

God's Predictive Knowledge Preserves Moral Choice

“The lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” Genesis 6:5-8 RSV. God had finally reached a point where He turned against the human race because they did not follow His rules. We are told that “From Adam’s day to the present time the great controversy has been concerning obedience to God’s law.”^[1] God’s long forbearance of disobedience came to an end. The *universe* witnessed a limit to His patience. A plan that would destroy the world was executed. Was that decision a capricious act on God’s part or had He had enough rebellion and chose to destroy this evil? Was His unusual plan to not only destroy man but also animals and plants and ruin the face of the world an overreaction? Or, was God mercifully freeing the world of unbridled iniquity? If the world was enjoying its life-style, was it truly an act of “mercy”?

God had previously promised that an avenue for man’s restoration would be made. Yet, at the time of the flood, it was still only a promise. Furthermore, it was conditional on obeying God. *What motivated God to destroy the antediluvian world was related to how sure God was that obedience was possible.* If obedience was possible, He had a right to punish disobedience. If it wasn’t, the universe would forever question His character. *His certainty was based on divine moral insight.*

Speaking of the flood, E. G. White states, “God’s plan was unfolding, showing both His justice and His mercy, and fully vindicating His wisdom and righteousness and His dealings with evil.”^[2] How was righteousness being vindicated? If perfection was only a theory, could there be justice and righteousness? Satan had charged that God’s standard for man was too strict.^[3] He had additionally declared that self-denial was impossible, therefore not essential.^[4] Though these accusations were not totally silenced until the first advent of Christ,^[5] at the time of the destructive deluge the universe was asked to rely on His foreknowledge of *promised perfection* so completely, they expected His justice, wisdom, mercy and righteousness would be fully vindicated.

Another prophetic act was extending eternal salvation to man before the cross. “By the translation of Enoch the Lord designed to teach an important lesson. There was danger that men would yield to discouragement, because of the fearful results of Adam’s sin. Many were ready to exclaim, ‘What profit is it that we have feared the Lord and have kept His ordinances, since a heavy curse is resting upon the race, and death is the portion of us all?’ ...” “Satan was urging upon men the belief that there was no reward for the righteous or punishment for the wicked, and that it was impossible for men to obey the divine statutes.”^[6] God needed to dramatically reassure loyal mankind that the promised Redeemer would save and that a sinless hereafter was real. By translating Enoch before the flood, that hope was inspired. A similar message was conveyed with Elijah’s translation at a time of great apostasy in Israel.

Abraham was given special assurance that God’s redemptive promise was going to be a certainty. “The plan of redemption was here opened to him, in the death of Christ, the great

sacrifice, and His coming in glory. Abraham saw also the earth restored to its Eden beauty, to be given him for an everlasting possession, as the final and complete fulfillment of the promise.”^[7] In vision Abraham saw the Savior on the cross. How confident was God in that revelation?

In the days of Israel, “Every morning and evening a lamb of a year old was burned upon the altar, with its appropriate meat offering, thus symbolizing the daily consecration of the nation to Jehovah, and their constant dependence upon the atoning blood of Christ.”^[8] “The incense, ascending with the prayer of Israel, represents the merits and intercession of Christ, His perfect righteousness, which through faith is imputed to His people, and which can alone make the worship of sinful beings acceptable to God.”^[9] God saw that it was necessary to remind daily that chosen nation – in a dramatic, objective way – that a *perfect* atonement was forthcoming. That system was a proleptic expression of God’s foreknowledge.

But in all of those experiences, how was righteousness going to be ultimately proven? Was it the divinity of Jesus that was to successfully resist temptation? Was it the divine nature of a Savior that would shed blood on man’s behalf? Or, was it the human nature of Christ that would struggle moment by moment and experience victory over sin? Was it a real man struggling to maintain moral perfection as the last moments of life ebbed away? Redemptive foreknowledge saw the victory of that second Adam.

