

IN MEDIO

Volume 2, Issue 1, January 2007

The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man Part Three: “The Scroll of Life ... from the Founding of the World”

This is the third and final installment in a series of online articles that I have produced in preparation for my upcoming debate with Dr. Robert Morey on the nature and extent of God’s knowledge, and whether or not the Bible teaches that mankind has “free will.”

In Parts One and Two I have provided my and Jehovah’s Witnesses’ understanding of these subjects primarily in the light of the Old Testament book of Isaiah and the New Testament book of Romans. Here I intend to bring the teachings of both of these and other biblical books together and discuss them in relation to an item mentioned in both the Old and in the New Testaments, “the scroll of life.”

The Bible

Though each of us has the ability to know what is good and what is bad (Genesis 3:27), though we can see God’s “invisible qualities ... from the world’s creation onward” (Romans 1:18–21), I do not believe that God has left us without any written revelation of his will. I have reasons for believing that the Bible contains that written revelation, one of which is the close correspondence I see between the Bible and the “things made” (Romans 1:20). I see a living, personal Being in the creation around me, and I see that same Being in the books of the Bible.

In the creation I see the Maker of the Tyrannosaurus Rex dinosaur and the Pomeranian puppy dog. In the Bible I see, Jehovah, the “God of gods” (Psalms 136:2), heavenly and the earthly rulers and judges (Psalm 8:5; 82:6; John 10:34–35), and the God of slaves, the lowly and the poor of the earth (Exodus 1:13–14; Psalm 82:1–4). In the creation I see purpose and design, meant for people who are “good.” In the Bible, there is purpose and design, for “good people” to “reside in the earth” (Proverbs 2:20–21). In the creation, I see no purpose, and no design, for people who are “wicked.” In the Bible, there is no purpose, no design for “the wicked,” except that they be “cut off from the very earth” (Proverbs 2:22).

The Bible is itself a collection of books containing a history of humankind, a history of the people chosen by God and through whom a promised “Messiah” would come (Daniel 9:25). It also contains a history of the birth, life, and death of that Messiah, and of his resurrection. The Bible explains how this Messiah’s life, death, and resurrection provide a legal basis upon which Jehovah God can redeem mankind from our sinful desires (Genesis, the entire Pentateuch, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the New Testament books of Romans, Hebrews, and James). Our “sin” is a part of the condition that has resulted from our using the ability to decide for ourselves, and on our own, what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. Since it was God’s expressed will that we not have this ability before we were ready, if ever, then where we ‘fail to do what we know is right it is a sin’ (Genesis 2:17; James 4:17). For such sins we are in need of redemption before God, otherwise he would be a God who accepts sin, as a behavioral norm.

The Bible also teaches us how to live in ways that are pleasing, not only to Jehovah God, but also to our fellow man (Mark 12:29–31). It teaches us to look after orphans and widows (James 1:27), to not be partial or show favoritism (James 2:9; 3:17), for wives to honor husbands and for husbands to honor their wives (1 Peter 3:1–7), for children to be obedient to their parents and for parents not to irritate their children (Ephesians 6:1–4). These, and many other simple yet profoundly moral teachings, are found in the Bible.

Therefore, if the Bible does indeed contain God’s written revelation of his will to mankind, then we can see from these teachings, together with the creation of the world around us, the personality of Jehovah God. Of course, in the Bible the best picture we have of God is his own Son, Jesus Christ (John 14:9; Hebrews 1:3), for he with humility upheld all of these and every single other law of God, perfectly (Hebrews 4:15), even with “lowliness of mind” (Matthew 23:11; Ephesians 2:4; Philippians 2:5–8). Thus, if he is to be King over all the earth, the Bible shows us what kind of King the earth will have (Isaiah 9:6–7; 11:1–9).

The Bible is, indeed, a collection of books unlike any other in the history of the world, with a wealth of credible, historical evidence supporting the things it describes. It also has a manuscript history that is not comparable to any other work of antiquity. It is no wonder, then, that it remains the best selling book of all time.

‘Weeds Sown among Wheat’

However, though the Bible has all of the earmarks of being a divine provision, a provision of a God who watches over the earth and those in it, it has been given to men and women who do not choose perfectly what is good and what is bad. The moment any communication from God is given to humankind it becomes subject to humanity—sinful humanity—humanity that has the ability to decide for itself what is right and what is wrong, but, again, not with the blessing from God to do so (Genesis 2:15–16; 3:3, 11,

17). Our receipt and handling of God's revelation, either his written word or his glorious creation, is not perfect, and so both end up corrupted by human hands to some extent. Then there are actual living enemies of God, the foremost of whom the Bible calls "Satan" (Job 2:1). I do not believe such enemies have left off from trying to deceive those made in God's image about God's will, whether it be by corrupting his written revelation or his creation (Genesis 3:1; Job 2:2-5). In fact, as we will see, Jesus taught that Satan is very involved in corrupting his work.

A notable example of how God has permitted his written revelation to be corrupted involves the use of God's own name, which is used nearly seven thousand (7,000) times in the Old Testament in the forms, translated in English, "Jehovah" and "Jah." Yet, most modern translations of the Hebrew text use words such as "Lord" or "God," instead of a translation of God's name (compare modern translations of Exodus 17:16; Psalm 68:4; 104:35; Isaiah 26:4). Indeed, even in the few New Testament passages where the divine name has been preserved, it is hidden in an expression rather than seen in the translation of most Bibles (Revelation 19:1-6 [where the Greek text has *allelouia*, which is a combination of *allelou* and *ia*, transliterations of the Hebrew words *hallelu* ("praise you") and *Yah* (the divine name, "Jah"), from which comes the expression "Hallelujah"]). (See *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics* [Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2007], Chapter 1, for more on this and other issues related to the use and pronunciation of "Jah Jehovah's" name.) At every turn the praise of "Jah" is stifled, except in translations such as the NWT.

