

which we live, and perhaps even of our own personal lives, we may see God's plans and purposes only very partially. One day we will gaze with wonder on the completed picture and be lost in endless praise, worship and adoration. 'Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and unfathomable His ways! ... For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever.'

This and other writings available from:

Robert Beecham  
Linden Cottage  
The Burgage  
Prestbury  
Cheltenham  
GL52 3DJ

or from website  
[www.GrowthInGod.org.uk](http://www.GrowthInGod.org.uk)

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# Predestination

gods of the heathen. Isaiah had a further revelation. There was in fact no other god. Chapter 45 begins with the surprising statement: 'Thus says the Yahweh to Cyrus His anointed ...' Cyrus, a heathen Persian king, was described as God's anointed. God was bigger and wider than they had hitherto realised.

Six times in this chapter (verses 5, 6, 14, 18, 21 and 22) we find with small variations the words, 'I am Yahweh, and there is no other; besides me there is no God.' Isaiah's vision had expanded to see that his God was no mere tribal deity in conflict with others like himself, but the great, solitary and unrivalled creator of the entire universe. Among other statements of God's sovereignty in this chapter we find the remarkable words: 'I am Yahweh, and there is no other, the one who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates evil. I am Yahweh who does all these things' (verses 6 & 7). Here is a positive statement that God actually creates evil. (The Hebrew word 'ra' (רָ) used here is translated 'evil' in the KJV, and 'calamity' or 'disaster' in other versions. Evil is the root meaning. The word occurs in the following well-known verses: Gen 2:9, 6:5, Ps 23:4, 121:7. Translations such as 'calamity' reflect conventional thinking rather than accuracy, but even if valid do not radically affect the issue.)

## Conclusion

Romans 8 like many other passages of scripture is permeated with the twin themes of suffering and glory. The two are inseparably connected. On the Emmaus road Jesus asked the disciples: 'Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' We know that Jesus suffered beyond all comprehension as the full weight of our sin came upon Him and like a dark cloud separated Him from the face of His Father. He also suffered daily throughout His life as His spotless soul came continually in contact with darkness and sin. For the joy that was set before Him, however, He endured the cross ... and has sat down on the right hand of God.

The 144,000 who stand with Jesus on Mount Zion are those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They will suffer with Him and they will also reign with Him.

Job suffered till he cursed the day of his birth and wished he had never been born, but in the end he rose from the dust to twice his former glory.

The creation was subjected to futility ... in hope that the creation itself would be set free ... into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom 8: 20,21).

Suffering does not come by accident; nor ultimately from the malicious actions of Satan; but from the loving hand of a Father and Creator who plans to bring His whole creation to perfection.

At present, in the political, religious and economic chaos of the times in

given to see His wisdom. We find a further suggestion in 1 Corinthians 6:3: ‘Do you not know that we shall judge angels?’ Judging is not just a matter of meting out punishments. The Hebrew concept of judging includes ruling and governing. Two of the judges who judged Israel are actually described as saviours in Hebrew (Judges 3: 9,15), and a third ‘saved’ Israel (3:31).

Another text is suggestive on this subject. We read in 1 Peter 3: 19, 20 that Jesus went in spirit and preached to the spirits in prison who were disobedient in the time of Noah. If there were no future for these spirits other than endless torment, why would Jesus visit them, and what could He preach to them?

## Dualism

The future of the angelic realm is largely hidden from our eyes. As yet perhaps we do not need to know. It is more important for the moment that we understand things rightly as they are. Paganism, traditional church teaching, science fiction and our own unrenewed minds have all united and conspired to give us a dualistic concept of good and evil. The universe is locked in one great conflict between God and Satan, light and darkness, right and wrong. It is all rather like a cosmic game of chess. White and black each have 16 pieces and white has the first move. Christians have no doubt about the final outcome and in fact believe that the victory is already won, while others just hope but are not so sure.

This sort of idea has its origins in paganism. It cannot be found in scripture except by twisting isolated verses out of harmony with the overall message. The heathen give much time and expense to placating capricious deities who may be good or bad. They simply do not know of a loving Father-God who created all things for His pleasure. As we come to know and love Jesus we begin to understand that all things work together for good for us. Trials and sufferings come from the hand of a loving Father whose only desire is the perfection of His children. To those without that knowledge, the chessboard concept fits their experience. Life appears to be full of random and arbitrary sufferings and evil.

