

BIBLE READING PROGRAM — SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

TWIST OF FATE

Is every detail of your life already mapped out in advance? Has your ultimate fate been sealed since before you were even born? Are you now just a preprogrammed figure in a cosmic game of chess, being moved from square to square by irresistible destiny? The truth may surprise you.

by Tom Robinson

There are many who think that everything that happens in life is inevitable and unavoidable. They believe that fate—the supposed force, principle or power that predetermines events—rules throughout the universe. A number hold that a Supreme Being, the Creator God, is the author and controller of fate. On the other hand, there are those who maintain that even God Himself is actually *subject* to this all-powerful force. But what is the truth?

Furthermore, does fate reach beyond the grave so that some people are foreordained to be saved and the rest lost, as certain nominal Christian denominations teach? Or is this idea actually a *distortion* of what the Bible reveals about “predestination”? Just what *does* Scripture reveal?

God and predestination

During World War II, Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain told the United States Congress, “He must indeed have a blind soul who cannot see that some great purpose and design is being worked out here below” (Dec. 26, 1941). And many others throughout the centuries have certainly recognized this fact.

But who or what is “working out” this “great purpose and design”? Logic and reason would dictate that it must be an infinite Intelligence. And indeed, the Holy Bible *names* that Intelligence—God. Within its pages, the Eternal God is declared to be supreme in existence, for there is “no one greater” (Hebrews 6:13). Thus, if fate exists, God has dominion over it. For One who is *supreme* cannot, by definition, be subject to anything but Himself!

The same great and infinite God tells us, “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:9-10). This, then, should remove all doubt. God is supreme and nothing can prohibit Him from doing whatever He wants.

Perhaps even more interesting, though, is that from the beginning of history, God has declared the *end* of it. But how can this be? Does the future already exist, so that God can merely look into a “crystal ball” and see it? Not at all! Rather, He explains how in the very next verse: “Indeed, I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.” In other words, God, who “sits at the controls of the universe,” steers events and circumstances to bring about whatever He has foretold.

And that brings us to predestination. Does the Bible actually mention this subject directly? Yes. In fact, the word “predestined” occurs four times in the New King James Version. First in Romans, the apostle Paul wrote: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He *foreknew*, He also *predestined* to be conformed to the image of His son . . . Moreover whom He *predestined*, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified” (8:28-30).

And then in Ephesians, the same apostle said that God “*chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having *predestined* us to adoption [sonship] as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself . . . In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being *predestined* according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (1:3-5, 11-12).

Notice that those who are foreknown and predestined are referred to as having been “called.” In other places, the Bible refers to such individuals as the “elect” (Matthew 24:24; Romans 8:33)—in fact, “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Peter 1:2).

All of this, then, begs the question: Is an individual’s eternal salvation a fait accompli—a done deal—before he is even born? And more disturbing still, if salvation is predestined for only some, does that mean the rest are already foreordained by God to eternal condemnation—having been doomed to a hopeless fate before even coming into existence?

Fate vs. free will

A major branch of Protestantism teaches that God, from the beginning, predetermined everyone who would be eternally saved as well as everyone who would be eternally condemned. Those who profess this religion maintain that there is *no choice* in the matter whatsoever. According to them, whether a person ever follows God or not is based solely on what God decided in advance. It gets worse when you realize that these people also believe in an eternally burning hellfire for those He has already decided would remain unrepentant. This would mean that God created certain people—indeed, *billions* of them, as *most* who have ever lived have not even *professed* Christianity—just to torture them forever in unending flames! What a horrendous, monster god that would be!

Thankfully, the true God is a God of infinite love and mercy! For one, the real hellfire doesn’t burn forever, but rather incinerates the incorrigibly wicked for their own good (download or send for our free booklet *Heaven & Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*). And furthermore, it is actually quite easy to show from the Bible that God has not predestined any individuals to condemnation. Paul states that “God our Savior . . . desires *all* men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4). And Peter says essentially the same thing: “The Lord is . . . not willing that *any* should perish but that *all* should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). He also says that “God shows *no partiality*” (Acts 10:34)—as does Paul (Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9). So God is eminently fair. Moreover, it is His expressly revealed will and desire that every person ultimately be saved. Yet according to Revelation 21:8, some will indeed perish forever—be annihilated—in “the lake of fire which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” *Therefore, it is absolutely clear that it is not God’s predetermination that puts them there!*

Rather, as God told ancient Israel through Moses, “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose life*, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19; compare Joshua 24:15; Proverbs 1:29). Thus, they had a *choice*. For God had made them *free moral agents*, having the free will to make their own decisions. And so it is with us today.

