

TOPIC XIV

DOES PRAYER CHANGE GOD'S MIND?

Whether God "changes His mind" about certain matters He has already Pronounced that He intends to do is a very controversial subject. For example, if He changes His mind, then how does this figure into His knowledge of the end from the beginning? Unless He already knows He will change His mind and appears to do so for the faith and well-being of those for whom, He cares about?

His "mind change" may be the perspective of the human writer, but not necessarily a "surprise" to God Himself. We will see in a moment that God knows our prayer before we utter it.

For the Calvinist who believes God has predetermined (and controls) everything from before creation, this subject makes no sense unless the changing of His mind is also already known and predetermined as well. And prayer itself becomes a useless act in terms of requesting things from God as the outcome is already predetermined whether we pray or not. Prayer becomes essentially an exercise in futility except for thanksgiving , praise and worship - which God has already predetermined we will give or not. It is actually the Calvinistic viewpoint that causes these questions and if one dismisses that viewpoint, the problem loses a lot of its force. Then, there is our subject, does prayer motivate God to change His mind about a predetermined decision, or did He know and plan this "apparent change of mind" all along? We have seen that it is God's foreknowledge upon which everything relating to His plan of redemption is based, as is His predetermining the things that will be and what His involvement in them will be.

Still, there are a number of verses stating that God "changed His mind" or "relented" in a matter about something or someone. This was often based in one of his servant's prayer or appeal. Here are some key passages:

1. Exodus 32:9-14:

9: The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. 10: "Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation." 11: Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12: "Why should the

Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil *intent* He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about *doing* harm to Your people. 13: "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.'" 14: So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

Well, first, there is no question that God's pronouncement that He would make of Moses "a great nation" was a test for Moses because the Messiah would come from Judah, not Levi, the tribe of Moses. Second, Moses reminded God of all the he had done and this reassured Moses as well as God that Moses knew and believed in all that God had promised and to whom.

So, in my imagination, I see God smiling as He relented on His threat to destroy them. I do not believe that was actually God's intention. He was pleased at Moses "prayer" and Moses learned something as well.

2. Amos 7:1-6,

7:1: Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and behold, He was forming a locust-swarm when the spring crop began to sprout. And behold, the spring crop *was* after the king's mowing. 2: And it came about, when it had finished eating the vegetation of the land, that I said, "Lord GOD, please pardon! How can Jacob stand, For he is small?" 3: The LORD changed His mind about this. "It shall not be," said the LORD. 4: Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and behold, the Lord GOD was calling to contend *with them* by fire, and it consumed the great deep and began to consume the farm land. 5: Then I said, "Lord GOD, please stop! How can Jacob stand, for he is small?" 6: The LORD changed His mind about this. "This too shall not be," said the Lord GOD.

We know that God sees the end from the beginning, so He must know in advance that, in the sight of those who pray, His mind appears to change about a decree or decision He has made or proposes.

3. Jeremiah 26:1-6, 7-15,

1: In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, saying, 2: "Thus says the LORD, 'Stand in the

court of the LORD'S house, and speak to all the cities of Judah who have come to worship *in* the LORD'S house all the words that I have commanded you to speak to them. Do not omit a word! 3: 'Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds.' 4: "And you will say to them, 'Thus says the LORD, "If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, 5: to listen to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I have been sending to you again and again, but you have not listened; 6: then I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make a curse to all the nations of the earth."

Now considering that God already knew that the people, priests and prophets would reject Jeremiah's proclamation, His statement in verse three can only be for Jeremiah's benefit. Here's what happened.

7: The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. 8: When Jeremiah finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded *him* to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, "You must die! 9: "Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD saying, "This house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate, without inhabitant'?" And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the LORD. 10: When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the LORD and sat in the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD'S *house*. 11: Then the priests and the prophets spoke to the officials and to all the people, saying, "A death sentence for this man! For he has prophesied against this city as you have heard in your hearing." 12: Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and to all the people, saying, "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that you have heard. 13: "Now therefore amend your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will change His mind about the misfortune which He has pronounced against you. 14: "But as for me, behold, I am in your hands; do with me as is good and right in your sight. 15: "Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves, and on this city and on its inhabitants; for truly the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."

They were soundly warned and though Jeremiah wasn't killed, the people did not heed his warning in the name of the Lord.

4. Jonah 3:1-10,

1: Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2: "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." 3: So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. 4: Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." 5: Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. 6: When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. 7: He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. 8: "But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. 9: "Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." 10: When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do *it*."

So what do you think? God knew the Ninevites would repent so did He really change His mind or did He give the appearance of changing His mind? If so why?

God "changing His mind" may be more likely a concept designed for the sake of those who prayed on behalf of those about to suffer affliction from God. Their hearts and motives are being examined and they find themselves with hearts and motives more admirable and pleasing to God than they previously knew. It also assures them that the God they serve is indeed a good and responsive Lord and attends to their prayers.