As the church began to decline after the departure of the apostles it accepted many ideas and practices from surrounding paganism. This dualism of good and evil was just one of them. In the hands of priests and clergy it has often been an excellent device for holding people in fear and subjection.

Like many other falsehoods this dualism appeals to the natural, unregenerate mind. It seems to fit experience. It is easy to relate to. However it is a slander against the true nature of God, and eventually crippling to our own spiritual growth and understanding.

Many in ancient Israel believed that Yahweh their God was stronger than the

## Introduction

“What do you think about predestination ?”

This question was the start to a recent Bible study evening and it hardly seemed like a good beginning. To most people predestination is a bad word. It is not a subject they want to discuss. The reasons are easy enough to find. The general view of the Bible believing public is that only a very small percentage of the human race is destined for heaven. The vast majority will suffer perpetual torment in hell. If this is according to God’s predetermined design and plan, then it is not something one would really want to shout about. It is best to change the subject as quickly as possible.

When we turn to the scriptures we do not find that the main user of the word, the Apostle Paul, had the same problems. He used it when he was being carried to the heights of ecstasy. He was revelling in the glory of God’s wonderful plans. Predestination was no embarrassment for him.

The Greek word **προ-ορίζω** meaning ‘predestine’ occurs six times in the New Testament, but has no Hebrew equivalent that I know of in the Old Testament. The word is first used in a corporate prayer of the early church in Acts 4: 28. In this verse they described the evil action against Jesus of Herod and Pilate along with the Gentiles and Jews as having been predestined by God’s purpose. They knew with a certainty and clarity beyond that of their forefathers that God had a plan. The greatest tragedy that had ever befallen the human race - no less than the rejection, betrayal and murder by torture of the Son of God - was in fact part of God’s foreordained purpose. The sufferings and glory of His first-born Son were not an accident or a failure, but a plan.

Paul saw God’s plans more clearly than anyone else of his time, and probably more than most people to this day. In particular he saw plans for the sufferings and glory of more sons. Each time he uses the word predestine it is in this connection:

- Romans 8: 29, 30: ‘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.’
- 1 Cor 2: 7: ‘We speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory.’
- Eph 1: 5, 11: ‘He predestined us to adoption as sons ... In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose ...’

Paul was particularly conscious of God’s plans for His sons, but to him that

was only the beginning. He could also see plans that went far beyond. At the climax of his great exposition of God's purposes in the letter to the Romans he exclaims, 'Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and his ways past finding out!' (11: 33).

God is good, and in everything He does He has a good plan. When He created the physical universe He looked at each thing that He had made and saw that it was good. Did the excellence of His planning cease with the natural creation and did things then begin to go wrong when He made man? The question is too foolish to ask. What God begins He will always carry through to perfection.

## God's Nature

God has three essential attributes that we must understand before we can begin to see His purposes clearly. Without a right conception of God we will easily misunderstand what He is doing.

Firstly God is all-loving. That is He desires the ultimate good and well-being of everything He creates. He does not wish suffering or pain for any of His creatures except to bring them eventual blessing. He wants them to be happy in the highest and truest meaning of that word.

Secondly God is all-wise. He is able to conceive a plan that will bring about the ultimate good of His whole creation. He can combine an infinite number of subsidiary plans for each individual being that He has created into one great master plan for His whole creation. His wisdom is such that all these plans can be in harmony one with another without any conflict of interest.

Thirdly God is all-powerful. He is fully able to carry out His all-loving, all-wise plans. No lack of resources can prevent or even delay His purposes. No opposition can stand in His way. Even to compare God's power with that of man or Satan or anything in the universe, springs from wrong thinking. He is in fact the only power and all other power is derived from, and thus infinitely inferior to, his. Evil men and the powers of darkness and even Satan himself are not in the final analysis enemies of His plans, but part of them.

To give lip-service to belief in an all-loving, all-wise and all-powerful God is not enough. We must also refuse and reject all ideas, doctrines and beliefs that do not match His nature. If we do not, we will be guilty of slandering Him.

These three great attributes of God are conspicuously lacking in the politicians and rulers of the world. They are seldom motivated by love of the people they rule or serve. Increasingly their wisdom is proving totally inadequate to solve the problems facing them. Their power is frequently insufficient to achieve the limited good they hope to do. There will be no peace and prosperity for the

this context. The initial well-known words are, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all the creation (or every creature)' (verse 15). The following verses speak of authority in five different realms:

- the human: 'he who has believed ...'
- the angelic: 'they will cast out devils ...'
- the animal: 'they will pick up serpents ...'
- the inanimate: 'if they drink any deadly thing ...'
- disease: 'they shall lay hands on the sick ...'