But even what is uncorrupted textually is often "twisted" into teachings and traditions of men that 'invalidate the word of God' (Matthew 15:6; Acts 20:30). These teachings are often "sown" among that which is true and good, causing confusion and doubt among the world. Jesus taught:

Matthew 13:24-30 (NWT)

Another illustration [Jesus] set before them, saying: "The kingdom of the heavens has become like a man that sowed fine seed in his field. While men were sleeping, his enemy came and oversowed weeds in among the wheat, and left. When the blade sprouted and produced fruit, then the weeds appeared also. So the slaves of the householder came up and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow fine seed in your field? How, then, does it come to have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy, a man, did this.' They said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go out and collect them?' He said, 'No; that by no chance, while collecting the weeds, YOU uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.

This illustration in particular caught the attention of Jesus' early followers. So much so that after the crowds left "his disciples came to him and said: 'Explain to us the illustration of the weeds in the field'" (Matthew 13:36). And so Jesus did explain it:

The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man
Part Three: “The Scroll of Life ... from the Founding of the World”

Matthew 13:37–39 (NWT)

In response he said: “The sower of the fine seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; as for the fine seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; but the weeds are the sons of the wicked one, and the enemy that sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is a conclusion of a system of things.

We must be careful, therefore, for the Devil has been and undoubtedly continues to be very active in sowing seed and making sure his “weeds” grow together with “the fine seed.” Jesus lets the Devil’s “weeds” grow in order to preserve also “the fine seed.” So it should not surprise or stumble anyone to find God’s revelations to humankind, or the entire “field” of the “world,” mixed with both the things of God and Christ, and the things of Satan, the Devil.

When it comes to the teachings of God’s word, I contend that the “Reformed” view of God’s knowledge and the “free will” of mankind, as represented by Dr. Robert Morey and other Doctors and scholars of the world, does not belong to the “field” of teachings ‘sown’ by Jesus Christ in association with his “kingdom.” “Reformed” theology is false, not just in one aspect, but nearly the entire system is filled with “weeds.” It does not honor Jehovah’s name. It does not teach the biblical Jesus Christ. It has not kept free from the world. And it does not teach the truth about the knowledge of God or the will of man, and in so doing it undermines the basis for judgment for each individual made clear in the Bible itself: the choices we make based on our desires or intentions.

In the Bible we read of Adam’s and Eve’s sinful choices against the will of God. We also learn how God allowed for the continuation of the present system of things, but how he put into motion a means of reconciliation (Genesis 3:15–17). The Bible also shows that Jehovah has been continuously answering the challenges of Satan respecting each one of us, and toward God himself (Job 1:6–2:10; 1 Peter 5:8). Like Job, we have since been subject to tests with or without our knowing it (2 Corinthians 2:11; 11:14–15; Revelation 12:9), for since Adam’s and Eve’s sins we, too, their children, have the same ability to choose good from bad, right from wrong (compare Isaiah 7:16).

Not even one of us can earn a righteous standing before God by what we do. But Jehovah God will give it to us as a result of his good pleasure and in the light of the choices we make, in particular our decision to choose him by showing him our love and by putting faith in his Son (John 3:16; Acts 10:43; James 2:5). It is our choices that determine whether or not our names are written in or wiped out from “the Lamb’s scroll of life” (Revelation 21:27). It is our “free will” that is a critical part of this process, and “Reformed” theology fails to teach this correctly.

God's Knowledge and Purpose, and the "Free Will" of Others

The most notable examples in the Bible of "free will" are Adam and Eve. To understand how their decisions played a part in God's purpose, and how Jehovah is glorified by allowing others to make their own decisions, we must unfold the original purpose of God as it is revealed in the Bible. Doing so will help us see for ourselves how our "free will" can be exercised under the sovereignty of Jehovah God. We can do this quickly and simply, so that everyone can see it.

We start at the point of man's creation:

Genesis 1:26-31 (NWT)

And God went on to say: "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have in subjection the fish of the sea and the flying creatures of the heavens and the domestic animals and all the earth and every moving animal that is moving upon the earth." And God proceeded to create the man in his image, in God's image he created him; male and female he created them. Further, God blessed them and God said to them: "Be fruitful and become many and fill the earth and subdue it, and have in subjection the fish of the sea and the flying creatures of the heavens and every living creature that is moving upon the earth." And God went on to say: "Here I have given to YOU all vegetation bearing seed which is on the surface of the whole earth and every tree on which there is the fruit of a tree bearing seed. To YOU let it serve as food. And to every wild beast of the earth and to every flying creature of the heavens and to everything moving upon the earth in which there is life as a soul I have given all green vegetation for food." And it came to be so. After that God saw everything he had made and, look! [it was] very good.

What you read above was the beginning of Jehovah's will for mankind dwelling upon the earth. You do not need Doctors, you do not need lawyers, and you do not need priests, pastors, or even elders of any kind to tell you what the account says, so long as it is translated in your own language and you can read it. This is true also for the next critical part of this history:

Genesis 2:15-17 (NWT)

And Jehovah God proceeded to take the man and settle him in the garden of E'den to cultivate it and to take care of it. And Jehovah God also laid this command upon the man: "From every tree of the garden you may eat to satisfaction. But as for the tree of the knowledge of good and bad you must not eat from it, for in the day you eat from it you will positively die."

Again, clear, simple, easy for all humankind to understand without any additional comment, as is also true of the further unfolding of God's will:

The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man
Part Three: “The Scroll of Life ... from the Founding of the World”

Genesis 2:18–25 (NWT)

And Jehovah God went on to say: “It is not good for the man to continue by himself. I am going to make a helper for him, as a complement of him.” Now Jehovah God was forming from the ground every wild beast of the field and every flying creature of the heavens, and he began bringing them to the man to see what he would call each one; and whatever the man would call it, each living soul, that was its name. So the man was calling the names of all the domestic animals and of the flying creatures of the heavens and of every wild beast of the field, but for man there was found no helper as a complement of him. Hence Jehovah God had a deep sleep fall upon the man and, while he was sleeping, he took one of his ribs and then closed up the flesh over its place. And Jehovah God proceeded to build the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman and to bring her to the man. Then the man said:

“This is at last bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh. This one will be called Woman, Because from man this one was taken.”

