

PAINFUL PROPHECIES

Matthew 26:30-35

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they went out to the Mount of Olives.

31 Then Jesus said to them,
“You will all fall away because of Me this night,
for it is written,

‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD,
AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.’

32 “But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”

33 But Peter answered and said to Him,
“Even though all may fall away because of You,
I will never fall away.”

34 Jesus said to him,
“Truly I say to you that this very night,
before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.”

35 Peter said to Him,
“Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.”
All the disciples said the same thing too.

(Matthew 26:30–35, 2022 LSB)

GOD’S WORD AND DECREES

It is an enormous blessing to have the Word of God in writing, isn’t it? There is so much that the Scriptures tell us that we would never otherwise know.

- Most importantly, it tells us about God, our Creator, Yahweh.
- It tells us how everything came to be, including us.
- It tells us what our created purpose was and is: to glorify God (First Corinthians 10:31) and enjoy Him forever (Psalm 73:25).
- It tells us *why* we don’t glorify Him or enjoy Him: Adam sinned, and his nature – which is our nature as well – became fallen and rebellious.
- And it tells us God’s predetermined plan – to save sinners through the death and resurrection of His own Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross.

Because Yahweh cannot make a mistake or be wrong, His Word is inerrant and infallible.

Being the only God-breathed revelation we have (Second Timothy 3:16), the Word of God is all-sufficient for all we need for life and godliness (Second Peter 1:3).

It teaches us all we need to know. It rebukes us when we are wrong. It corrects our errors and misunderstandings. And it trains us in righteousness.

It is not overstating the matter to say that the Bible, the printed book you hold in your hands, is all the information anyone needs about life and godliness.

All this is true of the Word of God because of Yahweh's absolute knowledge. He doesn't *guess* at what might happen. He doesn't 'predict' in the same sense that people today predict the outcome of a football game. God knows everything, for at least two reasons.

The first reason for Yahweh's knowledge is His decrees. Acts 2:23 speaks about "**the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.**" Acts 4:28 speaks of "**whatever God's hand and purpose predestine to occur.**" In Genesis 50:20, Joseph says to his brothers, "**As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.**" Psalm 33:11 calls God's speaks about the counsel of Yahweh standing forever, and the thoughts of His heart from generation to generation. Isaiah 46:10 says that Yahweh is the one who declares the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done. All these are references to the decrees of God. His decrees are beyond number. They have to do with everything that happens, not just with people but with every single aspect of creation. Matthew 10:29 speaks of sparrows being two for a penny, and yet not a single one dies apart from Yahweh. Nothing happens accidentally. Nothing happens automatically. The Creator has actively governed every atom since the moment they were created. What Yahweh decrees takes place, and nothing takes place that He has not decreed, including Satan's rebellion and the fall of Adam.

The second reason for Yahweh's knowledge is His eternal nature. He doesn't look down the corridors of time to see what will happen. Just as God is omnipresent, meaning that He is in every place at once, He is eternal and is at every time at once. Revelation 1:4, 8 says that Yahweh is "**the One who IS and who WAS and who is TO COME,**" all in the same moment. Time is part of creation, but before creation took place, God was (Genesis 1:1). He observes time in creation just as He observes creation itself, but He is no more hindered by time than He is by creation; a thousand years and a single day are the same to Him (Second Peter 3:8).

A. W. Tozer wrote in his wonderful book, *The Knowledge Of The Holy*:

“God dwells in eternity, but time dwells in God.

He has already lived all our tomorrows as He has lived all our yesterdays. ...

For [God], everything that will happen has already happened.

This is why God can say, “I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning.”

He sees the end and the beginning in one view.”

God’s knowledge of events is perfect because He is the perfect witness of everything that takes place. Some of God’s decrees and some of His perfect knowledge are revealed to us in the Scripture. He has revealed in His Word what we need to know for life and godliness. After that final Passover and first Lord’s Supper, the Lord Jesus revealed the fulfillment of Scripture to His disciples.

SCRIPTURE FULFILLED

Matthew 26:30-32

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“You will all fall away because of Me this night,
for it is written,

‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD,

AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.’