These references to the animal kingdom may well have both literal and figurative interpretations. Paul himself accidentally picked up a physical serpent and was unharmed. Others doubtless have handled other kinds of serpents, and come through unscathed.

## The Angelic Realm

We will move on now to consider the angelic realm. This realm includes both good and evil powers, all of which were created by God. We must be most emphatic that God created **all**. Can I ask you to read and re-read Colossians 1 verse 16: 'For by Him (Jesus) **all** things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions or rulers or authorities, **all** things have been created through Him and for Him.'

It is very clear that these thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities include evil powers as verse 20 speaks of their reconciliation. Good angels would not need to be reconciled. Please also read and re-read verse 20: 'and through Him to reconcile **ALL** things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross, through Him whether things on earth or things in the heavens.' There are many references to these rulers and powers in Paul's writings including the well-known passage about spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6.

We must learn and clearly understand two things from these verses in Colossians 1. Firstly God created the powers of evil. Secondly they will all eventually be reconciled to Him. What I am saying runs contrary to most traditional teaching, but I can see no other reasonable explanation of these verses. If you can, please let me know. I am willing to be taught.

We find confirmation of this view in Ephesians 3: 10,11: 'in order that God's manifold wisdom might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places, according to the purpose of the ages which He formed in Christ Jesus our Lord.' This may well be the first step in God's redemptive purposes in the heavenly realm. The rulers and powers there will be

Revelation. There they are followed by ‘a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.’

The final picture comes from chapter 5 verse 13: ‘I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"’ What could be more comprehensive than this?

1 Corinthians 15 gives a similar picture: ‘As in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then the end, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father ...’ (verses 22 to 24).

When the old testament saints looked into the future their view was often hazy and partial, but even some vision of the coming glories was a strength and encouragement to them in their current trials. It clarified the direction in which they themselves should move. So also we cannot see clearly the things which God has not yet fully revealed, but a small glimpse of what is to come may strengthen and encourage us to press forward toward the prize of our high calling. Some understanding of the future will help us to move in line with God’s purposes and not resist them like Saul of Tarsus did in his zeal for God, and think we are doing His will.

## The Animal Kingdom

The *whole creation* does not mean only the human race, but includes the animal kingdom and even in some sense things without life. Isaiah speaks of a time when ‘the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid ... the cow and the bear will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ... They will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea’ (11: 6-9). The end of chapter 65 has a similar passage.

God gave Adam dominion over the animal kingdom. He told him ‘to rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ (Gen 1: 28). No doubt he lost this dominion when he sinned and God pronounced the curse.

Noah had authority over the animal world when he brought animals of every species into the arc. There they dwelt together in harmony saved from the waters of judgement and prefiguring the glorious time of harmony of which Isaiah speaks.

The final instructions Jesus gave to His disciples in Mark 16 are interesting in

world until divine government replaces human and the world is ruled by love, wisdom and power. Amen, and may His kingdom come speedily and in our time.

## The Bible

Not only must we know God’s character, but also we must know how to read the Bible, if we are to understand God’s wider purposes. “How do you read?” Jesus asked the Pharisees. Many people read the Bible as though each verse were written personally to themselves. In fact some people explicitly teach that you should do this. Every command is for you, they say, and each promise also is yours. Such an approach to scripture may sound spiritual, but at best it is immature and it very soon breaks down in practice. Its root lies in lack of direct contact with God. The book is being used instead, and cannot then be used for its true purpose. Focusing everything we read on ourselves will hinder us from understanding God’s wider plans. This approach to scripture is also without foundation or precedent in scripture itself.

The Bible is a revelation of God. As we come to it with open heart and mind, and in dependence on the Holy Spirit for illumination, two things will happen. Firstly we will begin to see the obvious, which partly because of our tradition-blinkered eyes and religious brain-washing, and partly through our natural blindness, we have managed to misinterpret, ignore or fail to notice. Secondly God will open our eyes to the deeper hidden mysteries which lie beneath the surface of the written words. We are not mining in an overworked coal-field which is fast becoming uneconomic to continue. We have so far only scratched the topsoil above diamond deposits rich beyond imagination.

## A Plan For Everything

How wide are God’s plans? Let us quote a few scriptures in answer.