That is why a man will leave his father and his mother and he must stick to his wife and they must become one flesh. And both of them continued to be naked, the man and his wife, and yet they did not become ashamed.

There we have it: Jehovah’s will for humankind, man and woman, to live together and to have in subjection the creatures of the earth, to cultivate it, and to eat from it. The only command laid upon them was this: do not eat from one tree, “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.” Why? Because if they did, they would die (Genesis 2:17). Why would they die? Because Jehovah did not make them to decide for themselves what was good and what was bad. They had to first listen to him, and in so doing they would know what was good, and what was bad.

Jehovah could have made it so that Adam and Eve could not gain access to this tree, just as he made it so they could not eat from the “tree of life” (Genesis 3:22–24). But he did not. He let his command stand and he left it to Adam and to Eve to listen to him. Jehovah certainly knew it was possible for them to disobey him. But he also knew that they had no reason to disobey him, and on this basis he trusted that they would listen.

Then the will, not only of man, but of woman and of angels, decided what would happen next. What happened next was this: Satan chose to deceive Eve, and Adam chose to listen to the voice of his wife, instead of listening to the voice of his God. The result was disobedience because Eve *chose* to believe Satan, without reason, and Adam *chose* to listen to Eve, without reason. The result was Adam and Eve were allowed to know good from bad with respect to all that surrounded them, not merely with respect to “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.” Jehovah had to tell them it was wrong to eat from it. He did not have to tell them it was wrong to be naked (Genesis 3:7). They decided that on their own.

Thus, humankind had now not only the ability to make choices, which free will they had from their creation (proven by their choice to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad), but also an awareness of and the ability to decide what was good and what was bad without having to be told which was which, by Jehovah God. However, since in order to gain this awareness they first had to disobey God (the trap laid by Satan), once they took it respecting that which they did not know they were condemned by that which they did know, by the doing the one thing that God had told them not to do.

Jehovah's Witnesses, including myself, believe that it was not God's will for Satan to deceive Eve, or for Eve to be deceived, or for Adam to disobey God and take and eat the fruit brought to him by Eve. Jehovah's Witnesses, myself included, believe that had Adam obeyed the voice of Jehovah God then the earth today would be a much different place. We believe that had Adam remained faithful, Jesus Christ never would have had to die, and that today the earth would be "filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters are covering the very sea" (Isaiah 11:9). "Reformed" theology does not teach this. "Reformed" theology teaches that it was God's purpose "from all eternity" to have Christ suffer and die for us, as we will see below.

Jehovah's Witnesses and Reformed theologians do not believe what they do without reasons. Yet, each claim to get their reasons from the Bible. The only way to know who has the best reasons for believing what they do is for each party to present their best reasons and then everyone to evaluate them critically, comparing what is claimed with what is written, and how what is written can be understood grammatically and historically. That is what I intend to do on the subjects of God's knowledge and man's free will, beginning with Dr. Morey, and then with anyone else who challenges the biblical teaching regarding God's knowledge and the significance of mankind's free will.

As I made clear in Parts One and Two, by "free will" I mean that men and women have the ability to make choices; we can decide what to do on our own, though there are many factors in this life that can and do influence the decisions we make. Jehovah God himself can, and in my opinion does often influence the affairs of men and women in order to bring about his will. This was seen clearly from the study of the Bible books of Isaiah and Romans, in Parts One and Two. I believe that the Bible teaches clearly that mankind has the limitations of sin imposed upon us as an inheritance from Adam (Romans 5:12). But while we are all at times "a slave of sin" (John 8:34), and thus subject to "hurtful desires" (Colossians 3:5) which themselves produce sin (James 1:14-15), each of us can still choose the "way out" (1 Corinthians 10:13), which God makes available to us. We simply must not "turn in the opposite direction" when he 'opens our ears' (Isaiah 50:5).

A good example of this is Joseph, a sinner, but one who resisted the power of sin and the desire of the flesh by fleeing from Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:7-9). The best

example is Jesus Christ, who, like Adam, was perfect. Yet in his perfection he was subject to treatment that made him request that the “cup” of suffering pass from him, showing that he did not want to endure it. Who would? But he did not follow his own will. Instead he gave himself up entirely to the will of his Father, Jehovah (Matthew 26:39; John 8:54). Adam may have desired to please his wife, Eve, and thus he ate the forbidden fruit. But he should have resisted his own will, as did Jesus Christ, and given himself over to the one against whom he had no reason to sin. Adam did not. Jesus did:

Romans 5:17 (NWT)

For just as through the *disobedience* of the one man many were constituted sinners, likewise also through the *obedience* of the one [person] many will be constituted righteous [emphasis added].

Thus, in spite of sin, because of our free will and on the basis of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice, God through Christ “searches the kidneys and hearts, and [he] will give to [us] individually according to [our] deeds” (Revelation 2:23). In this, Part Three, I will defend the biblical teaching that God’s gift of life depends entirely upon him, and that it is something he gives to us because of what we do or, rather, because of our choices to obey or to disobey him. I will also explain how the “Reformed” position misunderstands this teaching to be one that makes life depend not on God, but on the individual, and how the “Reformed” view of God’s knowledge and mankind’s free will, in particular as presented by Dr. Robert Morey, is false.

