

Predestination

Introduction

The subject of “predestination” troubles many. The primary reason for distress is the idea God has chosen some for heaven and some for hell and one’s destiny is fixed. The Bible does not teach this nor is this what the Bible means by predestination. Theologians have spilt much ink arguing Calvinism versus Arminianism and created an arcane technical vocabulary with words such as sublapsarianism and supralapsarianism.

A study of predestination requires examination of related areas—God’s foreknowledge, election, man’s will, and how divine and human wills interact. While we cannot have full knowledge of these operations, God has provided a framework and enough information to understand the subject sufficiently. The goal of this study is to examine the Bible’s revelation on this subject and remedy the confusion that exists.

Biblical Terms Concerning Predestination

Foreknowledge ([προγινώσκω](#)) is part of God’s omniscience, that God knows everything. The verb προγινώσκω is formed by the preposition [πρό](#) (before) + [γινώσκω](#) (know). It means to know something beforehand and as it relates to man is confined to time. It occurs in the following verses: Acts 26.5; Romans 8.29, 11.2; 1 Peter 1.20; 2 Peter 3.17.

“Elect” or “Choose” (verb) [ἐκλέγομαι](#) occurs in the following verses: Mark 13.20; Luke 6.13, 10.42, 14.7; John 6.70, 13.18, 15.16, 19; Acts 1.2, 24, 6.5, 13.17, 15.7, 22, 25; 1 Corinthians 1.27-28; Ephesians 1.4; James 2.5. The most helpful verses are Mark 13.20 and Ephesians 1.4. One might object that verses which speak of Jesus choosing the Twelve should be considered (Luke 6.13; Acts 1.2, 24) but these seem problematic since

John 6.70, 13.18 include Judas as one of the chosen.

“Elect” or “Chosen” (noun) [ἐκλεκτός](#) provides more help than the verb. It occurs in the following verses: Matthew 20.16 (KJV), 22.14, 24.22, 24, 31; Mark 13.20, 22, 27; Luke 18.7, 23.35; Romans 8.33, 16.13; Colossians 3.12; 1 Timothy 5.21; 2 Timothy 2.10; Titus 1.1; 1 Peter 1.1-2, 2.4, 6, 9; 2 John 1.1, 13; Revelation 17.14. Most of these verses clearly declare that God has chosen some and that these are synonymous with believers.

“Called” [καλέω](#) is a verb frequently used (146x) and means “to call,” or “to be called or named.” Useful occurrences are the following. Matthew 9.13, 22.3-4, 8-9; Mark 2.17; Luke 5.32, 14.16-17, 24; John 10.3; Romans 8.30, 9.11, 25; 1 Corinthians 1.9, 7.22, 15.9; Galatians 1.6, 15, 5.8, 13; Ephesians 4.4; 1 Thessalonians 2.12, 4.7, 5.24; 2 Thessalonians 2.14; 1 Timothy 6.12; 2 Timothy 1.9; Hebrews 9.15, 11.8; 1 Peter 1.15, 2.21, 3.9, 5.10; 2 Peter 1.3; 1 John 3.1; Revelation 19.9. The word’s meaning in terms of our subject is synonymous with “chosen” or “elect.”

“Predestine” [προορίζω](#) occurs six times, five being from Paul: Acts 4.28; Romans 8.29-30; 1 Corinthians 2.7; Ephesians 1.5, 11.

These words reveal God has elected, predestined, or chosen certain individuals. In every case, the terms refer to *believers*. The Scriptures never state God has predestined or chosen unbelievers.

All Enlightened

The Bible states God has revealed Himself to every human being and that everyone knows God exists. God holds each of us responsible to respond or to reject Him. Consider the following verses:

There was the true Light which, coming into the world,

enlightens every man (John 1.9).

¹⁹ *because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.* ²⁰ *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse (Romans 1.19-20).*

if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister (Colossians 1.23)

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, (Titus 2.11).*¹

Predestination and the Angelic Conflict

No discussion of predestination is complete without a consideration of God's purpose in creating man. One of the principal reasons God created mankind was to resolve the angelic conflict.² Job is the story of a righteous man whom God used as an example to reveal how man's choice will vindicate God against Satan's accusations. In the first chapter we read:

⁶ *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.* ⁷ *The Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it" (Job 1.6-7)*

Little is known of the activities in heaven but God has disclosed that angelic beings are accountable to God and have to "front and center" to report on their activities. Hearing

Satan's report, the Lord asked him a question:

The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1.8).