But as clear as that may be, there are still some important questions to be answered. For based on what we’ve already seen, weren’t some people foreknown and predestined to certain actions? Yes. In fact, specific individuals were ordained beforehand, such as: Christ (Daniel 9:25-26; Isaiah 7:14; 53:1-2); Jacob’s ascendancy over Esau (Genesis 25:20-26); Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1-20); Josiah (1 Kings 13:1-2; 2 Kings 23:15-16); Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-10); the triumph of King Cyrus of Persia over Babylon and his decree to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple (Isaiah 45:1; 44:28); John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-57); and the apostle Paul (Galatians 1:15).

Of course, these were all *positive* roles. There *are* some who were preappointed to play *negative* roles. Examples include the pharaoh at the time of the Exodus, whose heart God hardened (Exodus 9:12; 10:1-2), and Judas Iscariot, Christ’s betrayer (Romans 9:14-18; John 6:70; Acts 1:16-20). Consider also that God has prophesied in Revelation of the coming of a great evil dictator called the Beast and his accomplice known as the False Prophet—both of whom will be destroyed at Christ’s return. Here, then, is where many become confused. And this is quite understandable. For how can it be that God has predetermined such unenviable roles that seem to end in condemnation while saying, as we’ve seen, that His will is that *none* should perish?

Moreover, the Bible emphatically states that only through the name of Jesus Christ can anyone be saved (Acts 4:12). Yet two thirds of the world do not profess a belief in Him as the Messiah. And lest any jump to the notion that these four billion people are entirely responsible for their blindness to the truth, notice the words of Jesus Christ: “*No one* can come to Me unless the Father who sent me *draws* him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44; see verse 65). But has the entire world been drawn to God?

No! Remember that only some are specifically referred to as the “called” and even fewer as the “elect”—that is, “chosen.” And though we are saved through the Gospel Christ and His apostles preached (compare 1 Corinthians 15:1-2), Jesus told His followers, “It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [the rest of humanity] it has not been given” (Matthew 13:11). How then can the Bible be true in saying God shows no partiality and wills that none be condemned? And how can it really be that we have free will?

The divine plan

The difficulty in understanding this subject is based on a mistaken notion of mainstream Christianity—that God is in a great soul-winning contest with Satan, trying desperately to save the world *now*. That, it must be understood, is simply NOT the case. Rather, God is merely *allowing* this world to be deceived by Satan—for the time being. Notice how the apostle Paul put it: “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the God of *this age* has blinded, who do not believe, *lest the light of the glory of Christ . . . should shine on them*” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). The omnipotent God *allows* Satan to preside over this present age, deceiving those who would otherwise understand the truth!

As recounted in Genesis 1–3, mankind got off to a bad start in the Garden of Eden. Because of their wrong choice, God has cut off mankind in general from the knowledge of salvation—letting them go their own way to learn the lesson of how much they need God. Since that time, every human being except Jesus has sinned, that is, broken God’s law, and fallen short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23; 1 John 3:4, King James Version)—and therefore deserves the death penalty (Romans 6:23). In that sense, the vast majority of the world is “perishing,” as the verse quoted above describes. For if not ultimately redeemed, they would be doomed.

But remember that it is God’s will that *none* should perish! And so Jesus Christ, the One through whom the Father created us (Ephesians 3:9), gave His life as an atoning sacrifice to pay the death penalty for the *entire world*—whoever would accept it (John 3:16).

Yet in the face of such a widespread lack of even professing Christianity, how is the world at large to be saved? The wonderful answer—shocking to some—is that this is not the *only* day of salvation! (The New Revised Standard Version correctly translates 2 Corinthians 6:2 and Isaiah 49:8 as calling the present time “*A day of salvation*”—not *the only* day.) God is, in actuality, calling only a few now. In fact, the Greek word translated “church” in the New Testament—*ekklesia*—means “the called-out ones.” And those in God’s Church are referred to as His “*firstfruits*” (James 1:18, KJV; compare Romans 8:23). This clearly implies that there will be *later* fruits to come! And so there will be.

When Jesus Christ returns, He will put down all resistance and establish an eternal Kingdom commencing with a rule over mankind for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4; compare Isaiah 2:2-4). Reigning with Him at that time will be the saints—those called in this age who remain faithful to the end—who are raised to immortal life in what is called the “first resurrection” (Revelation 20:5-6). During that initial period of Christ’s reign, known as the “Millennium” (meaning 1,000 years), the earth will be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the oceans are full of water (Isaiah 11:9)—and the vast majority of mankind will be saved.