- ‘Go into **all** the world and preach the gospel to the **whole creation**’ (Mark 16: 15).
- ‘From Him and through Him and to Him are **all** things’ (Rom 11:36).
- ‘For as in Adam **all** die, so also in Christ **all** shall be made alive. But each in his own order ...’ (1 Cor 15: 22,23).
- ‘Through Him (Jesus) to reconcile **all** things to Himself ... whether things on earth or things in the heavens’ (Col 1: 20).
- ‘... Him (Jesus) for whom are **all** things and through whom are **all** things’ (Heb 2:10).

‘Every created thing .. in heaven .. on the earth .. under the

earth .. on the sea, and **all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honour ..."** (Rev 5: 13).

For their full impact and meaning these verses should be studied in context, and many of them I will come back to subsequently, but they should suffice here to show that God's plans are comprehensive. He has good plans for His whole creation.

We may summarise this by viewing the creation in three main categories which we will consider in turn.

Firstly He has a plan for man: not just a small portion of the human race, but the whole. Within the human race He has plans for first-born sons and plans for those that will follow. He also has plans for the Jews and plans for the Gentiles, though not within the scope of this writing.

Secondly God has a plan for the lower animal creation. We have hints of this in Genesis, Isaiah, Mark and Romans.

Thirdly God has a plan for the whole angelic realm. This is implicit, though hidden, in many parts of the scripture, but on occasions clearly stated.

## Man

Of these three realms we will consider man first. God has chosen man to rule, both over the animal kingdom and over the angelic realm. His redemption and restoration are key to the salvation of everything else. Jesus became man in order to redeem, and through man He will carry on His redemptive work.

Nothing is haphazard or speculative about God's redemptive plan. He formulated it before the foundation of the earth. Its success does not depend on sufficient manpower or funds. God carries all His purposes through to a perfect conclusion.

### First-Born Son

The first phase in man's redemption was to produce one perfect man - a prototype for others that were to follow. That part is now history. **The word was made flesh and dwelt among (or in) us and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.** Four thousand years of human history had to pass before the world was ready for His birth. Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and many others had all **'served their generation and fallen asleep'**. Each had made his unique contribution in preparing for the coming Messiah and at God's perfect time He came. The social, political and religious scene were all perfectly set to form the background for the life of Jesus on earth. Only in eternity will we appreciate fully the cosmic impact of those brief 33 years He spent among

us in the flesh, His even briefer three years of public ministry and his final triumphant exodus from this world. His death and resurrection mark the pivotal point of all history and the beginning of the restoration of the whole creation.

### First-Born Sons

The next phase is to produce more perfect men. Few parents are satisfied with an only child. Paul expounds this great truth to us in Romans chapter 8. Verse 18 reads, **'For I consider the sufferings of this present time (season) are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is going to be revealed into (lit.) us.'** Paul foresaw a glory that was to be revealed both to and then in those whom God chose. We see the nature of this glory in verse 29: **'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'**

This verse contains a statement so staggering that it's thought is twice repeated in different words to reassure our unbelieving minds of its truth. Conformity to the image of Jesus is more than we could dare imagine, and so to strengthen our weak faith we find the thought repeated in a picture. Jesus is not to be a giant among pigmies, or a king among servants, or even a father among sons, but a first-born among brethren. Brothers in one family do not differ greatly in status or stature. Jesus will have brothers who are like Him. This was the glory beside which Paul's sufferings seemed as nothing. This was what predestination meant to him.

We find further confirmation of this astounding truth in Hebrews chapter 2. From verse 5 on we see the world to come subjected not to angels but to man. We then see Jesus crowned with glory and honour and in verses 10 and 11 we read: **'For it was fitting for Him, from whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.'** His brethren are to share His throne with Him.

### Others To Follow

Reverting to Romans 8 we find the whole creation in an agony of suspense waiting for the revealing of these sons. God's plan for creation does not cease with their perfection. They are not just a spectacle for the universe to admire. They are to be His instruments in bringing the remainder of creation into the perfect liberty that they themselves enjoy. We find clear indication of this in the book of Revelation. In chapter 14 verses 1 to 5 we find a description of the 144,000 who stand on Mount Zion with the Lamb. It is not difficult to identify these with the sons of Romans 8. In particular we read in verse 4 that they are the first fruits to God and to the Lamb. These 144,000 are first mentioned in chapter 7 of