

TOPIC X

PREDESTINATION AND PREDETERMINATION

PART V

Does God Have a Plan for Everyone's Life?

This has been a long debated matter and one hears about it all the time in Christian circles. It is also asked in this way, "What is God's will for my life?" But first, we must clarify the question. Are we talking about both Christians and non-Christians? Following on the subject about Calvinism and predestination, if one were an adherent to that teaching, the answer would have to be, "Yes." This would include all aspects of a person's life. There would be no choices or changes. But how does one know whether he or she is to be a janitor or a business executive? A missionary or a construction worker? Do I have a choice as to my mate or is there a specific person God has in mind? What about the "plan" for my children? How am I to know what that is and how to go about guiding them to it?

Calvinist's would say that the choices a person makes are predetermined and so there is actually no problem whatever a person selects to do. Nice. Easy. Simple.

If we are just talking about Christian believers and their life, then are we talking about their life occupation in this world and so on, including their mate, family, and all the rest or about their spiritual life, or both? Then, if we believe it isn't predetermined, then how does God let us know what we are supposed to be or do? And if it isn't predetermined, is there actually a "plan" at all? Wouldn't a "plan" for someone's life have to be predetermined? How do we view this idea?

However, I find this topic to be a bit of a mystery to me and a firm answer is difficult to establish one way or another as I honestly see both yes and no as possibilities, depending on whom we are talking about and what we focus in on.

The question I received for this topic goes as follows, "Lots of people talk about "God's plan", believing that God has outlined a plan for their lives. Different from the 'predestination' argument, but more along the line of a plan that they can choose to follow or not."

(Comment: If this is the case, who among us has ever had God reveal a clear plan He wishes us to follow so we can choose whether to follow it or not?" So we need to analyze this quite a bit before coming to a conclusion.)

"The reason I sent you the question of whether or not God has a specific plan for our lives that he'd like us to follow is because my mother-in-law went to a conference of Christian speakers in California and came back saying she got a prophecy. Apparently a speaker was on stage saying he was looking for specific people (e.g., is there a couple with the names Dave and Trina in the audience?) at one point he asked for someone named Suzanne (her middle name). He said that the date December 5 should mean something to her (Danielle's birthday). He also said she has grandchildren (obviously she does). Then he told her (actually a remaining group) that her grandchildren are part of God's plan to minister internationally; that they will be great international examples for Christ. But that she needs to keep nurturing them and taking care of them and leading them down the right path for them to reach their potential. I'm cynical of this particular guy, I think he was selling a book or something, but wanted to know about where I can see God's plans for our lives, and if I shouldn't be so cynical."

A fair and honest question. As to the prophecy, I have no comment. Whether this was from the Lord and/or directed at your mother in law's family, I cannot say. However, one might keep this in mind and see where it leads. Who knows what the Lord might provide in the way of opportunities for service in this area. We cannot limit the Lord on how He wishes to work in any one individual's life. Can God or His Spirit impress a leading on someone's heart and mind? Of course. The desires and gifts of the children and grandchildren themselves in this case will help to see if this is a real possibility.

As to a specific plan or God's will for a life, we know that it is His intention that all possible be saved. His love simply prompts this. God's calling and invitation is first to Himself. Now, for the non-believer, is there a plan or "will" outside of this? What about for the believer? Are we talking about a "blueprint" or just a divine counsel and direction? Is there even a passage of scripture that attests to this idea? Or, is there a selection of some who are designed or destined to fulfill a specific "plan" in God's program of redemption and some who are not?

Let's look at some popular scripture verses and some clear and definite directions from the Word.

Quite popular is Jeremiah 29:11,

'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'

This verse is in the middle of a letter sent by Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon wherein he tells them that the Lord has commanded them to stay there, marry, have children, build houses and plant gardens. They are to pray for the city of Babylon, and seek its welfare. They are to ignore the false prophets for in seventy years the Lord will return them to home in Judah, where they will seek Him and find Him. Then this verse occurs. So the context for this is the promised return of the exiles from Babylon to Judah.

Well, the plan God had was for a nation and it was critical in His plan of Redemption for all mankind. Though this verse is personalized by many today, and in the view of eternity has validity for all His people, it does not deal with the individual life nor is a guarantee that "calamity" will not happen in this life nor "prosperity" for that matter. Any view of the history of Judeo/Christian persecution ought to reveal this.

