

Does God Know Everything?

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*An Examination Of
The Knowledge Of God*

By

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Does God Know Everything?

An Examination Of The Knowledge Of God

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About The Author

Does God Know Everything?

One of the main questions about God concerns what He knows. Historically, the church has held that God is omniscient or all-knowing. In other words, He has all knowledge. He knows everything which has happened in the past, He knows everything which is now going on in the present and He also knows everything which will occur in the future. Not only does He know everything that will happen, He also knows everything that could possibly happen. His knowledge is without limit. This has been the traditional understanding of Scripture on this subject.

In recent years, this traditional view of God's knowledge has been challenged by some Bible-believing Christians. They contend that God does not know the future exhaustively. While His knowledge of past and present events is thorough or complete, the same does not hold true for the future. While He knows certain things about what will occur in the future, He does not know everything which will happen. The future, they contend is open. This means that God Himself is constantly learning new things.

In this book, we will look at what the Bible says about this all-important subject of God's knowledge. Does He know everything which will happen in the future or is His knowledge somehow limited? If so, has He limited Himself to what He can and cannot know? What does the Bible teach us on this issue?

As always, we will attempt to give a fair presentation of those who are on the various sides of this issue. Our responsibility is to clearly state the best arguments that each side offers and then evaluate these arguments in light of the totality of Scripture.

Because there are many passages which seem to teach God's limited knowledge, or that He repents or changes His mind, we will look at a number of these passages in detail. In doing so, we will give the various ways in which these passages have been understood by Bible-believing Christians.

Question 1

Does God Know Everything? (All-Knowing, Omniscient)

The God of the Bible has many attributes or characteristics which make up who He is. Among them is the attribute of “omniscience.” What do we mean by this word? In what sense is God omniscient?

The word “omniscient” comes from two Latin words *omnis* signifying all, and *scientia* signifying knowledge. When we say that God is omniscient it means that He has perfect knowledge of all things. In other words, He is all-knowing. He does not have to learn anything, and He has not forgotten anything that He knows. God does not have to reason things out, find out things, or learn them gradually. He knows everything that has happened, and everything that will happen. This is a basic definition of omniscience.

In addition, God also knows every potential thing that might happen. God even knows those things that humankind has yet to discover. This knowledge is absolute and un-acquired. The omniscience of God means that He has perfect knowledge, perfect understanding, and perfect wisdom as to how to apply the knowledge.

The Bible says the following about the knowledge of God.

He Is The God Of Knowledge

In the prayer of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, we have the revealed truth that the Lord, Yahweh, is a God of knowledge or a wise God:

Don't keep speaking so arrogantly, letting proud talk come out of your mouth! For the Lord is a God who knows; he evaluates what people do (1 Samuel 2:3 NET).

Hannah described the God of Scripture as a “God of knowledge.”

The psalmist also described the knowledge of God. He wrote it in this manner:

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain (Psalm 139:1-6 NIV).

The God of the Bible is indeed the God of knowledge. According to the psalmist, God knew his actions before he did them, his words before he spoke them, and his thoughts before he thought them. Indeed, God knows the entire life of the psalmist. The same holds true for the rest of us—God knows everything about us.

He Has Infinite Or Unlimited Knowledge

Not only is God a God of knowledge, His knowledge is without limits. The psalmist testified that the Lord's knowledge is infinite:

Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite (Psalm 147:5 KJV).

The English Standard Version says:

Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure (Psalm 147:5 ESV).

His knowledge is beyond our ability to measure.

John the evangelist also testified that the Lord knows everything. He wrote the following to the first-century believers:

Whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything (1 John 3:20 NRSV).

The God of the Bible does indeed know everything.

The Bible clearly teaches that God's knowledge is without limit. The Apostle Paul declared to the church at Rome:

Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his methods! (Romans 11:33 NLT).

In a moment of praise, the Apostle Paul exalted the Lord for His great wisdom and knowledge. It is indeed wonderful!

His Knowledge Is Not Like Human Knowledge

The knowledge that God has is not like the limited knowledge which we human beings have. The Lord made the following comparison between Himself and humanity:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8,9 KJV).

Notice the comparison between God's knowledge and our knowledge. It is so vast that no explanation can do justice to the differences. They are as great as can be!

The psalmist wrote about the difference between the infinite knowledge that God has, and the limited knowledge of humans. He records the Lord saying:

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These things you have done and I have been silent; you thought that I was one just like yourself. But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you (Psalm 50:21 NRSV).

We cannot compare our knowledge to the knowledge of the Lord. Indeed, there is no comparison.