Time and again over four thousand years the world was reminded that a Savior would pay the sin penalty and fully redeem man. This was based upon anticipatory knowledge by God Himself. God was able to look ahead and view the moral choices of the man called Jesus. Otherwise it would have been a presumptuous act on God’s part to take Enoch, Moses, and later, Elijah to heaven. The success of the redemptive plan was based upon the moral decisions of that Man. If the Father and Son could not penetrate the future perfectly, divine wisdom would have prevented the incarnation. It would have been a foolish risk. It was necessary that the prophetic eye could see events and moral choices. *Selective foreknowledge* would not permit God to know that Christ would be a Savior beforehand. “Our Savior, in His life and death, fulfilled all the prophecies pointing to Himself and was the substance of all the types and shadows signified. He kept the moral law and exalted it by answering its claims as man’s representative.”^[10] If there was no foreknowledge, then uncertainties about the New Testament must be raised. Salvation itself would be in question. The whole method of God’s dealing with man in the Old Testament would be presumptive. This issue transcends a philosophical religious consideration. Our relationship to His foreknowledge means everything. The gospel is an introduction to God’s solution of the great controversy.^[11] “The temptations to which Christ was subjected were a terrible reality. As a free agent, He was placed on probation, with liberty to yield to Satan’s temptations and work at cross-purposes with God. If this were not so, if it had not been possible for Him to fall, He could not have been tempted in all points as the human family is tempted.” “For a period of time Christ was on probation. He took humanity on Himself, to stand the test and trial which the first Adam failed to endure. Had He failed in His test and trial, He would have been disobedient to the voice of God, and the world would have been lost.”^[12]

Though Christ was placed in a position where He could have fallen, He promised *beforehand* that His resistance to sin would be complete. This did not lessen His struggles. Every temptation was a painful experience. The difficulties in making a proper choice *consistently*, while still knowing the outcome, reveals how perfectly the plan of redemption was orchestrated. *Knowledge did not interfere with absolute freedom of choice.*

The Jewish nation, which God adopted for a significant period of time, eventually departed from the Object of its strength and greatness. National pride and prejudice became a barrier to understanding God's purposes. They were blind to what God had foretold, and they failed to recognize the Messiah. Their knowledge of the Scriptures was "deep." Scholarly study was carried out meticulously, but they lacked spiritual insight. Not only did their misconceptions blind them to the arrival of Jesus, but Satan's purpose was fulfilled as they lowered their concept of God.

Of the Sadducees it is said, "They Believed in God as the only being superior to man, but they argued that an overruling providence and a *divine foresight* would deprive man of free moral agency and degrade him to the position of a slave. It was their belief that, having created man, God had left him to himself, independent of a higher influence."^[13] Thus the question whether God has the ability to look into the individual moral future of man is not new.

The problem this poses goes beyond the simple question of God's foreknowledge. One must address how much God can intervene into the daily lives of people if He knows what they will think or do. If man's freedom is not curtailed by God's advanced view of right and wrong decisions, would it be inconsistent with His character to intervene when one was faced with temptation before any choice is made?

The same concern could lead one to reject the right of the Holy Spirit to influence us — for it would be an intrusion into our free will. But if the Holy Spirit freed us from the barriers that Satan had created to make a moral choice, that would free us to make a choice. Man's freedom then would be preserved. Paul shows that even in temptation there is immediacy of foresight into man's moral resistance. I Corinthians 10:13. God balances out the inherent sinful nature with divine strength so man can truly choose between right and wrong. *Thus, correct understanding of God's foreknowledge shows it to be a vital characteristic of God to preserve moral freedom.*

Foresight Preserves the Will

As God looked ahead to this world's creation, He with His Son also made provision for a re-creation.^[14] No precedent existed. To devise means to restore fallen man demanded a perfect understanding of wrong and sin before it occurred. God was able to clearly penetrate the future to develop ways to raise man from the degradation that opposition to His laws would bring. *Their foreknowledge, instead of restricting moral choice, became the means of restoring man's will.* The covenant of grace is based upon divine foresight. Divine exercise of this freedom opens the door to man's freedom — *the provision to choose alternatives.*