Let's look at the question in a more specific way. If God has a "plan" for everyone's life and we are talking about all peoples, believers or not, then the formulation of God's plan applies to all involved. This must include the actual birth of the individual and his life God predetermined before the birth of the individual. It follows then, that this is also true of his or her parents since the birth of the current individual for who God has a "plan" must occur according to the plan. And so on all the way back to Adam. This would include the evil plans of man and his evil acts as well. Then we are back to pondering the actual nature of God. Then, since so many people are lost, that must also be a part of His plan. So we are back to Calvin's predestination again, and the problems therein.

Frustration may set in as we ponder all this. Perhaps time to break out the aspirin.

But, if we are talking about a blueprint plan for a person's life and career, (especially the Christian) where do we see this in scripture and even if we do, how does God reveal this to each person? In the introductory question above, it is through a prophecy given through a man or woman who exercises a gift he believes he has. Not everyone, however, gets one of these prophecies. So, perhaps there is a specific plan for selected individuals. This is actually Biblical. God revealed Himself in a powerful and personal way to a number of people both in the Old Testament and the New. Let's look at that for a moment.

Among these selected individuals are Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Hagar, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, David, Solomon, many of the judges, Samuel, the prophets, Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zacharias, Jesus and His disciples, the apostles Paul, Peter, John and so on. In each and every case either there was a direct appearance to these selected people by an epiphany, or The "Angel of the Lord", a messenger angel or a prophet coming in the name of and under the direction of the Lord. But in the overall view of all the people in Scripture to whom God appeared and laid out a plan (and I have listed nearly all of them) the number is few and all have to do with God accomplishing His redemptive plan and promise to the world.

In the case of Cain, he was given direction but chose not to follow it. The same with Adam and Eve. Abraham and many of the rest got on board but not without going astray, resisting, screwing it up in some ways and so on. So there was definitely a human involvement and choice in obeying the Lord or not. This still exists today. Yet few claim that God appeared and spoke to them directly. Those that do often justify their "evil acts" by claiming God told them to do it. Others often are just strange and we become uncomfortable around them. I have known many who, so involved with the leading of the Spirit one time, find themselves in the midst of immorality and disgrace not long after. It is quite evident that in all of Israel, God laid out His will and many decided to ignore it in favor of idolatry and immorality. So God may have a "plan" but what good is it if no one follows it?

But as to God setting out a plan for everyone's life including their social status, career and the items relating to this temporal life, I can't find that in scripture at all. In fact, a person's career is seldom mentioned at all in Scripture and that it was "God's plan" for them to be in that career is not mentioned at all. Nearly all of the ancient people of Israel were in the "agrarian" business by necessity, not by God's specific "plan" for each individual.

However, there is ample instruction on how to conduct one's life, but these are in the realm of godliness and spiritual growth. For the majority of us, it appears that God is more concerned about what goes on inside our hearts and minds than in what we do in my opinion. Our decisions are to be made in light of these things. But most look for God's will in the outward things rather than the inward. There is no question at all about what God desires for the inner core of our being. But rather than focus on that, most people focus on the external, temporal matters of their existence in this world and how to make that work to their own benefit. Is this not true? There is often a strong emphasis on evangelism by churches, but little

on the actual godliness of those who are supposed to be evangelizing. The world looks on and ponders.

Let's look at some more verses about this where we find plans made by both God and man.

Psalm 36:1-12, (Noting the contrasts)

- 1: Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart; There is no fear of God before his eyes.
- 2: For it flatters him in his *own* eyes Concerning the discovery of his iniquity *and* the hatred *of it*.
- 3: The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; He has ceased to be wise *and* to do good.
- 4: He plans wickedness upon his bed; He sets himself on a path that is not good; He does not despise evil.

In contrast while this is going on,

- 5: Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness *reaches* to the skies.
- 6: Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; Your judgments are *like* a great deep. O LORD, You preserve man and beast.
- 7: How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.
- 8: They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.
- 9: For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.
- 10: O continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, And Your righteousness to the upright in heart.

Then a prayer,

- 11: Let not the foot of pride come upon me, And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away.
- 12: There the doers of iniquity have fallen; They have been thrust down and cannot rise.

So the wicked makes plans for evil, and God does not. But has He "planned " the life and the 'plans' of the wicked? Proverbs 15:26 opposes this view if any are persuaded to believe it, "Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD, But pleasant words are pure."

"The word 'plans' in verse 4 is the Hebrew "hashab" and is used 134 times in the O.T. and variously translated as "thought", "consider" "design", "to intend" and so on. Has God "planned" the "thoughts", "considerations", "designs" or intents of the wicked? Absolutely not.

Proverbs has many verses about "plans."

15:22, "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed."