His Knowledge Is Perfect

The knowledge of God is altogether perfect. In the Book of Job, we find that a man named Elihu gave the following testimony to the knowledge of God:

Do you understand how the clouds float, those wonderful works of Him who has perfect knowledge? (Job 37:16 CSB).

“Perfect in knowledge” is an apt description of the God of the Bible.

No One Can Teach God Anything

The Bible says that God has all knowledge, but we must understand what that means. The knowledge which God possesses is intuitive. This means that He does not have to reason things out or acquire knowledge through observation. His knowledge is immediate.

In other words, it is always there. Because the knowledge of God is perfect, no one can teach Him anything. We read about this in the Book of Job:

Can anyone teach God knowledge, since He judges the exalted ones? (Job 21:22 CSB).

The obvious answer is “No.” God cannot be taught anything.

Paul stated the same truth in his letter to the Romans. No one can teach God anything, and no one can give him advice. He wrote:

For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? (Romans 11:34 NKJV).

Neither does God have to investigate anything. Again, we read in Job:

For he knows those who are false, and he takes note of all their sins (Job 11:11 NLT).

Obviously, His knowledge is not like ours.

He Knows Everything Which Is Happening On The Earth

Scripture says that God is aware of what is presently happening here on earth. In the Book of Exodus, we read that the Lord had seen the suffering of Israel on the earth:

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Then the Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings” (Exodus 3:7 ESV).

The Lord in heaven knew what the people of Israel were experiencing on the earth.

We read in the Book of Job that God’s knowledge is complete. He knew what was going on upon the earth as well as in heaven. The Bible says the following about this:

From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air. Abaddon and Death say, ‘We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.’ “God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens” (Job 28:20-24 ESV).

The God of the Bible sees everything—nothing escapes His notice. It is comforting to know that God is aware of what is going on in the lives of people here on the earth.

He Can Predict Events Ahead Of Time Because He Knows What Will Happen

Because God knows everything that will happen, this allows Him to predict the future ahead of time. We read the Lord saying that He does this:

Only I can tell you what is going to happen even before it happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish (Isaiah 46:10 NLT).

He plans the future. Whatever He wants to come to pass will come to pass. Therefore, He can tell us ahead of time what is going to happen.

The God of the Bible predicted the following things would happen to Abraham and his descendants. He said:

Abraham is to become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. This is how the LORD will fulfill to Abraham what He promised him (Genesis 18:18,19 CSB).

The Lord said that a great and powerful nation would come from Abraham because He had chosen to bless the world through this one man. The Bible records that the Lord brought about exactly what He promised. Indeed, a great nation did come from Abraham.

In the writings of Isaiah, we read the Lord saying that He has the ability to announce things which will take place before they occur. He said:

I am Yahweh, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, or my praise to idols. The past events have indeed happened. Now I declare new events; I announce them to you before they occur (Isaiah 42:8,9 CSB).

This is one feature that separates the Lord, the God of the Bible, from all other so-called gods in the world. He declares future events before they take place.

His Eyes See All Things

Scripture speaks symbolically of the “eyes of God” seeing all things. We read the following in the Book of Chronicles:

For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to show Himself strong for those whose hearts are completely His. You have been foolish in this matter, for from now on, you will have wars (2 Chronicles 16:9 CSB).

This makes it clear that the Lord knows everything which is going on upon the earth. His “eyes” see everything.

In Proverbs, we read about the thoroughness of God’s knowledge. He is compared to having eyes everywhere:

The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, observing the wicked and the good (Proverbs 15:3 CSB).

“Eyes everywhere” means that He knows every single thing that is going on in every place in the universe. He sees it all.

Jeremiah the prophet recorded the Lord saying that He watches everything, and sees every sin. This means nobody can hide from Him. The Lord said:

I am watching them closely, and I see every sin. They cannot hope to hide from me (Jeremiah 16:17 NLT).

This makes it clear that nothing escapes His notice.

Zechariah used the illustration of seven lamps as representative of the knowledge of the Lord. He stated it as follows:

Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel’s hand. For these seven lamps represent the eyes of the LORD that search all around the world (Zechariah 4:10 NLT).

His illustration again pointed to the fact that God knows everything and sees everything that is occurring everywhere.

The psalmist made an obvious conclusion about the abilities of the Lord:

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He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? (Psalm 94:9 KJV).

Nothing escapes God. He sees everything. Everything!

His Perfect Knowledge Is Denied By The Wicked

Scripture informs us that the wicked question the nature and extent of God's knowledge. They question how God is able to know everything.

We read in the Psalms:

They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth (Psalm 73:11,12 NIV).

Interestingly, it is the wicked who deny the Most High has knowledge. They believe God does not see their sin. Again, we read in the Psalms:

"The LORD isn't looking," they say, "and besides, the God of Israel doesn't care" (Psalm 94:7 NLT).

