; 69:19-22). Therefore, Peter and the others stated that, the people did whatever God's hand and counsel had previously set out to come to be (Acts 4:28; 2:23 A.V. "determined"). The Trinity determined not only

the end but marked out before hand the events which would lead to the cross.

God has decreed that the Son is the judge. Christ Himself said that the Father had committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22). The Son is the judge because the Trinity previously set out the boundaries for the Son to be the judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42). The Father has even established the day in which the Son, Who has been previously set out to be the judge, will judge the world (Acts 17:31).

In modern English, "son" is not considered a term of equality but inferiority within a family relation. In New Testament times "son" could be used of a young male child or of a male who has graduated into the status of adult. It is the later idea which is expressed when the Bible speaks of God the Son. God the Son emphasizes the equality, between the Father and Son, the full ability of the Son to perfectly represent the Father. When Christ called Himself, "the Son of God" He was calling Himself God (cp John 10:33, 36).

God marked off the boundaries for the Son before the Son became flesh (Romans 1:4). Those boundaries involved the exercise of power. The Son manifested God's power often, though the English translation of power by the word "miracle" often hides this fact. The Son also related to the Spirit of holiness during His earthly ministry. Finally, He was raised out from the dead. In fact, because He is indeed the Son of God, He not only was raised by the work of the Father and the Spirit, but He raised Himself (John 2:19; 10:17-18). All these were events

which the Trinity in counsel not only desired and determined but then marked out ahead of time. They marked out both the what and how of the Son's life, death and resurrection.

Predestination and the believer

God has determined that He will deal with the believer as a son (Hebrews 12:6-8). His purpose is that we be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29), therefore, He has previously set out that we will be conformed. Therefore, He deals with us in this sphere of sonship. Sonship is not only marked out for us but forms the boundaries within which God deals with us.

To be a son, one must be placed as a son. God previously set out the boundaries that we would be placed as son (Ephesians 1:5). The English "adoption" translates a Greek term which describes a male child's graduation within a family from childhood to adulthood, hence he becomes a son. This is a different activity than the type of adoption with which we are familiar. In the New Testament, adoption never describes the act of making one who has not been a member of one's family a legal member, as in modern English. It is always used of a change of status within a family.

Because God has previously marked out that we would be sons; since sonship is the sphere within which God deals with us, God applies discipline us. God's discipline is not applied on the basis of our being children [by regeneration]. Because a son has a more mature status within the family, there is quality of conduct which is consistent with that status. It is

due to our failure to live up to that which is the cause of His loving discipline.

While we are heirs with Christ of all things, we have also been made part of Christ's inheritance. God marked this out beforehand (Ephesians 1:11). The A.V.'s translation "obtained an inheritance" misrepresents the Passive voice. Paul is not stating what we have obtained, but what we have become because God marked this out ahead of time.

The application of God's wisdom in providing our present tense salvation was marked out before hand (1 Corinthians 2:7). God marked out this wisdom for our glory. This passage illustrates that "predestine" is not a good translation. God did not set out the destiny of His wisdom. God set out boundaries; He marked out beforehand how he would use this part of His wisdom for our glory. In this present dispensation of Grace, we not only await future glory, but have the opportunity to live out some of that glory in our daily lives. We have this potential because God set out the boundaries within which He would apply His wisdom to us.

Purpose

The last words which we will consider are the Greek words *prothesis* and *protithēmi*. These have two uses in the New Testament: that which a person purposes or sets down before; a thing placed out in plain view. The root *tithēmi* means to place and the preposition *pro* before, either in time or location. When *pro* refers to time the word indicates a purpose which was previously set down. When *pro* refers to location the word indicates a position in front of, as the A.V.'s "shewbread" or literally "the bread of

the presence" or "the bread placed before". This bread was **placed** in the first room of the tabernacle **before** God (Hebrews 9:2).

God's "marking out beforehand" [see above] is measured by God's purpose (Ephesians 1:11). Therefore, God set out this purpose, His intent, before He marked out the boundaries. This is clear; when building a house, one stakes out the boundaries of the foundation, only after one has expressed his intended goals. [See God's Decree #1].

In this present dispensation, God is governing the daily lives of His people by grace (Ephesians 1:9). Part of God's purpose in doing this is to make known an aspect of His wisdom to spirit beings (v. 10). The spirit beings observe God applying His wisdom in grace to our salvation (past, present, future) and they learn something about God. This present dispensation was previously a mystery [unrevealed in the Old Testament] though God's purpose to do this was eternal (v. 11). God intended or purposed to make known His wisdom to spirit beings by governing our lives by His grace. He simply didn't reveal it prior to Paul's ministry.

Calling in the New Testament is only applied to salvation. It is never used of a call to ministry. God's calling us to salvation is measured by His purpose (Romans 9:11). God purposed for us to be saved and conformed to the image of His Son. Therefore, God called us to that salvation.

God has saved us and called us to that salvation according to His purpose and grace not according to our works (2 Timothy 1:9). As Paul illustrated with Jacob and Esau, God made

a choice before either of them had done anything good or bad (Romans 9:11). Had God waited until the two had begun to act, it might have been claimed that His choice was based upon their actions. With us as with Jacob and Esau God made His own choice and that choice was measure of His purpose. God is the sole source of His purpose. His choice of Jacob to be the chosen seed or His calling us to salvation is not based upon works. Paul adds that the grace was given to us in Christ before times in eternities (2 Timothy 1:9). In God's plan, because He purposed for us to be in Christ, and chose us to be holy and blameless in Christ, it was already done in eternity. God did cause all these things to happen in time, but God not bound by eternity, could count it to be as good as done before time had begun.

An understanding of God's purpose reinforces the Biblical truth of eternal security. Before time, God had already given me grace. If his plan for my salvation began then, to the point of giving me grace, how secure is my salvation in time? Divinely secure according to His purpose.