Again, “Reformed” Theology is False

Reformed theologians from John Calvin to Robert Morey use the Bible in support of their view of God’s knowledge and sovereignty. I do not believe it supports their teachings on these and other important teachings, including the name and the identity of God. Therefore, in my opinion Reformed theologians and those who follow their teachings dishonor Jehovah in two ways: 1) they misrepresent the teachings of his Word and 2) they misrepresent him. Here, though, we are concerned only with the teaching of the Bible respecting the knowledge of God and the will of man, and how Reformed theology, as represented by Dr. Morey, differs from it.

Of course, anyone can say that another’s beliefs about God are false. But that is not enough. It has to be ‘explained and proven by references’ (Acts 17:3).

The best proof I can provide in support of my contention that Reformed theology, as represented by Dr. Morey, is false and that Dr. Morey is ‘disobeying the truth’ is by first presenting his claims and then evaluating those claims in the light of what I believe the Bible teaches and the reasons supporting my beliefs. Then those interested can consider Morey’s beliefs and arguments, my beliefs and arguments, and then decide for themselves whether one of us is right, or if you think we are both wrong.

Consider the following excerpt from my September 27, 2006, radio discussion with Dr. Morey, which took place starting at 24:34 of the show. As with the excerpt I presented in Part Two, I am here numbering the exchange in order to make clearer the sequence of information as it was given:

[1]Morey: Did God in fact know ahead of time, let's say, that Judas would choose to betray Christ and does Scripture indicate that God's foreknowledge was complete and he knew everything everybody would do concerning the crucifixion?

[2]Stafford: He knew that it would happen but "woe to the one through whom it comes."

[3]Morey: So in other words ...

[4]Stafford: That's Jesus' words.

[5]Morey: ...even though Judas' betrayal was fully understood from all eternity, so Luke 22:22 "it had been determined."

[6]Stafford: Well, I wouldn't say that.

[7]Morey: Well, Luke 22:22, "he went to betray Christ as it had been determined." At the same time...

[8]Stafford: But that doesn't say "determined from all eternity."

[9]Morey: Well that...yes...yes it does. Because as you take a word study of that word and you go over to Acts 2 and Acts 4, you find that the crucifixion of Christ was foreordained from the foundation of the world.

[10]Stafford: Well, that's not "eternity," that's the "foundation of the world."

[11]Morey: "Before the foundation of the world." From all eternity.

[12]Stafford: Yes, "Before" Adam and Eve had children, "before the throwing down of seed" God determined after Adam rebelled that there would be...that the serpent would bruise Jesus in the heel and that, thus, foretold his betrayal at the hands of one who eventually was named "Judas."

END OF TRANSCRIPTION

From the above we can see that, according to Dr. Morey, Luke 22:22, Acts 2, and Acts 4 teach that "Judas' betrayal was fully understood from all eternity." Therefore, we will

now consider these texts and accounts, as translated by the NWT, to see if in fact they teach what Morey claims:

(1) Luke 22:22 (with verse 21):

But, look! the hand of my betrayer is with me at the table. Because the Son of man is going his way according to what is marked out; all the same, woe to that man through whom he is betrayed [underline added]!

The Greek for “marked out” is *horismenon*, and is a form of the Greek verb *horizo*, which can mean to “*determine, appoint, fix, set*” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., edited and revised by Frederick W. Danker [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000], page 515 [hereafter, BDAG3]). It is in this same sense that I understand NWT’s “marked out.” Therefore, we can conclude that the betrayal of Jesus was “determined” or “marked out” before it happened. But, as I told Dr. Morey ([8]Stafford), Luke 22:22 “doesn’t say ‘determined from all eternity.’”

Morey’s reply ([9]Morey) was, “...yes it does.” He then refers to Acts 2 and Acts 4 as the basis for interpreting Luke 22:22 as teaching that “the crucifixion of Christ was foreordained from the foundation of the world,” which, again, he believes is “from all eternity” ([5]Morey). The only passages in Acts 2 that speaks to this issue in any way similar to the way Morey discusses it are Acts 2:22–23. The only verses in Acts 4 that relate in some way to what Morey says are Acts 4:24–28. We will consider them in the order of their occurrence:

(2) Acts 2:22–23:

[Peter says,] “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus the Naz·a·rene´, a man publicly shown by God to YOU through powerful works and portents and signs that God did through him in YOUR midst, just as YOU yourselves know, this [man], as one delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, YOU fastened to a stake by the hand of lawless men and did away with [underline added].

The Greek for “the determined counsel and foreknowledge” is *tei horismenei boulei kai prognosei*, and is represented well by the English in NWT, “the determined counsel and foreknowledge.” Though Peter does not immediately associate his assertion with an Old Testament text, as he does with the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:24–28), later on he does associate what was “announced beforehand through the mouth of all the prophets” with the acts of the Jewish people and their rulers concerning their ‘disowning’ and ‘killing’ of the Christ (Acts 3:13–18).

I would also argue that “the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God” concerning the suffering and killing of the Christ was “announced beforehand” by God himself, not “from all eternity,” but “before the foundation of the world.” This was after Adam and

Eve sinned and before the ‘seed of the world of mankind was sown’ (see below), in Genesis 3:15. But, again, as with Luke 22:22, Morey’s view that it was “fully understood from all eternity” is not supported by Acts 2:22–23. That leaves Acts 4:24–28:

(3) Acts 4:24–28:

Upon hearing this they with one accord raised their voices to God and said: “Sovereign Lord, you are the One who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all the things in them, and who through holy spirit said by the mouth of our forefather David, your servant, ‘Why did nations become tumultuous and peoples meditate upon empty things? The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers massed together as one against Jehovah and against his anointed one.’ Even so, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with [men of] nations and with peoples of Israel were in actuality gathered together in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, in order to do what things your hand and counsel had foreordained to occur [underline added].