Satan is the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4.4) and the puppet-master of the world's governments (Matthew 4.8-9; Luke 4.4-7). Before God created man, Satan had a headquarters in Eden (Ezekiel 28.11-19). Since then, he has roamed the earth observing earth's activities and influencing its rule. Based upon Satan's reconnaissance, God asked him his opinion of Job, the premier man on the earth. Satan clearly knew Job and one can sense the sneer in his response:

⁹ Then Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰ Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹ But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face" (Job 1.9-11).

Satan's counter-argument was Job feared God because God protected him (had Satan tried to harm Job?) and made him rich. He challenged God that if He removed His protection and blessings, Job would curse Him. God responded He would "take that bet" and placed Job under Satan's power.³

Then the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord (Job 1.12).

Following Satan's destruction of Job's livestock, servants, and children, we read:

²⁰ *Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.* ²¹ *He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."* ²² *Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God (Job 1.20-22).*

In Chapter 2, is the record of Satan's next report before the Lord. We read:

The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause" (Job 2.3).

God noted Job's faithfulness again to Satan even in the face of Satan's attack. Irked by his failure to get Job to curse God after destroying his family and wealth, Satan conceived another line of attack:

⁴ *Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.* ⁵ *However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face."* ⁶ *So the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life" (Job 2.4-6).*

As a result, Satan afflicted Job with extremely painful boils. We read:

⁹ *Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!"* ¹⁰ *But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed*

accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips (Job 2.9-10).

After much discussion by Job's friends of the nature and occurrence of evil, the book ends with God revealing His wisdom and power to Job. He peppered Job with a series of unanswerable questions (Job 38-42). In response, Job replied:

¹ Then the Lord said to Job, ² "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it." ³ Then Job answered the Lord and said, ⁴ "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. ⁵ "Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; Even twice, and I will add nothing more" (Job 40.1-5).

¹ Then Job answered the Lord and said, ² "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. ³ 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." ⁴ 'Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.' ⁵ "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; ⁶ Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42.1-6).

Satan's argument to God was that Job feared God because God had given him health and wealth, not because of Who God is. That was the battleground. Job persevered (Job 13.15) and trusted God despite his undeserved sufferings and slander levied against him. Job's wife counseled him to curse God and die (Job 2.9). His friends advised him to acknowledge his sin since the innocent do not suffer. Job made a *choice*. He chose to trust God against appearances. He clung to God, and in the end, God vindicated him before Satan, his wife, his friends

(Job 42.7-9), and exalted and rewarded him for his faithfulness (Job 42.10-17). Man will *choose* God, not as Satan argued, because God gives health or wealth, but solely because of Who He is. Man's role in resolving the angelic conflict is that by choosing God for Who He is—even when confronted with seemingly irrational and undeserved circumstances—he gives testimony against Satan and the angels who rebelled with him in their choice. The lesson in the realm of predestination is that God has given man a will which man can exercise to choose or reject Him. It is the will of man, his choice to choose God for Who He is, that God will use to condemn Satan in his case against God.

The Argument of God's Absoluteness in Salvation

Some argue God has predestined man by sovereign decree wholly independent of man's choice. Below are several passages used in support of this view.

just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (Ephesians 1.4-5)

¹¹ *for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls,* ¹² *it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger."* ¹³ *Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."* ¹⁴ *What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!* ¹⁵ *For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* ¹⁶ *So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs,*

but on God who has mercy (Romans 9.11-16).

In Him ¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, ¹² to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. ¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1.11-14).

These passages, according to those who maintain man's salvation is based solely on God's choice, demonstrate God has predestined or elected some men wholly apart from what man wills. John 10.26 is interpreted to mean a person believes because God has chosen them to believe. Thus, according to the reasoning of those who maintain that God is absolutely sovereign in the matter of salvation, God chooses to have mercy on some and not on others. Furthermore, it is argued that when one exercises faith, it is God who has drawn the individual and gives them faith (cf. John 6.44-45, 65; Ephesians 2.8; Philippians 1.29). Does this argument have Biblical merit?

