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## **PREDESTINATION & JUDAISM**

When Joseph reveals his identity (Genesis 45:4-5:7), a doctrinal statement is being made: Although they thought they were selling him into slavery, what his brothers were actually doing was furthering a national destiny. Despite all their choices, the years spent in Potiphar's household and the dungeons of Egypt, God's plan to use Joseph to further the nations redemption is what triumphs over all. It is important to note the change of wording by Joseph when describing the sale: *Be not distressed for having **sold** me here, for it was to be a provider that God **sent** me ahead of you* (verse 5). To highlight this point is a verse from Proverbs: *Many designs are in man's heart, but the counsel of God—only it will prevail* (19:21).

It seems from this saga that Judaism subscribes to the idea of predestination—the notion that all has been determined in advance by the Almighty. And yet Deuteronomy clearly states: *I have placed before you life and death, a blessing and a curse, that you should choose life* (30:19). God is saying here that man has free choice. The Talmudic Tractate Berachot (32b) states: *Everything is in the hands of heaven except the fear of heaven.*

Predestination or free will? I subscribe to the idea that it remains a mystery, for one can “prove” either side from Scripture. The fact is that human reason simply cannot grasp the infinite wisdom of God. But anyone who thinks Judaism is against predestination would be wrong.

The notion that nothing happens unless ordained by God can be seen in the following Talmudic dictums: *No man can touch that which has been prepared in advance for his friend* (Yoma 38b); *No man injures his finger here below unless it has been decreed for him on high* (Chullin 7b); and *Never does a snake bite...or a lion tear [its prey]...or a government interfere in men's lives unless incited to do so from on high* (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 10:11).

One obvious question about predestination is how can one be punished for sin if the crime was ordained by God? The Ultra-Orthodox thinker, Rabbi Mordechai Yosef (1801-54), maintained that only the will of God exists, and man's freedom of choice is but an illusion: *In the deepest sense, everything is in the hands of heaven and man's freedom of choice is only apparent and exists only in his mind, because God has hidden His ways from man since He desires man to serve Him, and if His ways were revealed to man he would not be motivated to serve God* (Mei Hashiloach).

Man, according to Rabbi Yosef, is a passive tool in the hands of the Divine Will. Yet while every action is predetermined, man has complete freedom to decide! That is to say, man is not judged for his actions but rather on the decision he makes to act. The concept of sin is therefore transferred from the act to the decision to act and the error in decision-making. Accordingly, the concept of repentance is also transferred from the realm of behavior to the realm of thought, and man is judged on the basis of his decision to repent.

A 13<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Rabbi Chisdai Crescas goes one step further and maintains that all aspects of life, including man's thoughts and decisions, are ordained by God. Repentance is determined by Divine Grace and cannot be a voluntary act. Indeed, repentance, according to him, is granted as a Divine gift.

Scripture makes no attempt to harmonize the moral freedom of the individual with God's effective control of all things, but remains content to affirm both. While Judaism has often represented the doctrine of free will over predestination, early rabbinic literature never systemizes either doctrine. It seems that mankind will continue to struggle with the need to be free, our destinies and the complete surveillance of heaven.

Response to the article *PREDESTINATION & JUDAISM*

By Jack W. Langford (A word of caution: read this slowly and prayerfully!)

### ***PREDESTINATION & MESSIAH Ben JOSEPH***

Eleven Hebrew men stood motionless; it was as if they were petrified. In this case their jaws were probably partially opened, but they were certainly speechless. This whole experience they had been through the last year was indeed bewildering and now at this very moment it was truly beyond comprehension. A great and powerful, even fearful Egyptian leader, before whom they are standing, who had always spoken to them through an interpreter, had ordered all the Egyptian servants and aides out of his presence. And now this powerful monarch was sobbing uncontrollably in front of them. And he kept saying words—words in their language—words that they heard and knew, but words which were petrifying and almost unbelievable.

For over twenty long years these men had carried a burden, a secret, that they had shared with no one—especially their own father. That secret had recently become a painful memory to them after they had spent three days in an Egyptian dungeon (Gen. 42:21, 22) and after finding a silver chalice in Benjamin’s sack (44:16). They must have come to realize that God in heaven knew their secret and one day there would be a reckoning—but not at all like this! Their secret—well, it should be told in fullness in order to be properly understood.