"Plans" here is "mahasabah" from the same root as "hashab." It is more specific and direct as in "scheme", "plan", "devise", "formulate" intend" or "plot." (The same in 15:26.) Note that in 15:22, the counsel is to have many advisors in one's plans to assure success. God is not mentioned here. On the other hand we have an interesting series of proverbs in 16,

- 1: "The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.
- 2: All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.
- 3: Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established.
- 4: The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.
- 5: Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished.
- 6: By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil.
- 7: When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.
- 8: Better is a little with righteousness Than great income with injustice.
- 9: The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

Let's examine this more closely. Verse 4 stands out as it seems to say that God made the wicked to do whatever they seek to do and created them for the "day of evil", whatever that is supposed to mean. We will see! Pulling this verse out of the context we can make it say whatever we wish for our own purposes. But there are two ways to know the actual intent of this verse.

First, we are faced with an awkward translation. For example, the word "purpose" is "maaneh" but the actual common translation and meaning is "answer." The exact same word is used in this sense in verse 1. Translating the Hebrew of verse 4 directly or literally we have:

(The text): [כל פעל יהוה למענהו וגם־רשע ליום רעה:]

"All are committed (or made) by God to answer, And even (the) ungodly to a day of misery." This would be closest to the intent in my opinion, and most commentaries agree.

Second, the Book of Proverbs is formed in couplets, or parallelisms. These are repetitions of the same thought but in different terms. In this case, verse 5 parallels verse 4 and makes it clear that the point is that evil will be punished.

Verse 9 finds a man planning and the Lord directing his steps. Though the word "mind" is used, the Hebrew is clearly "lev" - the heart. It is the translator's discretion as to how to translate "lev" as it is translated both "heart" and "mind" in many English versions. There are other words translated "mind" as well in the Hebrew. But they deal with emotions, thoughts, intents and seldom is there a reference to what we think of as the "mind" or "intellect."

Now, is this "direction of steps by God" during the planning or during the activity? It reflects verse 1 and the idea is that though man devises thoughts and plans in his heart, God has the answer. The word "steps" means active progress. So it appears that the Lord directs the progress after the plans are finalized. This will only be true if the man submits his plans to the Lord's guidance. 19:21 expresses this,

Proverbs 19:21, "Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand."

As does Proverbs 3:5-8,

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones."

In 20:18 and 21:5, we have counsel about making "plans." "Prepare plans by consultation, And make war by wise guidance." And, Proverbs 21:5, "The plans of the diligent *lead* surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty *comes* surely to poverty."

Isaiah 25:1 might persuade us that God plans for everything and everyone, "O LORD, You are my God; I will exalt You, I will give thanks to Your name; For You have worked wonders, Plans *formed* long ago, with perfect faithfulness." But the context is restoring Jerusalem from the hands of the Moabites. Isaiah is actually writing a poetic psalm (or song) here praising God for what he has promised to accomplish.

Isaiah 29:15, "Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the LORD, And whose deeds are *done* in a dark place, And they say, "Who sees us?" or "Who knows us?" Well, can these schemes actually be hidden from the Lord? Well, not in the context which is the impending invasion of Assyria.

Verses 13 and 14 read,

13: "Then the Lord said, 'Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*, 14: Therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; And the wisdom of their wise men will perish, And the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed.'"

Isaiah 32:8, "But the noble man devises noble plans; And by noble plans he stands."

Jeremiah 6:19 "Hear, O earth: behold, I am bringing disaster on this people, The fruit of their plans, Because they have not listened to My words, And as for My law, they have rejected it also."

Well, they had God's counsel and chose to reject it in favor of implementing their own plans.

Jeremiah 18:12, "But they will say, 'It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.'

Jeremiah 18:18, "Then they said, "Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah. Surely the law is not going to be lost to the priest, nor counsel to the sage, nor the *divine* word to the prophet! Come on and let us strike at him with *our* tongue, and let us give no heed to any of his words."

Yet we have at the same time this unmistakable word,

Jeremiah 1:4-10, 4: "Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 5: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." 6: Then I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth." 7: But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak. 8: "Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD. 9": Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. 10: "See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To pluck up and to break down, To destroy and to overthrow, To build and to plant."

This certainly sounds like God directly involved Himself in Jeremiah's entrance into history. On the other hand,

Micah 2:1-3, 1: "Woe to those who scheme iniquity, Who work out evil on their beds! When morning comes, they do it, For it is in the power of their hands. 2: They covet fields and then seize *them*, And houses, and take *them* away. They rob a man and his house, A man and his inheritance. 3: Therefore thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am planning against this family a calamity From which you cannot remove your necks; And you will not walk haughtily, For it will be an evil time."