Once again we read that God’s “counsel had foreordained [Greek: form of *pro’orizo*]” the things that were to occur against his “servant,” his Son. Specifically, in this context, the things that were “to occur” involved the actions of Herod and Pilate (Mark 3:6; 8:15; 12:13; Luke 13:31; 23:8–12; John 19:16). These “things” were prophesied about, not “from all eternity,” but in Psalm 2:1–2. Of course, all such prophecies concerning the suffering of the Christ relate back to what was prophesied by Jehovah about the ‘bruising of the heel’ of the promised “seed,” the Messiah (Genesis 3:15). Had Adam and Eve not sinned, there would have been no need for any such “counsel” to have been “foreordained to occur.”

Morey has mis-read all three of these Bible accounts. A correct reading and interpretation of these accounts, according to their grammar and their historical context, does not support the Reformed understanding of the time from which Jesus’ betrayal was foreknown, namely, “from all eternity.”

“Before the Foundation of the World”

Morey and other Reformed theologians base a great deal of their belief about God’s knowledge and decrees on the meaning of Ephesians 1:3–4:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in union with Christ, just as he chose us in union with him *before the founding of the world* [emphasis added].

Consider yet another excerpt from our September 27, 2006, radio discussion:

(The following does not occur immediately after the previous excerpt. It begins in minute 40. I am numbering it in sequence from the previous excerpt only for my referencing later on in this article.)

[13]Morey: We know that we are to go to the New Testament for the final revelation of God. There, for example, we are told in terms that are explicitly clear in the Greek, in Ephesians 1:4. It’s *pro kataboles kosmo*, “Before the creation of the world.”

[14]Stafford: No, it doesn’t say that.

[15]Morey: God’s plan of redemption had already ...

[16] Stafford: It’s says “before the throwing down...” You just misquoted the scripture.

[17]Morey: “Before.” *Pro kataboles kosmos*.

[18]Stafford: *Kataboles* [means (signal interruption)] the “laying down.”

[19]Morey: And there the word, if you look in any lexicon...

[20]Stafford: You said “creation.” That is not accurate. Now let me respond to what you said.

[21]Morey: Oh, really? You mean the lexicons are wrong? I have the lexicons in front of me.

[22]Stafford: I’m telling you that you are wrong in saying that *kataboles kosmos* means the creation of the world inclusive of Adam and Eve.

[23]Morey: Yes it does.

END OF TRANSCRIPTION

As can be seen from my transcription of [11]Morey and [13]Morey above, Dr. Morey believes that the expression *pro kataboles kosmou* means “before the foundation/creation of the world,” which itself means “from all eternity.” I disagreed. Instead I claimed that “before the foundation of the world” means “before the throwing down of seed,” or before the time when Adam and Eve “founded” the world with children. “Before” that time, I contend, and not “from all eternity,” God chose those who would belong to the promised “seed” (Genesis 3:15; Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 1:4).

“Before the founding of the world” in Ephesians 1:4 and other NT passages uses a common preposition for “before” (*pro*) followed by *kataboles kosmou*, forms of the

Greek nouns *katabole* (“foundation”) and *kosmos* (“world”). To help us resolve the present dispute, or at least to put forth a defense of my position and a criticism of Morey’s Reformed view, we will consider how the New Testament (NT) uses the expression, “before the foundation of the world,” as well as the use of *katabole* (“foundation”) by itself, by considering each NT use of the phrase and of the word, respectively.

Since Morey referred to “the lexicons” as support for his use of “creation,” I will first provide the definition of *katabole* from a recognized lexical source cited earlier in this study:

[**Katabole:**] (1) the act of laying someth. down, with implication of providing a base for someth., *foundation* ... (2) ... *sowing* of seed, used of begetting [BDAG3, page 515.]

No mention, specifically, of “creation,” here. But I do not so much oppose the use of the word “creation” as I do Morey’s use of “creation of the world” to refer to “the creation of the world inclusive of Adam and Eve,” which he agreed was how he used the expression. However, since I believe that the act of begetting or conceiving children is a type of “creation,” if Morey had used “before the creation of the world” ([13]Morey) to refer to the time “before” the “creation” of Adam and Eve’s children, we would be in agreement about the time referenced. But we are not in agreement because, again, Morey understands “before the creation/foundation of the world” to mean “from all eternity” ([11]Morey). Thus, we have a dispute, not so much with respect to the lexical meaning of *katabole* itself, but with respect to which “foundation” or “creation” is referred to in texts such as Ephesians 1:4.

All eleven occurrences of *katabole* are listed by BDAG3 under definition (1), except for Hebrews 11:11, which is mentioned also under definition (2). Nine of the eleven times *katabole* occurs in the NT it is a part of the expression *kataboles kosmou* (“foundation of the world”). The two exceptions are Matthew 13:35 and Hebrews 11:11. BDAG3 gives eight separate entries for *kosmos*, of which I believe the following meanings are possible in relation to the use of *kosmos* as a part of the expression *kataboles kosmou*:

[**Kosmos:**] (3) the sum total of everything here and now, *the world, the (orderly) universe* ... (4) the sum total of all beings above the level of the animals, *the world* ... (5) planet earth as a place of inhabitation, *the world* ... (6) humanity in general, *the world* ... (7) the system of human existence in its many aspects, *the world* [BDAG3, pages 561–563].

Therefore, in the expression “before the foundation of the world” we are concerned with the kind of “foundation” in view and, thus, the time referenced by the expression. Once this is determined, we can better understand the time indicated by “before” the “foundation” in question. We will also consider the sense attributed to “world” in the examples that follow, since this is also a part of the present dispute.

Again, according to Morey, “before the foundation/creation of the world” means “from all eternity” ([11]Morey). I believe, as I said to him during the September 27, 2006, radio show, that it means ‘before the throwing down of seed’ ([12]Stafford), or “before” Adam and Eve had or conceived children. To help us appreciate the meaning of the eleven NT uses of *katabole*, and especially the meaning of the expression *kataboles kosmou*, I will present each text as it is translated by the NWT, I will highlight the word or expression under consideration, and then I will discuss the meaning of the text in its historical context:

(1) Matthew 13:35 (with verse 34):

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds by illustrations. Indeed, without an illustration he would not speak to them; that there might be fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet who said: “I will open my mouth with illustrations, I will publish things hidden since the founding.”