Foresight is not selective nor limited. It penetrated the future *without precedence*. Through it, heaven devised means to redeem man from sin before sin was an entity. Through it, He promised Adam and Eve that their moral freedom and their posterity's *free will* would be preserved. He could look ahead and see that His life and death would be a perfect atonement not only for sin, but that redemption would give man the right and possibility to choose Him again. Through this divine plan, Christ even assured the angels that by His death He would ransom many and would destroy him who had the power of death.^[15] Man's freedom was bound, however, to uncompromising loyalty to Him. Once any choice was made to oppose His laws, it became impossible to remain free. "Man had become so degraded by sin that it was impossible for him, *in himself*, to come into harmony with Him whose nature is purity and

goodness. But Christ, after having redeemed man from the condemnation of the law, could impart divine power to unite with human effort. By repentance toward God and faith in Christ, the fallen children of Adam might once more become 'sons of God.'"[\[16\]](#) Thus, to maintain man's free moral being, God must be intimately involved with man. Is there freedom without divine power to help make a choice?

Foresight – A Part of Redemptive Insight

"God and Christ knew from the beginning of the apostasy of Satan and of the fall of Adam through the deceptive powers of the apostate."[\[17\]](#) "God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He *foresaw* its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency."[\[18\]](#) Long before man ever was, long before God had the opportunity to judge the future by the past and present (there was no present nor past in that spiritual rebellion), His pervasive insight knew that Lucifer and Adam would sin.

After man came into this world, time and again God looked ahead and read the characters of men who had not even been born or conceived. How can we limit a God with so much depth and futurity, a God who "sees the far distant future with as clear vision as we do those things that are transpiring daily."[\[19\]](#) "God knows the end from the beginning. He knew before the birth of Jacob and Esau just what characters they would both develop. He knew that Esau would not have a heart to obey Him."[\[20\]](#) He foreknew their moral character. Three hundred years before Josiah was born a prophet of God from Judea, He foretold that a man by the name of Josiah would be righteous and seek to do away with idolatry (I Kings 13:1-3). This was fulfilled in II Kings 23.[\[21\]](#) In the announcement to Zacharias before the birth of John the Baptist, the angel declared, "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord." Luke 1:15. His character was open to heaven beforehand. A year before Christ's betrayal He foretold that one was a devil (directly referring to Judas).[\[22\]](#) In John 6:70 Jesus told Peter "that this day, even in this night, before the cock crows twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." Mark 14:30 . Peter did not consciously fulfill Christ's predictions. He was shocked after he denied his Lord and went out and wept bitterly as the penetrating silent gaze of Jesus made him realize that Christ foreknew he would fail his dearest earthly friend.

Along with these examples of God's insight into moral decisions of man are the prophecies that accurately foretold future events (i.e., Isaiah 45:1-3 where 100 years before, God knew that a man would be born, receive the name of Cyrus, become a Persian king, overthrow Babylon, and be a shepherd of God's will). Another marked example of perceiving the future is the ease and simplicity with which God does it. During his first experience in cleansing the temple, as He stood on the steps with all eyes gazing on Him, "He *looks into futurity* and sees not only years, but centuries and ages. He sees how priests and rulers will turn the needy from their right and forbid the gospel shall be preached to the poor. He sees how the love of God will be concealed from sinners, and men will make merchandise of His grace."[\[23\]](#) God is so confident of the future decisions of the beings of this universe that when redemptive goals will have been met, He declares that, "Sin can never again enter the universe."[\[24\]](#)

God fully anticipates the future, so much so that the righteous dead "live unto Him."[\[25\]](#) He has divine foreknowledge.[\[26\]](#) God even determines if raising up a seriously ill person is prudent based upon what that individual's future moral decisions would be if they were permitted to live.[\[27\]](#)