The contrast is important as we see timer and time again that God was quite active in managing and producing the needed people and elements so that His plan of redemption, already formulated prior to creation would not fail to be fulfilled. Yet when it comes to the evil plans and acts of men we also constantly see God's opposition to them. He says,

Zechariah 8:16-17, 16: "These are the things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates. 17: 'Also let none of you devise evil in your heart against another, and do not love perjury; for all these are what I hate,' declares the LORD."

All of this is from the Old Testament. Now, in the New Testament, there are only eight passages that talk about a "plan." They are:

Matthew 1:19; Luke 23:51; John 11:53, 12:10; Acts 2:23, 5:38, 27:42, and Romans 1:13.

Of these seven speak of general plans people make, but Acts 2:22-23 Peter notes,

22: "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- 23: this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death."

Referring to this predetermined plan of God's, there are many N.T. verses that affirm that this is indeed the case regarding Jesus:

Matthew 26:24; Luke 22:22, 37, Luke 24:44-46; John 19:24, John 19:31-37; Acts 3:18; Acts 4:28; Acts 13:27; Acts 15:18; I Peter 1:20.

As to a predetermined plan for anyone else's life or death, the N.T. says nothing except direction and leading in the lives of some of the apostles who are selected and commissioned. For example, regarding Paul in Damascus after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus,

Acts 9:13-16, 13: "But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; 14: and here he has

authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' 15: But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16: for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.'"

In Antioch (of Syria) some time later, Acts 13:2, While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Then on the second missionary journey, Paul and Silas were ministering in the Cilicia/ Phrygian /Galatian region, we are told in Acts 16:5-8,

5: "So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily. 5: They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; 7: and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; 8: and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas."

So we have specific direction and guidance by the Holy Spirit. This ultimately involved bringing Luke, the physician, into Paul's company as the Lord knew Paul needed medical assistance due to his being stoned at Lystra. Paul suffered much as the Lord predicted, but brought Luke into his life and Luke stayed with him until nearly the end of his days.

It is quite apparent that God had a plan for this journey. On the other hand, the controversy recorded in 15:36-40 is of interest in this discussion.

Finally, we will find a massive amount of scripture about God's will on how we are to behave, believe, obey God, love others, to be led by the Spirit, worship, relate to others in nearly every situation beginning with God, our family, our neighbor and community, our employer, the governing authorities, enemies, and about dealing with the problems in our hearts and minds, that by comparison what we are to do in terms of career and all the other external issues is miniscule by comparison, not to mention often unclear and confusing when trying to find and figure out God's "plan."

Though this is the truth and the case, most ignore God's counsel in these internal and spiritual matters and focus on the external.

To me it's like those all a-twitter about prophecy. They want to understand the

things that can be unclear and controversial in the Bible but ignore the things that are crystal clear regarding the kind of person God wants them to be in relationship with Him and others.

Jesus said it this way, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others." Matthew 23:23

What is God's will or plan for your life? Start with the spiritual and inner matters and let the Lord take it from there.

It appears that, especially in the Old Testament, God's purpose of fulfilling His plan of redemption involved many individuals for whom He had a plan and with whom He worked to bring it about. But in each case there was a personal appearance by God or one of His prophets to lay out the "plan." Once 400 B.C. occurred and the Old Testament had come to an end, most of what needed to be accomplished in preparation for the coming of Christ had been fulfilled. As the New Testament opens, we see God's hand in Christ's appearing and in the ministry, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension of His Son. We see an involvement in the early church from Pentecost to the commissioning of the apostles and the spread of the Gospel in the first century.

After that, the only thing we can say is that God continues, in His own way to lead, prompt, direct, and manage people to the ultimate conclusion of history. How He does this, we are not absolutely sure. What we don't have is an inspired record of those people and moments we can absolutely attribute to God's intervention. Yet we sense He still does this in answered prayer, and by certain actions of the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells us that we are to walk by faith and not by sight¹ and God has given us enough evidence and support to do so. That is our first priority.

Below are links to other perspectives on these matters.

¹ See also: II Corinthians 4:16-18; Romans 8:24-25; I Corinthians 13:12; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 10:38; I Peter 1:8, 5:9 etc.

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/god.does.not.have.a.plan.for.our.lives.and.we.should.stop.pretending.that.he.has/48565.htm>

<http://www.bibleissues.org/spouse1.html>