The underlined words are from the Greek *apo* [“from”] and *kataboles* [“founding” or “foundation”]. Here *kataboles* is not associated with *kosmos* (“world”). Rather, it is said to be “from” (*apo*) a time in which things have been “hidden,” specifically, those “things” Jesus is making known by means of illustrations. The ‘hidden things’ Jesus taught by illustration in Matthew 13 all have to do with “the sacred secrets of the kingdom of the heavens” (Matthew 13:11). His illustration in Matthew 13:3–9 involved “the word of the kingdom” (13:19), and his illustrations in Matthew 13:24–30, 31–32, and verse 33 are all about the “kingdom of the heavens.” Our next example gives us further indication as to the time indicated by “the founding” in Matthew 13:35:

(2) Matthew 25:34:

“Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, YOU who have been blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for YOU from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*].”

As discussed earlier and in “Part Two: Romans,” Jehovah prophesied in Genesis 3:15 and thereby ‘foreknew [Greek: form of *proginosko*]’ Christ’s sacrifice ‘before the founding of the world’ (1 Peter 1:19–20 [to be discussed further, below]). Since Jehovah is God and sovereign over all things, his purpose will come to pass (Isaiah 55:11). That purpose according to the Genesis 3:15 prophecy involved a promised “seed” who would ‘crush Satan in the head.’ This kingdom has been in actual preparation, not merely as a prophecy, from the time Adam and Even had children, since only from these children would the sons of the kingdom come. In other words, the general “seed” of Adam and Eve would provide another “seed.”

It is the “seed” of the woman (Genesis 3:15), who is also the “seed” of Abraham, Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:16), who will be given “rulership and dignity and kingdom, that the peoples, national groups and languages should all serve even him” (Daniel 7:14). But this “kingdom” has also been prepared for those who “belong to Christ,” who are also,

literally and figuratively (Genesis 13:14–16; Romans 1:16; Galatians 3:29), “Abraham’s seed.” These, too, ‘take possession of the kingdom itself’ (Daniel 7:22), and “all the rulerships will serve and obey even them” (Daniel 7:27). The ‘preparations’ for this kingdom have been taking place “from the founding of the world,” not “from all eternity,” since such ‘preparations’ only became necessary after Adam and Even disobeyed God’s expressed will.

(3) Luke 11:50 (with verses 49 and 51):

On this account the wisdom of God [Jesus (Matthew 23:34)] also said, ‘I will send forth to them prophets and apostles, and they will kill and persecute some of them, so that the blood of all the prophets spilled from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*] may be required from this generation, from the blood of Abel down to the blood of Zech·a·ri·ah, who was slain between the altar and the house.

Here Jesus himself defines the “founding of the world” when he says that “from the founding of the world” is “from ...Abel,” one of the first two children by Adam and Eve. But since Abel was the first “prophet” whose “blood was spilled” he is named, not Cain, with respect to the “founding of the world” referenced here in Luke 11:50. From the time of the “founding of the world,” “Abel” was the first “prophet” to have his blood spilled.

(4) John 17:24 (with verse 25):

Father, as to what you have given me, I wish that, where I am, they also may be with me, in order to behold my glory that you have given me, because you loved me before the founding of the world [*pro kataboles kosmou*]. Righteous Father, the world has, indeed, not come to know you; but I have come to know you, and these have come to know that you sent me forth.

Jesus here refers to his pre-human existence with the Father, in the heavens (John 3:13; 6:38), and the love the Father had for him “before” he was ‘sent forth,’ “before” even the “founding of the world.” I understand this “founding” as the same time referred to in all three prior examples considered, namely, “before” the time of Abel and the other children of Adam and Eve, which children came to be the “world” that God “so loved” (John 3:16). “Before” this time, the Father loved his Son, as he has ever since (John 3:35).

(5) Ephesians 1:4 (with verses 3 and 5):

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in union with Christ, just as he chose us in union with him before the founding of the world [*pro kataboles kosmou*], that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love. For he foreordained to the adoption through Jesus Christ as sons to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

“Before the founding of the world,” in connection with the prophesy of the “seed,” God chose people, either specifically due to the defined personality that would be born

through the families of the earth, or as a general type or class of persons according to the kinds of people he similarly knew would appear. These people God could ‘mold’ or ‘create’ to “walk in” the works he prepared for them (Romans 8:28–29; 9:21–23; Ephesians 2:10). But, in any case, God’s choice is always “according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians 1:5).

There is nothing in Ephesians 1:4 or in its immediate or extended NT contexts that defines God’s choice of people for adoption as “sons” as “from all eternity.” There is, instead, good reason to understand his choice as occurring together with his prophesy of the promised “seed,” whom he also chose “before the founding of the world,” but after Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:15). Just as God has ‘prepared a kingdom from the founding of the world’ (Matthew 25:34), he has also ‘chosen’ those who will be adopted as his sons, “and if a son, also an heir through God” (Galatians 4:7). Just as Jehovah “foreordained” his own Son as the “seed” that would “bruise” the head of the serpent, Satan, he has also “foreordained” or “defined beforehand” (Greek: *pro’orisas*) those who will “belong” to the promised “seed” (Galatians 3:29).

Jehovah knows “beforehand” those who are “patterned after the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29) because he made them (compare Psalm 139:16; Jeremiah 1:5). He ‘defined them beforehand’ even as he defined his Son according to his own image (John 14:9; Colossians 1:15). Jesus and God’s ‘adopted sons’ must still do God’s will (Matthew 7:21; 12:50; 1 John 2:17). God prepares people and their works, but we must still “walk in them” with no grounds for boasting, as if we did something more than what we should have done or could have done at all, without God (Ephesians 2:8–10). Everything depends on God (Romans 9:16).

