

What does the term “foreknow” mean?

While the noun “foreknowledge” (Greek: prognōsis) means knowledge of future events with an implication of divine direction or control (see the article: What does the foreknowledge of God mean? at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/1God/OmniscienceWhatDoesForeknowledgeMean.aspx), various scholars attempt to parse the sequence of divine thought. For example:

Is God's foreknowledge of future events conditional on His plan or decree?

Or is God's plan or decree conditional on His foreknowledge of future events?

In the only two instances where there are references to divine foreknowledge, one can gain a sense of this complex issue:

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. (Acts 2:22-23)

In Peter's witness to the Jews, there is the suggestion that God's “predetermined plan” for His Son Jesus precedes the “foreknowledge of God.”

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, 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)

As Peter encourages the northern region of Asia Minor, there is the suggestion that the “foreknowledge of God the Father” precedes His act of choosing.

These questions force one to a careful study in the pursuit of learning more about the character of God. One approach to this problem is to study the verb “foreknow” which in Greek is “proginōskō”.

Foreknow (Greek: “proginōskō”)

The verb “proginōskō” is found in the LXX only three times and always without any Hebrew equivalent. This verb is found in five instances in the Bible and all in the New Testament. According to the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, it means “foreknow”, “know beforehand or in advance”, or “choose beforehand.”

In two instances (Acts 26:5; 2 Peter 3:17), the term “proginōskō” is used in reference to human beings who had prior knowledge of a person or concept.

since they have known (**proginōskō**) about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. (Acts 26:5)

In presenting his defense to Agrippa, Paul is making the statement that the Jews had known him previously as Saul the Pharisee.

Your therefore, beloved knowing this beforehand (**proginōskō**), be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness. (2 Pet 3:17)

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Peter concludes his letter to his Christian friends with a reminder to “remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.” (2 Pet 3:2) In remembering the words of the apostles they heard before, they will not be carried away by false teachers.

In three instances (Rom 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet 1:20), the term “*proginōskō*” is used in reference to God who had prior knowledge of a person, group of people or concept.

For He was foreknown (***proginōskō***) Who before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you. (1 Pet 1:20)

In 1 Peter 1:2, Peter uses the noun “prognosis” with the meaning of the “foreknowledge of God.” In that instance, the “elect” were those God had foreknown would be His people, because of their “obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood” (1 Pet 1:2). God’s election of people was for a purpose, to be His own people; however, only those who had faith in Jesus Christ were of the elect (see the article: The Parable of the Wedding Banquet at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/2JesusChrist/ParableKOGrejectWeddingBanquet.aspx).

In 1 Peter 1:20, Peter states that Jesus Christ was “foreknown” before the foundation of the world; however, the context suggests something more than the foreknowledge of Jesus and His death. It implies that Jesus’ purpose of providing atonement and the means for salvation was known beforehand.

For those whom He foreknew (***proginōskō***), 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)

This well known passage must be understood within the context of the chapter. Romans 8 is about the Believer’s life through the Holy Spirit, the benefits of Its indwelling and the future consummation of salvation in the form of glorification (Rom 8:1-25).

With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:17), Romans 8:25 (“But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it”) is in reference to the benefits of sonship, heirs as children of God and the glory still to come (Rom 8:14-19; 2 Cor 1:21-22; 5:5).

Romans 8:29-30 affirms the destiny of the Believer and process of sanctification from justification to glorification.

Did God foreknow, because He chose who would be Believers or did He know who would chose to be Believers? Exodus 19:5-6 indicates that God chose the nation of Israel; but, the elect were those who obeyed God’s voice and keep His covenant.

God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew (***proginōskō***). Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? (Rom 11:2)

Paul speaks of the nation of Israel that God knew before the onset of Jesus Christ. They were “a disobedient and obstinate people” (Rom 10:21). Despite their history of disobedience, God does not reject the nation; but, He will use the Gentiles to bring them to faith (Rom 11:11-15).

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In all the passages where “proginōskō” is found, it can be understood naturally as “to know beforehand.” This view would lend support to the concept that God’s foreknowledge precedes His plan.

However, there are others that would disagree and believe that God’s plan precedes His foreknowledge. This interpretation is derived by using the hermeneutic approach of studying the root words of "fore" and "know" and interpreting the compound term "foreknow" as "forelove." This view holds that what God decrees (or plans), He foreknows; in other words, God's foreloving of certain people is the consequence of His decree (or plan).

If one considers this is an important doctrinal point, take some time to evaluate the hermeneutics of each view and determine which is faithful to the biblical text. For example, examine the hermeneutics of how “love” is derived from a root word study of “know” in both the Old and New Testament. Such a study will help one become a better student of the Bible and the knowledge gained can be applied in other areas of theology.