

**The Decrees of God**  
**Isaiah 46:8-13; Ephesians 1:3-14**  
**April 6, 2008**

- I. Decrees of God and Predestination
  - A. They are not the same thing
    1. or at least the decrees of God include more than predestination
    2. Scripture describes two different wills of God
      - a. the preceptive will – what God requires (e.g. Ten Commandments)
      - b. the decretive will – God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass
    3. Question and answer 7 refer to the decretive will of God
    4. Predestination involves one aspect of God’s decree
      - a. in fact, the Westminster Standards distinguish predestination and foreordination  
*WCF 3.3 By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.*
      - b. predestination specifically speaks of the elective, saving decree of God
      - c. foreordination speaks to the ordering of the rest of Creation, including the passing over of some to everlasting death
    5. God accomplishes his decrees through the means of creation and providence – and yes, this applies to all the decrees including predestination
  - II. God’s sovereign decree established (Isa. 46:8-10)
    - A. Context of this passage
      1. this passage falls in the part of Isaiah’s prophecy in which God sends words of comfort to the Israelites (see 40:1-2)
      2. in particular, in this chapter, God makes a clear distinction between himself and the idols of Babylon
      3. these verses (vv. 8-10) provide comfort in two ways
        - a. confidence for Israel because they serve the one true God (vv. 8-9)
        - b. comfort for Israel because of the faithfulness of God (v. 10)
      4. Despite the terrible circumstances, God’s plan will be accomplished
    - B. The “Contradiction” of an all-powerful, sovereign God and the existence of evil
      1. Isaiah’s answer – God’s good purpose will be accomplished
      2. the example of Cyrus – God’s unknowing anointed (45:5-6)
      3. Lam. 3:38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?
      4. doesn’t offer a solution – doesn’t explain the relationship between God’s sovereignty and the existence of evil  
**Spear: “The teaching of the Bible is that even in choosing to do evil, in a mysterious way sinners are carrying out God’s purposes.”**
      5. does say that evil does not stand outside of God’s plan, and that the sinful activities of man will not thwart his purpose  
*Acts 2:23<sup>23</sup> this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*
  - III. God’s sovereignty and predestination
    - A. The spiritual blessings of Christ – vv. 3-4
      1. God’s decrees rooted in Christ – chose us **in him**
      2. what do you receive? Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places
      3. how do you receive? v. 4
        - a. not chosen because you are or were holy and blameless
        - b. chosen to be holy and blameless
      4. chosen when? Before the foundation of the world – “his eternal purpose”

- B. The sovereign love of God – vv. 5-6
  - 1. the motive of his plan → grounded in his love
  - 2. predestined according to the purpose of his will
  - 3. the purpose of the plan → to the praise of his glorious grace
- C. Eternal plan worked out in history – vv. 7-10
  - 1. worked out in time and space history through the person of Jesus Christ
  - 2. redemption through his blood (7a), set forth in Christ (9b)
  - 3. what did God set forth in Christ? A plan for the fullness of time (10a)
    - a. typical question: Did God ordain what color socks or what color tie I would wear today?
    - b. God’s decrees related to the whole story of humanity – not merely abstract decrees, but the story of redemption worked out in history
  - 4. plan of redemption – to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth  
*Romans 11:36* <sup>36</sup>*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*
- D. The fruit of this doctrine
  - 1. confidence and assurance for believers – v. 11
    - a. in him (Christ) we have obtained an inheritance
    - b. that inheritance rests in the decrees of God, the one who works all things according to the counsel of his will
    - c. you can see how the general decrees of God (v. 11b) serve to strengthen our confidence in the salvific decrees of God (v. 11a)
  - 2. establishes the will of the creatures
    - a. God does not accomplish salvation by force
    - b. The Holy Spirit works in hearts so that we freely choose to obey the call of the gospel
    - c. Or God leaves men and women to their wicked hearts so that they freely choose to reject God
    - d. We must not confuse the preceptive and decretive will of God
  - 3. after explaining the sovereign, electing love of God, Paul points the Ephesians to their decision – vv. 12-13
    - a. you hoped in Christ – you believed in him – you confirmed God’s call on your life
    - b. God’s predestination establishes the will of the creature – he makes them ready and willing, and they respond in obedience, calling on the name of the Lord

#### IV. High Mystery of Predestination

- A. Why must we be careful with this doctrine?
  - 1. We cannot discover the relationship between God’s decrees, free will, and the existence of evil
  - 2. We must not elevate God’s decrees outside of their place in the system – in other words, we cannot ignore the call of the gospel for men and women to claim Christ
  - 3. We must not allow our belief in God’s decrees to override our responsibility to obey – His preceptive will, not his decretive will, governs our duty – make your calling and election sure
- B. But there are benefits from this doctrine (WCF 3.8)
  - 1. assurance and certainty of salvation
  - 2. praise, reverence, and admiration of God
  - 3. working humility and diligence in all who believe the gospel