32 But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”

(Matthew 26:30–32, 2022 LSB)

There are many prophecies about Jesus the Messiah in the Old Testament. Most are concerned only with Him, but a few include others. For instance, Psalm 41:9 foretells Judas’ betrayal of the Lord. And Zechariah 13:7, which Jesus cites here, foretells the falling away of the other disciples.

Understandably, we wish that every Scripture was positive and happy, but we know that’s not the case. There are a number of prophecies and prophetic pictures of the Lord’s suffering and death. And, as we see, Yahweh foretold through the prophet Zechariah that Jesus’ disciples would abandon Him when He was struck down. Because of the decrees and eternal presence of God, these are not guesses but historical facts recorded before they took place. God’s decrees never fail. His knowledge is never incorrect. His Word is without error (inerrant) and incapable of being wrong (infallible).

The Lord says in Isaiah 55:10-11,

10 “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
 And do not return there without watering the earth
 And making it bear and sprout,
 And giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
 It will not return to Me empty,
 Without accomplishing what pleases Me,
 And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”
(Isaiah 55:10–11, 2022 LSB)

Let me ask you something: could anything prevent the crucifixion of Jesus? Was there any possibility that Judas would lead the guards to the wrong location, or that the chief priests would repent and believe during His trials, or Pilate would stand firm against their demands that Jesus be crucified? None whatsoever. Jesus would die on Passover because Yahweh had decreed it and prophesied it in His Word.

Let me ask you something else: could anything prevent the disciples from falling away from Jesus that night? Was there any possibility that they would be infused with sudden courage or that their love for Him would cause them to stand with Him through the trials? Again, none whatsoever. Yahweh didn't merely foresee that Jesus' disciples would abandon Him; Yahweh decreed it. Their falling away was as much by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God as the Lord's death on the cross. God had decreed it. His Word had prophesied it. In fact, Jesus also prophesied it, didn't He?

Praise God, Jesus didn't stop there. He went on,

32 “But after I have been raised,
 I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”
(Matthew 26:32, 2022 LSB)

God had also decreed Jesus' resurrection and the restoration of His disciples; that's why He said He would go ahead of them to Galilee and implied that He would see them there.

DEFENSIVE UNBELIEF

Matthew 26:33

33 But Peter answered and said to Him,
 “Even though all may fall away because of You,
 I will never fall away.”

(Matthew 26:33, 2022 LSB)

We can rephrase Peter’s meaning this way. “Lord, You might be right about *those* other guys, but You are completely wrong about me!” Peter thought that he knew himself much better than Jesus knew him. This wasn’t the first time Peter had objected to the Lord’s prophetic statements. About six or eight months before Jesus had first mentioned that He would be killed and then raised from the dead. Peter took Him aside and said, “**God forbid it, Lord; this shall not happen to You!**” (Matthew 16:21-22). In other words, Peter claimed to know God’s will better than Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lord of Glory, the Savior of the World, the Eternal Word made flesh. He engages in a sort of defensive unbelief. I don’t think Peter doubted Jesus very much, but when his own self-image was on the line, he was compelled to insist that HE was true and the Son of God a liar.

We can feel for Peter, can’t we? We don’t mind positive, happy Scriptures. In Matthew 25:34, Jesus foretells the moment when He, the King, will say to His people, “**Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom, which has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world!**” That’s a promise to claim! How about Romans 8:32, “**He who indeed did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?**”

But prophecies of suffering and hardship are a different matter. Peter didn’t want to hear that he would fall away. At that moment, it was impossible for him even to admit the possibility that Jesus could be right. “**Even though all *these* fall away, I will never fall away.**” But it was so very important that he take Jesus’ words to heart. So Jesus goes on:

34 Jesus said to him,
 “Truly I say to you that this very night,
 before a rooster crows,
 you will deny Me three times.”

(Matthew 26:34, 2022 LSB)

This was Peter's opportunity to agree that Jesus was right. "Oh, Lord, forgive me for daring to accuse You of being wrong! I hate the idea, but if You say I will fall away, then I will. Please don't leave me in that fallen state!" That would have been a humble, repentant response.