The wicked accuse the Lord of not looking to discover what is going on. In fact, they say that He does not even care what is happening.

However, the Bible makes it clear that God knows what the evil people think. In Job, we read the following:

He knows what they do, so he overthrows them at night, and they're crushed (Job 34:25 God's Word).

The thoughts of evil people are known by God.

God Is Perfect In Judgment Because He Knows Everything

Only a God who is perfect in knowledge would be competent to judge humanity. The Bible speaks of that Day of Judgment when the Lord judges all humanity. For God to judge righteously, He must know all things. The Bible says:

But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless (2 Peter 3:7 NRSV).

This is symbolically expressed in God opening the "Books" on Judgment Day. We read the following in the Book of Revelation:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:12 NIV).

The Lord can judge perfectly because He is perfect in knowledge.

When people understand that they will have to stand one day before an all-knowing God, this should cause them to evaluate the way they live their lives. Judgment is coming, and people need to live in light of it. Jesus said:

For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (Matthew 12:37 ESV).

These are sobering words from Jesus. Because God knows everything the warnings that He gives humankind need to be taken seriously. Since He knows what will happen in the future, any warning He gives is for our benefit.

This Is A Comforting Truth For Believers

There is great comfort for the believer in the omniscience of God. In all the problems the believer may face, we are told by Jesus that, “Your Father knows” (Matthew 6:8). This is indeed encouraging.

The Lord searches every heart. In the Book of Chronicles, we read:

And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever (1 Chronicles 28:9 NIV).

The believer may rest secure in the knowledge that God knows everything about them. Nothing about any of us will take God by surprise. No one can tell Him anything that would cause Him to cast us out of His presence. He thoroughly knows us. John wrote:

Whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything (1 John 3:20 NRSV).

Therefore, we can take comfort in the knowledge of God.

Summary To Question 1

Does God Know Everything? (All-Knowing, Omniscient)

The Bible says that God has all knowledge. The technical term is “omniscient.” This being the case, we need to have a proper understanding of what it means that the Lord has “all knowledge.”

As we examine what the Scripture has to say about the extent of the knowledge of the God of the Bible, several things become clear.

First, the God of Scripture is called a “God of knowledge.” In fact, He is the God of infinite knowledge. Indeed, there is nothing that He is unaware of. All things which are possible for Him to know, He knows. Nothing escapes His notice.

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Furthermore, God is not like human beings in His knowledge. He cannot learn anything new, does not need to be taught, and does not make any mistakes. His knowledge is complete, and it is immediate. He does not have to think things through or consult with anyone.

The Bible emphasizes that God's knowledge is infinite and perfect. This means that there is no limit to what He knows, and His knowledge is always correct. In other words, He is never wrong; He never makes mistakes when it comes to knowing things.

Consequently, He is able to righteously judge humanity. Indeed, God knows the thought as well as the deed. All the facts are known to Him. Therefore, His judgment is always flawless.

His omniscience, or all-knowledge, also allows Him to accurately predict the future. He knows everything that will happen before it occurs. In many cases, He tells us what will take place in the future.

There is great security for the believer in the exhaustive knowledge of God. He knows the need of each and every believer, and He promises to meet those needs. We can certainly rely on these promises.

All those who have put their trust in Him are comforted by the thought of God's omniscience.

Question 2

Which Words In The Bible Express The Omniscience Of God? (Foreknowledge, Foreseeing, Foreordained, Foretelling,)

There are a number of words in Scripture that express God's omniscience—that He knows everything. From each of them we gain insight into the knowledge of God. The biblical words that express this truth are as follows.

1. Foreknowledge – He Knows What Will Happen

One key word is foreknowledge. This simply means that God knows everything that will happen before it occurs. Paul wrote:

Because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified (Romans 8:29-30 NET).

The New Living Translation puts it this way:

For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters (Romans 8:29-30 NLT).

The death of Jesus was in the eternal plan of God. In other words, it did not take Him by surprise. He knew in advance that this would happen.

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter said to the crowd which had gathered that Jesus' death was both foreknown by God as well as predetermined:

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man clearly attested to you by God with powerful deeds, wonders, and miraculous signs that God performed among you through him, just as you yourselves know—this man, who was handed over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you executed by nailing him to a cross at the hands of Gentiles Acts 2:22-23 NET).

God certainly knew ahead of time what would take place with respect to Jesus' death. He was not surprised with the outcome.

In another place, Peter wrote about Christ, the Lamb of God who was to be slain was something which foreknown before the world was created. He put it this way:

You know that from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors you were ransomed—not by perishable things like silver or gold, but by precious blood like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb, namely Christ. He was foreknown before the foundation of the

world but was manifested in these last times for your sake. (1 Peter 1:19-20 NET).