(6) Hebrews 4:3 (with verses 4 and 5):

For we who have exercised faith do enter into the rest, just as he has said: “So I swore in my anger, ‘They shall not enter into my rest,’” although his works were finished from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*]. For in one place he has said of the seventh day as follows: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works,” and again in this place: “They shall not enter into my rest.”

Here the ‘finishing of his works’ is said to have taken place “from the founding of the world,” which is tied to the time of the “seventh day” of Genesis 2:2. It is on this same seventh day that Eve gave birth, “with the aid of Jehovah,” to Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1–2). But with the background of Genesis 2:2 in view, “world” here could refer to “(5) planet earth as a place of inhabitation, *the world*” (BDAG3), or it could be another reference to the time on the seventh day from Cain and Abel, as in Luke 11:50–51.

(7) Hebrews 9:26 (with verse 25):

Neither is it in order that he [Jesus Christ] should offer himself often, as indeed the high priest enters into the holy place from year to year with blood not his own. Otherwise, he would have to suffer often from the founding of the world

[*apo kataboles kosmou*]. But now he has manifested himself once for all time at the conclusion of the systems of things to put sin away through the sacrifice of himself.

The ‘suffering’ of Christ here referenced is first spoken of in Genesis 3:15, where Jehovah prophesied that Satan would “bruise” the promised “seed,” Jesus, “in the heel.” Since the redeemable sins began first with those committed by Adam and Eve’s children, persons who had inherited sin rather than those who committed sin while sinless (Psalm 51:5), Christ offered himself “once for all time” instead of ‘offering himself often’ “from the founding of the world.”

The time referred to as the “founding of the world,” then, would have to also be during the seventh day of God’s rest, and no doubt from a point after which such an offering would have been needed. This would either have to be from the time of Adam and Eve’s children, or after Adam’s and Eve’s sins, depending on if you believe Adam’s and Eve’s sins were redeemable by Jesus’ sacrifice.

(8) Hebrews 11:11 (with verse 12):

By faith also Sarah herself received power to conceive [*katabolen*] seed, even when she was past the age limit, since she esteemed him faithful who had promised. Hence also from one [man], and him as good as dead, there were born [children] just as the stars of heaven for multitude and as the sands that are by the seaside, innumerable.

In this account *katabole* is used explicitly for conception, “(2) ... *sowing* of seed” (BDAG3).

(9) 1 Peter 1:20 (with verses 17–19):

Furthermore, if YOU are calling upon the Father who judges impartially according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves with fear during the time of YOUR alien residence. For YOU know that it was not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, that YOU were delivered from YOUR fruitless form of conduct received by tradition from YOUR forefathers. But it was with precious blood, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb, even Christ’s. True, he was foreknown before the founding of the world [*pro kataboles kosmou*], but he was made manifest at the end of the times for the sake of YOU.

The use of “before the founding of the world” here reminds one of Ephesians 1:4 in that it speaks of that which was “foreknown,” but not actually manifest, until long after the time from which it was foreknown. In this case, as with Ephesians 1:4, Christ’s sacrificial “blood” was foreknown from the time of Jehovah’s prophecy in Genesis 3:15, concerning the ‘bruising’ of the “seed’s” “heel.” In this prophecy Jehovah ‘foreknew’ the death of Jesus Christ “before the foundation of the world,” which death was needed only after Adam and Even had sinned.

(10) Revelation 13:8:

And all those who dwell on the earth will worship it [the “wild beast”]; the name of not one of them stands written in the scroll of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered, from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*].

Here we essentially have the same thing said as we do in 1 Peter 1:20, namely, that Jesus’ death was “foreknown before the founding of the world, but he was made manifest at the end of the times for the sake of YOU.” Revelation 13:8 speaks about this death with such certainty, it is as if it actually happened “from the founding of the world,” which was not necessary according to Hebrews 9:26 since Jesus offered “himself once for all time at the conclusion of the systems of things.” Again, I believe this ‘slaughtering’ is in reference to the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, given “before the founding of the world.”

(11) Revelation 17:8:

The wild beast that you saw was, but is not, and yet is about to ascend out of the abyss, and it is to go off into destruction. And when they see how the wild beast was, but is not, and yet will be present, those who dwell on the earth will wonder admiringly, but their names have not been written upon the scroll of life from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*].

“The scroll of life.” It is not said to have names written in it “from all eternity,” or even “before the founding of the world,” but “from the founding of the world.” Since “death” did not even enter into the world until Adam’s sin (Romans 5:12), such a scroll would not have been needed before then. But after that time, from the time of his and Eve’s children (the “foundation of the world),” this scroll has been opened with names written in (Revelation 17:8) and names ‘wiped out’ (Exodus 32:33; Psalm 69:28). What, though, is this “scroll of life,” and, more importantly, on what basis are the names of people “written upon” or “wiped out” of it?

“The Scroll of Life”

Jehovah God never intended for humankind to die. He gave Adam and Eve life, and he gave them his love. He also gave them the prospect of enjoying that life without end. The only mention of death was in association with their disobedience of one command: do not eat the fruit of “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad” (Genesis 2:17; 3:3). But Jehovah made mankind in his image and he gave us the ability to make choices on our own. He gave us “free will.” That is why apart from any enslavement to sin, Adam and Eve chose on their own to do according to their own desires, and not according to the commandment of God (Genesis 3:6).

After “sin entered into the world and death through sin” (Romans 5:12), mankind has not been able to completely satisfy Jehovah God. No one has earned his or her own

salvation, or that of another (Psalm 3:8; 37:9; 49:7; 2 Timothy 1:9), except Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:15; 5:8–10). But God has taken delight in many who choose to love and put faith in him, his word, and his Son. To these God gives salvation (Psalm 18:19; James 2:5).