And, of course, Peter does exactly what we would do in his place:

35 Peter said to Him,
"Even if I have to die with You,
I will not deny You."
All the disciples said the same thing too.
(Matthew 26:35, 2022 LSB)

"No, Lord, You couldn't be more wrong about me! I know myself infinitely better than You do! And I will prove myself to You. If the moment comes that You are crucified, I'll be there with You, one cross over."

BRINGING IT HOME

Most of God's people don't have a problem with Him "**working all things according to the counsel of His will**," as Ephesians 1:11 says. We just rarely, if ever, expect that "the counsel of His will" might take us through the valley of the shadow of death or that He has decreed and witnessed our sinful rebellion against Him. Have you ever made promises to the Lord about your future self?

- "Lord, I won't commit *that* sin again, I promise."
- "Lord, I've learned my lesson, and I'll never doubt Your forgiveness again."
- "Lord, I've wasted too many opportunities; I'll never stay silent about the Gospel again."
- "Lord, I'll never be like *that* person who is so [fill in the blank]."

We have broken every one of these kinds of promises, haven't we? How long did we keep them before breaking them? A year? A month? A day? An hour? We've certainly broken these often enough to know that we should never make promises to God.

Jesus made a very specific prophetic statement to the eleven disciples about their behavior over the span of a few hours. He doesn't do that with us. But He does tell us about our earthly lives in Him.

2 For we all stumble in many ways ...
 (James 3:2, 2022 LSB)

9 Who can say, “I have kept **my** heart pure, I am clean from **my** sin”? [Answer: no one!]
 (Proverbs 20:9, 2022 LSB)

22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,
23 but I see a different law in my members, waging war against the law of my mind
 and **making me a captive to the law of sin** which is in my members.
 (Romans 7:22–23, 2022 LSB)

17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh;
 for these are in opposition to one another, **so that you do not do the things that you want.**
 (Galatians 5:17, 2022 LSB)

There is no hope for us if we think that we can stop ourselves from sinning, or fulfill all the promises we make to the Lord. But there is eternal hope for us in the words Jesus spoke to Peter in Luke 22:31-32.

31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift **all of you** [plural] like wheat.
32 But I have prayed earnestly for **you** [singular, so just Peter], that **your faith** may not fail;
 and **you**, once **you** have returned, strengthen your brothers.”
 (Luke 22:31–32, 2022 LSB)

Sifting like wheat doesn’t mean looking for sin or weakness. No one had to go searching for Peter’s sins and weaknesses! They aren’t secret! *Sifting* means *separating*. The devil wanted to separate the disciples from the Lord Jesus and from one another. And remarkably, Jesus gave him permission! It might shock you, but Jesus didn’t seem to be particularly worried about the outcome. Why not? He says to Peter,

32 “But I have prayed earnestly for you,
 that your faith may not fail;
 and you, once you have returned, strengthen your brothers.”
 (Luke 22:32, 2022 LSB)

Satan *would* separate them, and Peter *would* fall away, but he also *would* return to fellowship with the Lord. Yahweh had decreed both events. He foretold them to Peter and the disciples. As the Son of God, Jesus was a witness to Peter's denials and restoration before creation took place.

Beloved, the Father didn't only elect those who would be perfect Christians.

Jesus didn't die only for the salvation of those who would never suffer weakness.

The Spirit doesn't only dwell in flawless saints.

The Father elects sinners. The Son died for sinners. The Spirit dwells in sinners. We are not safe and secure in Christ because we are able to keep ourselves, but because our faithful God has decreed our justification, sanctification, and glorification!

Here are three promises from the Scriptures that comfort my heart, and I hope they will comfort yours as well.

27 "Peace I leave with you; **My peace** I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."
(**John 14:27, 2022 LSB**)

1 Therefore, **having been justified by faith,**
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
2 through whom also we have obtained our **introduction by faith**
into this grace in which we stand;
and we boast in hope of the glory of God.
(**Romans 5:1–2, 2022 LSB**)

6 Be anxious for nothing, [**including your own sin and weakness**]
but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.
7 And the peace of God,
which surpasses all comprehension,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
(**Philippians 4:6–7, 2022 LSB**)