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FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Modern scripture speaks unequivocally of the foreknowledge of God: "All things are present before mine eyes" (D&C 38:2). It affirms that God has a fulness of truth, a "knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they *are to come*" (D&C 93:24, emphasis added).

Divine foreknowledge includes the power to know even the thoughts and intents of the human heart: "There is none else save God that knowest thy thoughts and the intents of thy heart" (D&C 6:16). Divine foreknowledge is at least, in part, knowledge of his own purposive plans for the cosmos and for humankind, plans that "cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught" (D&C 3:1). "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18; Abr. 2:8). These include the conditions of the plan of salvation. For example, "God did elect or predestinate that all those who would be saved, should be saved in Christ Jesus, and through obedience to the Gospel" (*TPJS*, p. 189). It is likewise foreknown that all humankind will die, be resurrected, and be brought to judgment.

In scripture, the root terms for divine knowing connote more than a subject-object, cognitive relationship; they imply a close, direct, participative, affective awareness. Divine foreknowledge is the knowledge of a Heavenly Father, not knowledge of a metaphysical abstraction. Scriptures that speak of divine foreknowledge emphasize God's understanding of an experience with his people and their destiny rather than the content and logic of that knowledge. Anyone seeking to understand divine foreknowledge must begin by recognizing that scripture does not directly address the question as it has been formulated in philosophy and theology, where the emphasis is on the content and logic of knowledge. The scriptures are explicit that God knows all and that we can trust him. They have not been explicit about what that means philosophically or theologically. Consequently, short of new revelation, any answer to the theological question of God's foreknowledge can be only speculative.

In an attempt to reconcile divine foreknowledge and human freedom, major Jewish and Christian theologians and philosophers have offered three alternatives. In the first, both horns of the dilemma are affirmed: "Everything is foreseen, and freedom of choice is given." This is the position of Rabbi Akiba and Maimonides (Aboth 3, 19; Yad, Teshuvah 5:5), as well as of Augustine and Anselm (*City of God* 5.9–10; *The Harmony of the Foreknowledge, the Predestination, and the Grace of God with Free Choice* 1.3). Maimonides argues that though it is logically impossible for human foreknowledge of one's actions to be compatible with freedom, God's foreknowledge, which is of a different and mysterious kind, is compatible with freedom.

In the second, God's foreknowledge is limited. Since people are free, God knows the possibilities and probabilities of human choice, but not the inevitabilities. God is omniscient in knowing all that can be known; but not in knowing beforehand exactly how people will use their freedom, since that cannot be known because future, contingent events do not exist. This is the view of the Talmudist Gersonides (Levi Ben Gershon, 1288–1344; *Milhamot Adonai*, III, 6) and, with some modifications, of Charles Hartshorne and process philosophers.

In the third, humans are not genuinely free. Freedom is an illusion that arises from human ignorance of divine cause and necessity. All that individuals do is actually determined and predetermined. God both pre-knows and pre-causes all that occurs. This is the view of Spinoza and Calvin.

Historically, most Latter-day Saints have taken the first general position: everything is foreseen and freedom remains. Some have taken the second, that God's foreknowledge is not absolute. The third alternative, that human freedom is illusory, is incompatible with LDS belief in genuine free agency and responsibility. Praise and blame, accountability and judgment, are meaningless unless humans are free. Any doctrine of foreknowledge that undercuts this principle violates the spirit and letter of LDS scripture.

Consequently divine foreknowledge, however it is finally defined, is not PREDESTINATION. What God foresees is not, for that reason, divinely caused, even though it is in some sense known (Talmage, p. 317). Divine foreknowledge is the background of *foreordination*. But, again, foreordination is not pre-causation. Rather, "foreordination is a conditional bestowal of a role, a responsi-

bility, or a blessing which, likewise, foresees but does not fix the outcome” (Maxwell, p. 71).

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FOREORDINATION

Foreordination is the premortal selection of individuals to come forth in MORTALITY at specified times, under certain conditions, and to fulfill pre-designated responsibilities. In LDS interpretation, “foreordained” does not mean predetermined (*see* PREDESTINATION). It is the outcome of voluntary choice, not the violation or abrogation of it. The idea of preexistence and premortal preparation for earth life is hinted at in biblical sources, and evidence of it appears in some early Jewish-Christian sources. But it has been less prominent in later thought.

ABRAHAM was told that he was included among the valiant SPIRITS and was therefore chosen or *foreordained* before his birth to be a leader in God’s kingdom on earth (Abr. 3:22–23). The Lord likewise informed Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and . . . I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jer. 1:5). Alma₂ taught that priests belonging to a “holy order” were foreordained “according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works” (Alma 13:1, 3). The Prophet Joseph SMITH concluded that “every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was” (*TPJS*, p. 365). And in addition to these foreordinations to priesthood callings, many spirits may have been foreordained to specific nations and generations, which Paul characterized as the “bounds of habitation” (Acts 17:26), as well as to families and to varied assignments, work, or missions on earth.

While each of these selections is ultimately based on the omniscience and foreknowledge of

God, several factors may influence one’s earthly circumstances. Foreordination comes as a blessing or reward for premortal righteousness and valiant commitment to Jesus Christ. BIRTH into the house of ISRAEL and heirship to all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are often seen as the birth-right of dedicated souls (see Eph. 1:4–5; Rom. 9:4). These rights and blessings may still be obtained by any and all who elect to receive them, whether in this life or the next. People sooner or later will manifest, as Elder B. H. Roberts, of the Seventy, taught, “the strength of that intelligence and nobility to which their spirits had attained in the heavenly kingdom before they took bodies upon earth” (T. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith* [Salt Lake City, 1980], p. 2). The Doctrine and Covenants teaches that men and women may come to God through RIGHTEOUSNESS and diligence and thus become numbered with those who are “sons [and daughters] of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God” (D&C 84:34).

Through faithfulness on earth, whatever one’s premortal foreordination or prior covenants, one may, as PAUL taught, become “adopted” into the favored lineage: “They are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom. 9:6). Many, that is, may be foreordained to high missions in mortality, but may, through sin, rebellion, or sloth, fail in their foreordinations and give up their blessings. Obedience to the COVENANTS and ORDINANCES of the gospel is a primary factor in determining ultimate election to the chosen lineage.

Latter-day Saints further believe that the times, places, and circumstances of birth into mortality may be the outcome of former covenants and decisions as well as that which would be best, in divine wisdom, to provide both opportunities and challenges for the individual’s growth and development. Additionally, foreordination may also be based on God’s own purposes and plans to bless all of his children. The specifics of these factors remain unclear. As a result, a person’s premortal character can never be judged by his or her present station in life. Some of the most bitter and arduous circumstances may be, in the perspective of eternity, the most blessed, and perhaps even the situations that men and women elected and agreed to enter. Foreordination does not preclude the exercise of agency. Foreordination is a *conditional* preappointment to or bestowal of certain blessings and responsibilities.