Response to the Argument

Several problems exist with the argument. While the passages above seem to indicate God's absolute sovereignty in the matter of salvation these passages are a subset of a larger body of Scripture on the subject. To gain a sound understanding of predestination and election requires us to consider the entire body of Scripture related to the subject, compare Scripture with Scripture, and interpret them in their

context. Failure to do this will result in flawed exegesis and logical inconsistency.

Comparing Scripture with Scripture

God has revealed He is unwilling that *any* perish. But clearly, some do. Why? If God wills something and it does not come to pass, does it mean He is not sovereign? Consider the following verses:

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing [[βούλομαι](#)] for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3.9).

³ *This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires [[θέλω](#)] all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2.3-4).*

¹² *“What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? ¹³ “If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. ¹⁴ “So it is not the will [[θέλημα](#)] of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish (Matthew 18.12-14).*

These passages are from Peter, Paul, and the Lord Himself. Each declares God wants none to be lost but ALL to be saved. If He wants ALL to be saved and ALL are not saved, what accounts for the discrepancy? In the face of the logic of those who maintain salvation is wholly a matter of God's sovereign decree are the following statements:

God chooses some to be saved.

God wills that all be saved.

These two statements form the proposition: "God wills that all be saved but chooses some to be saved." Such a statement is logically unsound. It cannot be true apart from other information. How do those who maintain God's will alone is significant in salvation account for this?

Those who maintain salvation is based solely upon God's sovereign decree teach that the straightforward reading of the text is a misreading of the text. They teach the text should read "all kinds of men," not, "all men." Thus, they maintain God does NOT want all to be saved. Related to their concept of predestination and election is their idea of the extent of Christ's work on the cross. They teach Christ did not die for the whole human race but only for some. Why do they teach this? If Christ died for all, their theology is destroyed.⁴ Their theology is greater than the Scriptures.

Divine and Human Will

Jesus brought the relationship between the divine and human will into sharp focus with His declaration to the Jews of His day, shortly before His crucifixion. Matthew recorded:

³⁷ "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted [θέλω] to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling [θέλω]. ³⁸ "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! ³⁹ "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'" (Matthew 23.37-39)

This passage reveals the Lord wanted to gather the Jews to Himself and be their King but they WOULD not. Matthew used θέλω for both divine and human will. It should be clear to

even a casual reader that God's will was thwarted by human will. How do we know this? The Lord God Himself said so! Furthermore, He promised He would not return until the Jews asked Him to return. Therefore, we have an explicit statement from the Lord Himself that His return was conditioned upon the Jews' WILL.⁵

Many passages speak of man's will in the execution of divine activity. Consider the following familiar passage:

¹⁴ *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; ¹⁵ so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3.14-16).*

Jesus said that "whoever believes in Him shall not perish." Belief is an act of human will. God will save no one apart from human will, which is revealed by faith (cf. Romans 3.21-22, 4.3-5, 5.1; 1 Corinthians 15.1-2). Having said this, how do we account for the following passages?

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6.44)."

And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father (John 6.65)."

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul (Acts 16.14).

The above passages reveal one cannot respond to God unless God draws them. How should these verses be viewed in the light of

other Scriptures?

Solving the Issue

We have examined five kinds of passages so far. They are the following:

1. Passages that indicate God's absolute sovereignty in man's salvation (Ephesians 1.4-5; 11-14; Romans 9.11-16; John 3.3-8; 6.44, 45, 65, 10.26; Ephesians 2.8; Philippians 1.29; 2 Peter 1.2)
2. Passages that indicate God is unwilling any should perish (2 Peter 3.9; 1 Timothy 2.3-4; Matthew 18.12-14)
3. Passages that indicate God must draw an individual before he can believe (John 6.44, 65; Acts 16.14)
4. Passages that indicate all men know God exists and are accountable to Him (John 1.9; Romans 1.19-20; Colossians 1.23; Titus 2.11)
5. Passages that indicate man must believe of his own free will (John 3.14-16; Romans 3.21-22, 4.3-5, 5.1; 1 Corinthians 15.1-2)