But what about the billions who have lived throughout the ages without understanding God’s truth? A parenthetical sentence in Revelation 20:5 answers, “But the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended” (New Revised Standard Version). At that time, the people of Israel will be resurrected to physical life (see Ezekiel 37) and given God’s Spirit (see verses 12-14). But not just of Israel, for “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34). The resurrected billions of all nations will then go through a judgment—not sentencing—period (Revelation 20:11-12), just as God’s Church is being judged today (1 Peter 4:17). And many will repent at that time, as they *would* have, according to Christ, speaking of pagan gentiles long dead, if His work had been done among them (see Matthew 11:21-24; 12:41). It should be noted, however, that this does *not* mean anyone will ever be given a “second chance” to be saved. Although it will be their *second life in human flesh*, it will be their “first chance” to really understand and follow the truth of Almighty God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Amazingly, then, God has foreordained three judgment periods: the present age, the Millennium and the Last Judgment. Therefore, to answer one of the major questions of this article, predestination does not

concern whether or not individuals will be ultimately saved or condemned. Instead, it clearly refers to *when* people are *offered* salvation! Some will not be offered it until the Millennium or the Last Judgment. But God predestined that a few would be called in this age and given the opportunity before Christ returns. Yet these people—as in all ages—still have free will. The decision of whether to accept Christ is each person’s to make individually. And even then, whether or not that person remains in God’s grace or chooses to reject Him is ultimately up to that individual as well (see Hebrews 2:1-3; 6:4-6; 10:26-27, 35-36).

God’s guiding hand

Of course, some will claim that even this is not fair. And they still wonder how a just God could preappoint individuals to negative actions. Notice how the Living Bible paraphrases what Paul said about this:

“Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was an example of this fact. For God told him he had given him the kingdom of Egypt for the very purpose of displaying the awesome power of God against him: so that all the world would hear about God’s glorious name. So you see, God is kind to some just because he wants to be, and he makes some refuse to listen. Well, then, why does God blame them for not listening? Haven’t they done what he made them do? No, don’t say that. Who are you to criticize God? Should the thing made say to the one who made it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ When a man makes a jar out of clay, doesn’t he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar beautiful, to be used for holding flowers, and another to throw garbage into? Does not God have a perfect right to show his fury and power against those he has been patient with for all this time? And he has a right to take others such as ourselves, who have been made for pouring the riches of his glory into, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, and to be kind to us so that everyone can see how very great his glory is” (Romans 9:17-24).

In other words, God had every right to shape and mold Pharaoh to be the way he was. After all, God created him and Pharaoh was, like everyone else, worthy of death—so God hardening his heart did not worsen his predicament in the overall scheme of things. The Lord, it must be noted though, did not directly make him sin, for God does not tempt *anyone* to sin (James 1:13). Rather, it was part of Pharaoh’s rebellious nature all along. This proud ruler, who had been reared to believe he was a god, had at first hardened his *own* heart (Exodus 8:15, 32). In *further* hardening Pharaoh’s heart, the omniscient God simply knew how to “push his buttons”—that is, how to provoke him and get a particular reaction out of him. Pharaoh will, of course, be given his opportunity to repent and receive salvation during the Last Judgment.

God, then, sometimes steers events and circumstances—even seeing to it that certain people are influenced into particular actions—to make sure His overall plan and purpose is fulfilled. But He clearly doesn’t directly bring about all that occurs at any given moment with all people. For, as His Word tells us, “*time and chance happens to them all*” (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Thus God has *not* mapped out every detail of every person’s life.

As for the question of why God calls particular individuals—perhaps you, if you are beginning to really understand what you are reading in the *Good News* magazine and our other literature—that answer is known by God alone. And He, as the Creator, has the prerogative to call a person at whatever time He chooses. We should trust that whatever time He decides to call a person is the best time for that individual. And though being called now is a wonderful privilege, that does not make one better than those called later (compare 1 Corinthians 1:26-29). After all, even if we *are* being called now, all of us still have free will—and therefore we can still fall away if we don’t continue to obey the truth. For we are not just pawns on a chessboard.

Perhaps *you* have been predestined and are now being called! How you respond to God’s calling and invitation is up to you. Those who respond and submit to God will receive the blessings of God on their lives now, and even more importantly, will have started on the path to eternal life. So let’s hold tight to the wonderful salvation offered to us by our Creator, allowing the awesome future that He wants for us to become a reality.