Earlier we considered Revelation 17:8, which speaks in part about those who “wonder admiringly” at the “wild beast,” and how “their names have not been written upon the scroll of life from the founding of the world.” From this it is clear, however, that a “scroll of life” has been written in “from the founding of the world.” Some are not written in it, like those who ‘admire’ the “wild beast,” and others are “written down in the book” (Daniel 12:1). Some can even be “blotted” or “wiped” out of it, meaning that they were at one time in it, and then removed from it (Exodus 32:33; Psalm 69:28; Revelation 3:5).

Based on the above, I believe that “the scroll of life from the founding of the world” is an ongoing record of those who will be given life by God. Those not written in and those who are “wiped out” of “the scroll of life” will not receive life. Jehovah ‘pays attention and listens’ to the affairs of men and women, and he keeps “a book of remembrance ... for those in fear of Jehovah and for those thinking upon his name” (Malachi 3:16). Jesus Christ also has authority over this book, for he promises not to “blot out” any of the names of those who “conquer” (Revelation 3:5). Those who conquer are the ones who ‘observe [Christ’s] deeds down to the end’ (Revelation 2:26). Those who ‘carry on a disgusting thing and a lie’ (Revelation 21:27) will not be written in it.

But ‘conquering’ and ‘observing Christ’s deeds down to the end’ does not mean that any who do so are responsible for their own salvation. They are not. Could we truly say that the evil-doer who died alongside Jesus, but who asked that Jesus ‘remember [him] when [Jesus] gets into [his] kingdom,’ was responsible for his own salvation by that one act (Luke 23:42)? Consider:

Luke 23:39–43 (NWT)

But one of the hung evildoers began to say abusively to him: “You are the Christ, are you not? Save yourself and us.” In reply the other rebuked him and said: “Do you not fear God at all, now that you are in the same judgment? And we, indeed, justly so, for we are receiving in full what we deserve for things we did; but this [man] did nothing out of the way.” And he went on to say: “Jesus, remember me when you get into your kingdom.” And he said to him: “Truly I tell you today, You will be with me in Paradise” [underline added].

Had the evil-doer not “rebuked” his fellow criminal, had he not admitted that he was deserving of death, had he not shown faith in Jesus by asking to be remembered, had he not by these acts ‘feared God’ unlike his fellow criminal, there is no reason to believe he would have been “remembered.” But he did, and so he will be. Not because he deserves to be, and not because by these final acts of faith he *earned* the right to life. It is instead

because he ‘feared God’ by putting faith in Jesus, and God, through Christ, was “paying attention and listening” (Malachi 3:16). Indeed:

Romans 2:6–10 (NWT)

And he will render to each one according to his works: everlasting life to those who are seeking glory and honor and incorruptibleness by endurance in work that is good; however, for those who are contentious and who disobey the truth but obey unrighteousness there will be wrath and anger, tribulation and distress, upon the soul of every man who works what is injurious, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory and honor and peace for everyone who works what is good [emphasis added].

While seeking to please God we may fall along the way. When that happens, the means of gaining peace with God is clear, and simple:

1 John 2:1–6 (NWT)

My little children, I am writing YOU these things that YOU may not commit a sin. And yet, if anyone does commit a sin, we have a helper with the Father, Jesus Christ, a righteous one. And *he is a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins, yet not for ours only but also for the whole world's*. And by this we have the knowledge that we have come to know him, namely, *if we continue observing his commandments*. He that says: “I have come to know him,” and yet is not observing his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this [person]. [Emphasis added.]

Never let the salvation God offers through faith in Christ get you down by causing you to think that you ‘have not done enough.’ You can never ‘do enough,’ if by “enough” is meant you can earn a righteous standing before God. Instead, concentrate on “observing his commandments,” and if you sin know that Jesus’ sacrifice will cover it. Never fall into the trap of trying to please men, by doing only what they say should be done to please God (Isaiah 29:13). You know what to do. We all know what to do, for we all have the knowledge of good and bad from the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Thus, we will all be ‘judged individually according to our deeds’:

Revelation 20:11–13 (NWT)

And I saw a great white throne and the one seated on it. From before him the earth and the heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, *and scrolls were opened. But another scroll was opened; it is the scroll of life. And the dead were judged out of those things written in the scrolls according to their deeds*. And the sea gave up those dead in it, and death and Ha´des gave up those dead in them, *and they were judged individually according to their deeds [emphasis added]*.

“Fine Public Declaration in Front of Many Witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12)

If my understanding of Jehovah and his teachings is correct, he will be glorified through my presentation of it against the false teachings of Dr. Robert Morey and other advocates of “Reformed” theology. If the Reformed position concerning the knowledge of God and the will of man is correct, and if my understanding is false, then it will be evident in the public demonstrations that are to follow and Jehovah will still be glorified for that which is correct, or more correct, will prevail over that which is false, or less accurate.

Dr. Morey challenged me to a debate. I accepted. I have written three articles that give a clear and detailed explanation of how I understand the Bible’s teaching on the knowledge of God and the free will of man. I have engaged Dr. Morey’s views, and I have shown where he fails to answer questions put to him. I have shown where he has failed to teach the truth concerning the meaning of biblical words and expressions, and I have also ‘explained and proven by references’ (Acts 17:3) the things I believe concerning God’s knowledge, his purpose, the free will of mankind, and how our decisions will serve as the basis for our judgment before God and Christ.

It is now time for each of us to stand up for what we believe to be true about God and man. It is time for Dr. Morey and myself to bring these issues before “many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12), before Jehovah God, before Jesus Christ, before the holy and the wicked spirits, and before the world of mankind. Then everyone can decide for themselves what is right, and what is wrong, what is good, and what is bad.

Greg Stafford

(REVISED April 19, 2008)*

***This article was revised only with respect to its formatting. No changes were made to the content of the original article.**