

[1968. In *Encyclopedia of Christianity*. Edwin A. Palmer, ed. Wilmington, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education.]

FOREKNOWLEDGE. The term *foreknowledge* implies knowledge beforehand. It is clearly attributed to God in the Bible. The most obvious instances are the prophecies: “It shall bruise they head and thou shalt bruise his heel”; “the scepter shall not depart from Judah until . . .”; “behold, I will red the kingdom . . . and given ten tribes to thee”; “this same Jesus shall so come in like manner.” Not only do such prophecies show that God knows these future events, but they imply far more. The prophecy that the Messiah was to be a descendant of David implies God's knowledge that Athalia could not extinguish the royal line. The principle in these prophecies is summed up by a very clear statement of foreknowledge in Isaiah 46:9-10, “I am God . . . declaring the end from the beginning.” Scripture even attributes to God a knowledge of what would happen under contrary-to-fact conditions. In I Sameul 23 God told David that the citizens of Keilah would surrender him to Saul if he should stay there. So David left the city.

The foreknowledge of God is part of God's omniscience. Aristotle provides an interesting contrast with the Scriptural position in denying omniscience. Aristotle believe that the object of knowledge must be something real; and since future events are no yet real, they are now unknowable. Thus the future is not certain and inevitable; no predictions or prophecies are possible.

In the Bible the future is certain and knowable because God decrees it. God knew from eternity that jesus would be crucified, *not* because He *looked ahead* and *discovered* it, but because He *intended* it to happen. Foreknowledge is not merely a knowledge of something future. First of all it is God's knowledge of His own mind. This knowledge is as eternal as God is. Unlike our condition, there is no succession of ideas in God's mind. He does not lack an idea today that He will have tomorrow, nor will He forget tomorrow an idea He has today. Hence, God's knowledge is sometimes called *intuitive* rather than *discursive*. These terms are unfortunate, because if *discursive* means “syllogistic,” then God thinks in syllogism (Rom 4:2-3), and because men also presumably have intuitions. But these terms as applied to men cannot be applied to God. In reality, Divine foreknowledge is far removed from human “knowledge” about the future.

The term *foreknowledge* has a meaning similar to that of the term *knowledge*. The term *knowledge* in the Bible has a meaning very different from that in ordinary English. Is Ephesians 3:19, concerning human knowledge, just a play on words: “to know the love of God that surpasses knowledge”? But Psalm 1:6, with reference to Divine knowledge, says, “The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” Does not God also “know” the way of the ungodly? Is He not omniscient? Still more striking is Amos 3:2: “You only have I known of all the

families of the earth.” This cannot mean that God is ignorant of other nations. It means that the Biblical use of know differs from that of ordinary English. In a similar way *foreknowledge* is used in a way that differs from ordinary English.

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