Perhaps one of the more interesting concerns of those who advocate selective foreknowledge

is that God is only able to enjoy the future as it happens since He does not know perfectly what is going to happen. Simple logic would oppose that and advance the limitless ability of God to experience what He knows will happen as many times as He wants and when He wants (past, present or future). When the event actually occurs in His wisdom and power, He has full control to experience it emotionally and cognitively as intensely as He chooses. The most profound evidence that God can let the present deeply affect Him when He knew beforehand what would occur,^[28] is when the plan of redemption was formally set into motion. “Before the Father He pleaded in the sinner’s behalf, while the host of heaven awaited the results with an intensity of interest that words cannot express. Long continued was that mysterious communing — ‘the counsel of peace’ (Zech. 6 :13) for the fallen sons of men. The plan of salvation had been laid before the creation of the earth; for Christ is ‘the lamb slain from the foundation of the world’ (Revelation 13:8); yet it was a struggle, even with the King of the universe, to yield up His Son to die for the guilty race.”^[29] We are told that God suffered with His Son in Gethsemane.^[30] Yet, as we contemplate the marvels of God who sees the future as clearly as the present, His love, justice and mercy shine with added brilliance because it doesn’t interfere with the moral choice of His creatures. Knowing that Lucifer would rebel, perceiving fully the implications of man’s fall, yet creating Lucifer and bringing into existence man, ennobles and honors our God. It brings into focus, once again, that His foreknowledge never to the slightest degree hampers the free moral agency of His creation; it permits its existence!

Summary

Biblical and Spirit of Prophecy evidence reveals that God predicts the future historically and morally with penetrating wisdom. As the Sadducees of old, many today contend that if God could view the future decisions of man, He would not be relieved of the responsibility for those decisions, and man would not be free (His foreknowledge would be permissive). This position rejects the beautiful evidence of God’s determination to preserve voluntary submission in the heart of man. God can view *everything* ahead of time. This does not leave the creature void of decision. He foresees the creature’s decision. It does not mean that God has arbitrary rule over man’s will. With man the act is still free because it is derived from his choice of alternatives. God simply knows how man will exercise that freedom. *This knowledge is His divine freedom to be fully Omniscient. Not interfering with what decisions man will make is an exercise in Omnipotence.* “As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented Himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary.”^[31] Christ had foreknowledge into His own moral decisions which gave immediate hope to the world that continued for four thousand years before the cross.

Redemption embodied the restoration of man’s freedom to choose. The plan of salvation guarantees His consistent desire to relate to man freely and man to voluntarily relate freely back to Him. Man’s nature has taken from him that ability. God’s foreknowledge is man’s assurance of becoming free moral beings by providing the Spirit’s power. Through faith, redemptive strength is received to overcome wrong and stand in defense of right – if we choose.^[32] That is moral freedom restored. Man ultimately becomes responsible for the preservation of that quality God so deeply desires us to have. Free moral choice is a gift of faith. Once activated, it becomes a spiritual law in man’s hand to exercise and retain. Its use is fully man’s. Its origin fully God’s.

References:

- [1] *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 73.
- [2] *The Great Controversy*, pp. 80-81.
- [3] *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 97
- [4] *The Faith I Live By*, p. 11
- [5] *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 78.
- [6] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- [7] *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- [8] *Ibid.*, p. 352.
- [9] *Ibid.*, p. 353.
- [10] *Selected Messages*, bk 1, p. 231.
- [11] *The Desire of Ages*, p. 147.
- [12] *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 1082-1083.
- [13] *The Desire of Ages*, p. 604.
- [14] *Ibid.*, p. 147; *Selected Messages*, bk 1, p. 250.
- [15] *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 65.
- [16] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- [17] *Selected Messages*, bk 1, p. 250; *Desire of Ages*, p. 22.
- [18] *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.
- [19] *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1099.
- [20] *The Story of Redemption*, p. 87.
- [21] *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 398-402.
- [22] *The Desire of Ages*, p. 720.
- [23] *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- [24] *Ibid.*
- [25] *The Desire of Ages*, p. 606.
- [26] *Christian Service*, p. 74.
- [27] *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 147.
- [28] *Ibid.*
- [29] *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 63.
- [30] *The Desire of Ages*, p. 693.
- [31] *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1084.
- [32] *The Faith I Live By*, p. 82.