Many years before there arose a severe problem in their very proud family of twelve boys. Their father was none other than Jacob whose name was changed by Almighty God to *Israel*, which means “a prince with God.” They were indeed a chosen people with very special promises made for them by the very creator of heaven and earth. If God’s promises were true, then there was an unbelievably glorious future in store for them and their posterity. This gave them a certain pride, even though they still lived in tents and in occupied territory. They had become a wealthy family; they also professed a high moral standard which made them a righteous people.

Then of all things, one of their youngest brothers had drawn out the worst that was in them—not that their brother had intended to do this, but it was inevitable because of their own sinful human natures. Joseph was his name. He was actually a bright and likable brother. The fact that Israel showed special favor towards Joseph made them envious (Gen. 37:4). But in addition to that, Joseph had exposed some of their own evil doings which got them into trouble with their father (37:2). This seriously compounded their dislike of Joseph. And then to top it off, Joseph dreamed of reigning over all of them—even over his own father and mother. To them, this was the height of indignities (37:8 & 10). And down deep in their hearts they looked for an opportunity to rid themselves of the affliction they were experiencing from this “favored” brother. And one day when they were wandering away from the place where they should have been, they looked up and here came Joseph looking for them (37:17). Now no one else was there and so they conspired Joseph’s demise (37:18). Though they actually intended to kill him, yet they ended up casting him into a pit (37:24), selling him to the Gentiles who

would in turn sell him as a slave down in the land of Egypt (37:28). As a slave Joseph would soon be lost and forgotten in far away Egypt. Cleverly they dipped his colorful garment into the blood of an animal (37:31) and showed that to their father, Israel, who, of course, concluded that Joseph was torn in pieces by a wild animal (37:33). Such a story sufficed to cover their crime for the last twenty or more years.

And now, this is what the Egyptian was saying—“*I am Joseph.*”

The shock is obvious! Yet the sobbing and tears he shed were even more incomprehensible! He was sobbing on their behalf and because of His love for them! There was no vindictiveness towards them—only compassion and the announcement of a Divine provision in operation overruling their own sin and initial rejection of him. He explained, that though they meant it for evil, yet God used it for their good. This was stirring up all kinds of emotions in their very souls. What would their response be?

Most certainly, we who are looking on should ask, why was such a story as this even written? Why do you think the Jewish nation should be reminded of it for the next 37 hundred years? Is it possible that what happened to this original family of Israel would be duplicated in Israel’s later national history? Is it possible that *predestination* exists on a national scale? Is it possible that the very one the Jewish rabbis today refer to as *Messiah ben Joseph* would also have that precise experience?

Is it possible that *Yeshua* (Jesus), the brother of the Jewish people, who exposed the hypocrisies of his generation, and honestly gave to them His vision of reigning over them, and yet was hated and cruelly rejected, is indeed *Messiah ben Joseph*? And is it possible that though the Jewish leadership of that day was guilty of His murder, yet He also was passed off to the Gentiles, where He rose to a place of awesome prominence, and there He is now unrecognizable to His own brethren?—speaking to them today through an intermediary? Yes, and is it not possible that now after nearly 20 centuries have passed since His rejection, and the world is entering a time of great tribulation, and Israel is seeking assistance from another “Egypt” (the USA), that something similar is about to happen? And, yes, after all the Gentile servants and attendants of *Yeshua* are to be excused from the room, He will privately reveal Himself to His brethren—

Is that why God has preserved this story?!?!

Of secondary importance in this story, and yet of vital interest as well, is the action of the servants of Joseph in Egypt. No doubt, Joseph had evangelized many of the Egyptians to the knowledge of the true God. Though Egypt is a pagan nation, yet the name of Joseph is as respected among them as the name of Pharaoh himself. In addition, there are obviously those in Egypt who are knowledgeable about God and serve him. We certainly would believe that all those of Joseph’s household were of that nature. In particular, the servant of Joseph is always used to probe the hearts of his brothers to stir them to be conscious of the spiritual attributes of Joseph, the fear of God and the provision of God for them. In a beautiful sense this is the position of many true Christians in the United States of America. They are vitally interested in the welfare of Israel. And, as servants of *Yeshua* they often probe the hearts of His brethren in the flesh—but always for a good purpose, and in obedience to *Yeshua*.

A servant of *Yeshua*, Jack W. Langford