The Scriptures provide two key verses to help solve the issue of the divine will and man's will and the nature of predestination and election. One is from Paul and the other from Peter. In Romans 8.29, Paul wrote the Roman church (primarily Gentiles) and defined God's foreknowledge and predestination. It reads:

²⁸ *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called [κλητός] according to His purpose.* ²⁹ *For those whom He foreknew [προγινώσκω], He also predestined [προορίζω] to become conformed [σύμμορφος] to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;* ³⁰ *and these whom He predestined [προορίζω], He also called [καλέω]; and these whom He called [καλέω], He also justified [δικαιώω];*

and these whom He justified [δικαιώω], He also glorified [δοξάζω].

Peter, addressing Jewish believers, wrote the following in 1 Peter 1.1-2:

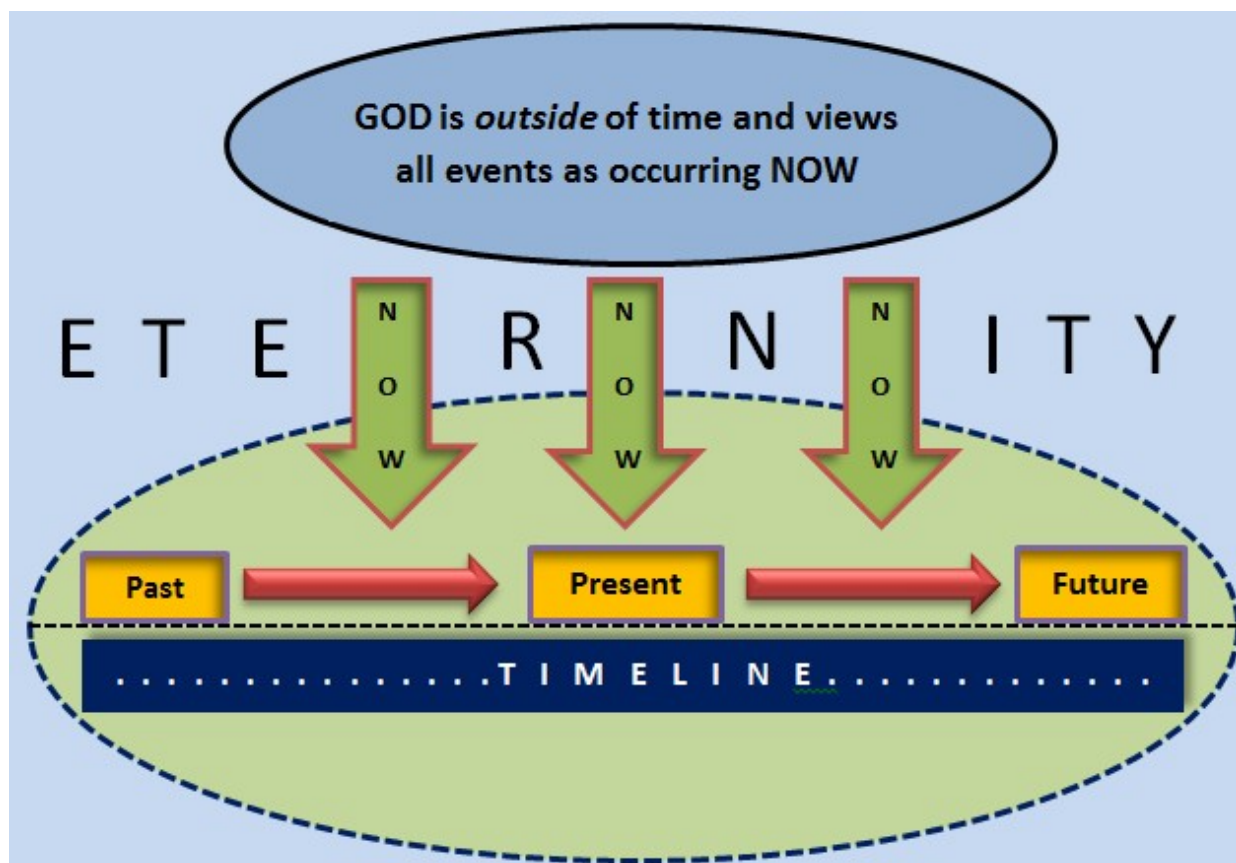
¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen [ἐκλεκτός] ² according to the foreknowledge [πρόγνωσις] of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

These passages provide critical information in understanding and resolving the issue of God's foreknowledge and predestination.

