

What does the verb “predestine” mean?

Because it is associated with “election” and “foreknowledge”, the definition for the term “predestine” has been confusing and challenging to understand. Some understand “predestine” as synonymous to “foreknow”. To begin the process of clarification, the relationship of these three terms can be seen in the following two verses:

To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **who are chosen** according to the **foreknowledge** 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 (1 Pet 1:1-2).

For those whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Rom 8:29)

These examples establish the fact that God elects and predestines based on His foreknowledge; foreknowledge governs God’s elective work.

The verb “predestine” comes from the Greek term “prohorizō,” which is the compound of “pro” and “horizō.” Grammatically, the verb “prohorizō” is used in the aorist tense which indicates a definite event that will occur at some future time. The active voice portrays God as initiating this action.

“Pro” means “in front” in a spatial sense or “before” in a temporal sense.

“Horizō” means “to determine or ordain” or “to appoint.”

Combined as “prohorizō,” the meaning of “decide upon beforehand , foreordain” or “pre-appoint” is derived. Through the influence of Jerome, who is largely responsible for the Latin Vulgate, “prohorizō” developed a sense of “destiny” which led to the English translation of “predestine.”

The Greek verb “prohorizō” is very rare and is not even found in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament).

Found once in classical Greek literature by Demosthenes, before the New Testament, “prohorizō” is used to mean “lay claim” in a contractual dispute of property and money. Other extrabiblical uses include the idea of laying claim of a day as in “appointing” a day for a wedding before it occurred.

More detailed studies of “horizō” indicate its original meaning as “setting a boundary” as seen in the Old Testament (Num 34:6; Josh 13:27; 15:12; 18:20). Its cognate compound “aphorizō” provides the Hebrew meaning “to separate” (Gen 10:5; Deut 4:41; Lev 13:4) and when referring to the gospel, it means “to mark or appoint one for God’s service” (Acts 13:2; Rom 1:1; Gal 1:15).

From these linguistic studies, instead of “predestine,” “prohorizō” is more accurately understood as “pre-appoint” or “determine beforehand” Thus, foreknowledge governs God’s elective work and pre-appointment / predetermination.

With a better understanding of “prohorizō,” one gains a more accurate understanding of its use in the New Testament (Acts 4:28; Rom 8:29-30; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:5-11).

“to do what your power and plan had already **determined beforehand** should happen.” (Acts 4:28 [Complete Jewish Bible])

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In Acts 4:25-26, quoting from Psalm 2:1-2, the apostles understood the opposition to Christ as a fulfillment of this Messianic prophecy. The characters of this Old Testament prophecy were identified as contemporaries of the apostles: “Nations” as Gentiles, “peoples” as people of Israel, “kings” as Herod and “rulers” as Pontius Pilate. Since this prophecy occurred a thousand years before the time of Christ, the apostles saw its fulfillment as evidence of God’s sovereign power and will; divine prophecy revealed what was *predetermined* to occur at its appointed time.

It is worthwhile to note that the events that God “determined beforehand” pre-appointed did not simply involve Believers; it included non-Believers who played an important role in the events leading up to the Crucifixion. The use of “determined beforehand” describes the certainty of God’s sequence of election, timing and outcome.

“Furthermore, we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called in accordance with His purpose; because those whom He knew in advance, He also **determined in advance** would be conformed to the pattern of His Son, so that He might be the firstborn among many brothers; and those whom He thus **determined in advance**, He also called; and those whom He called, He also caused to be considered righteous; and those whom He caused to be considered righteous He also glorified! (Rom 8:28-30 [Complete Jewish Bible])

In Romans 8:29 Paul reveals the certainty of complete sanctification by revealing the process of being made holy. By divine foreknowledge and choice, a Believer is *predetermined* to become like Jesus Christ.

Many consider this the sequence of salvation: a) those who He knew in advance (foreknowledge), b) He determined in advance, c) He called, d) He also considered righteous (justified), and e) He glorified. While faith may appear to be excluded in this sequence, it is not as the whole context of Romans is about justification by faith alone (Rom 3:21-31; 4:1-25; 5:1-21) and sanctification by faith (Rom 6:1-23; 7:1-25; 8:1-39).

“Instead we speak the wisdom of God, hidden in a mystery, that God **determined** before the ages for our glory.” (1 Cor 2:7 [NET])

The wisdom Paul speaks of, a “mystery” or “hidden” to principally Jews but including all non-Believers, is God’s plan of salvation through Jesus Christ (Matt 11:25; Rom 16:25-26). Based on God’s grace and received through faith alone, it meant the ultimate glorification of Believers. Paul affirms God’s omniscience that by using evil men to crucify Jesus, atonement was accomplished and fulfilled God’s sovereign plan of salvation that was *determined before the ages*.

“He **determined in advance** that through Yeshua the Messiah we would be His sons — in keeping with His pleasure and purpose — so that we would bring Him praise commensurate with the glory of the grace He gave us through the Beloved One. In union with Him, through the shedding of His blood, we are set free — our sins are forgiven; this accords with the wealth of the grace He has lavished on us. In all His wisdom and insight He has made known to us His secret plan, which by His own will He designed beforehand in connection with the Messiah and will put into effect when the time is ripe — His plan to place everything in heaven and on earth under the Messiah’s headship. Also in union with Him we were given an inheritance, we who were **picked in advance** according to the purpose of the One who effects everything in keeping with the decision of His will,” (Eph 1:5-11 [Complete Jewish Bible])

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul affirms the blessing of being a Believer regardless of ethnicity (Jew or Gentile). Believers are *pre-appointed* to adoption as God’s sons. And because of Christ, Believers have received an inheritance which was already *predetermined* according to God’s plan and purpose for Believers.

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When Paul speaks of “prohorizō,” he writes within the context of his personal conversion experience (see the article “Examining the Election, Call and Conversion of Saul the Pharisee”). He sees faith as a matter of obedience and his rigorous training as a Pharisee as preparation to be an authentic witness of Jesus Christ.

Paul uses the verb “prohorizō” to demonstrate God’s sovereignty and foreknowledge and provides a hope to Believers about their future.

In accordance to God’s foreknowledge, often revealed in prophecy, God elects and pre-appoints / predetermines people, nations and events according to His unfolding plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

And the God’s plan is not yet complete until the Kingdom of God arrives and consummates the adoption of His holy people as His children.

References:

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