1. Believers are the subject of God's foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, glorification, and His working of all things together for good. *Unbelievers* are never the subject of these teachings.
2. The texts state God predestined and chose those whom He foreknew; thus, foreknowledge *precedes* predestiny and election. Foreknowledge *governs* election.

God exists in eternity. Eternity is NOT simply a long time. It is non-time, i.e., timeless. No one really knows what time is but the scientists tell us it is a *physical* property of space-matter. Time is a fourth dimension of reality in addition to length, height, and width. For man, the present is NOW. For God, past, present, and future are NOW. God is outside time and its constraints. God experiences all events as NOW. We can only experience the present as NOW. Therefore, God sees all decisions we make (or will make) and all events as NOW. In effect, God has all eternity to contemplate each moment we

experience in time. We describe God's foreknowledge as something "future." But for God, foreknowledge as "future" is meaningless. For Him, it is simply NOW. The chart below illustrates God's relationship to time.



God inhabits eternity outside the time dimension. Past, present, and future are NOW for Him.

As we have seen, the proposition, "God wills that all be saved but chooses some to be saved" is illogical and can only make sense with additional information. The passages above, Romans 8.28-30 and 1 Peter 1.1-2, provide the missing piece of information. God's election and predestination of individuals is based upon His foreknowledge, which includes knowledge of all things that do happen and could possibly happen. The Scriptures reveal God has provided a witness of Himself to all men. All men know God exists. The Scriptures reveal God has given man a will to respond or to reject Him. Therefore, what

God foresees is man's response to that knowledge. If an individual responds to the light he has been given, the Lord will provide him with more information. Thus, like Lydia who listened to Paul, God opened her heart to respond (Acts 16.14) to the things she heard. Lydia was willing to know more and God opened her heart to believe Paul's gospel. Such explanation links all the Scriptures into a logical fit. God has given all men a knowledge of Himself. He desires all be saved. But He has also given men a will to accept or reject Him. A person can say, "I want to know more." Or he can say, "I have no interest." If a person responds, God provides more light. If he doesn't, God doesn't. The genius of God is He can give man free will and still have things come out exactly as He planned. In this, God is completely sovereign. Therefore, God predestines on the basis of His foreknowledge. Foreknowledge governs predestination but does not determine it since within foreknowledge are events that will not occur (since God knows all possible outcomes). Those who respond to God are those whom he saves; they become the elect and predestined.

Conclusion

Those who argue for God's absolute sovereignty in man's salvation have no answer for verses that declare God wants all to be saved. They address the issue by theological legerdemain (Spurgeon called it "theological gunpowder") by declaring "all men" means "all kinds of men." But the Scriptures are clear: man has a choice in salvation and God's will is not uncontested. Ultimately, we have to trust God. If God did not love us, would He have suffered on the cross for us? Does He love some more than others? No, God created each of us His image and loves us equally. God has provided salvation for each person. God has given everyone a choice to respond to His love or reject it. C. S. Lewis wrote, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be

done. All that are in Hell choose it”⁶ and “the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*.”⁷

¹ Paul meant the “knowledge of salvation,” not salvation itself. He was no universalist.

² I have yet to find a study on predestination in which God’s purpose in creating man is discussed.

³ Satan wished God to be the agent of evil against Job, “put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has.” This was a subtle temptation. Satan seeks to tempt God to not be God (cf. Matthew 4.1-11). God replied He would give Job over to Satan’s power.

⁴ The extent of the atonement is considered in my article [For Whom Did Christ Die?](#)

⁵ We know EXACTLY when the Lord will return because He told us. He will return when every Jew on the earth says, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”—and not a moment before (cf. Acts 2.36, 38; Romans 11.26).

⁶ C. S. Lewis. *The Great Divorce*. New York. Macmillan. 1946. p. 69.

⁷ C. S. Lewis. *The Problem of Pain*. New York. Macmillan. 1973. p. 115.

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