God knows what will occur before it actually happens.

2. Foreseeing – He Sees Everything Ahead Of Time

Foreseeing is another term that speaks of God knowing everything that will occur. In this case, He sees everything before it takes place. Paul wrote:

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed” (Galatians 3:8 NKJV).

The Contemporary English Version puts it this way:

Long ago the Scriptures said that God would accept the Gentiles because of their faith. That’s why God told Abraham the good news that all nations would be blessed because of him (Galatians 3:8 CEV).

The Lord foresaw that the Gentiles would be justified by faith.

Peter said that David, through the Holy Spirit, foresaw what would occur to the Messiah:

Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, ‘He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption’ (Acts 2:31 NRSV).

The Lord sees things before they come about. This is another way of saying that God knows what will happen in the future.

3. Foreordained – God Determines Certain Things Ahead Of Time

The word foreordained speaks of events that God has determined, or planned, certain things ahead of time. Peter spoke about God choosing, or determining ahead of time, that certain people would belong to Him:

God the Father decided to choose you as his people, and his Spirit has made you holy. You have obeyed Jesus Christ and are sprinkled with his blood (1 Peter 1:2 CEV).

According to Peter, God chose certain people ahead of time for His particular purposes.

In the same manner, the Apostle Paul wrote about how God determines things according to His holy purpose. He wrote:

Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began (2 Timothy 1:9 NKJV).

The clear teaching from Scripture is that certain things have been foreordained by God. He has determined ahead of time what will happen.

4. Foretelling – God Tells Us What Will Happen Ahead Of Time

Because God knows what will occur, and has foreordained what will happen, He is able to foretell events. Thus, foretelling speaks of God knowing future events, and then telling humanity what will occur.

In the Book of Acts we read about this:

In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer (Acts 3:18 NRSV).

God, through the prophets, foretold that the Messiah would suffer. This is one of many illustrations we find in Scripture of God foretelling what will occur.

These four words emphasize that the God of Scripture knows everything that will occur, He sees everything that will occur, He has foreordained, or planned, certain things that will occur, and finally He has told humanity about certain of these things that will indeed occur.

These terms, however, in one sense, do not accurately reflect God's knowledge. For example, God does not foresee into the future because He dwells above space and time. In other words, there is no past or future for Him. The term, therefore, is for our benefit.

Summary To Question 2

Which Words In The Bible Express The Omniscience Of God? (Foreknowledge, Foreseeing, Foreordained, Foretelling,)

There are four biblical words which make it clear that the God of the Bible knows everything that that is possible for Him to know. They are foreknowledge, foreseeing, foreordained and foretelling. Generally speaking, we can define these words as follows.

Foreknowledge means God knows what will happen before any event occurs. He knows everything which will happen.

Foreseeing has the idea of God seeing events before they actually take place. This is another way of stating that the Lord knows what will occur before the event transpires. He "sees" what will happen.

The word foreordained means that God has ordained or planned certain events to occur in the future. Because He has foreordained them, these events will happen. In other words, there is no chance that something else might happen.

Does God Know Everything?

Since God knows the future, and He also ordains certain events to take place, it is possible for Him to tell us ahead of time what is going to occur. Foretelling means that God perfectly predicts what will happen, before it does happen. This foretelling is for our benefit.

These words confirm the biblical truth that God knows everything – past, present, and future. They give us a basic or general idea of the knowledge of the God of Scripture. Indeed, they are a good starting point in our discussion of the knowledge of God.

Question 3

According To The Bible, What Things Does God Specifically Know?

The God of the Bible is a God of knowledge. Indeed, Scripture gives us a number of illustrations about what the Lord specifically knows. As we study God's Word, we find that it says the following about His knowledge of the universe.

2. He Knows Everything Under The Heavens

God knows everything under the heavens. All things are seen by Him. We read about this in the Book of Job. It says:

For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens (Job 28:24 NRSV).

Everything means everything. Nothing escapes His notice.

3. He Knows Every Star By Name

The Bible also says that God knows how many stars there are in the universe as well as the name of every star. The psalmist stated:

He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name (Psalm 147:4 NKJV).

Amazingly, each star has been given a name by God! This shows the depth of His concern for the created universe, as well as the extent of His knowledge.

4. God Knows All The Creatures

God has knowledge of every creature in the universe. In the Book of Hebrews, we read about this attribute of God:

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:13 ESV).

He knows everything about His creatures.

5. He Knows The Smallest Details About His Creation

Jesus taught that God knows even the smallest of details—even the death of a simple sparrow. He said the following:

Not even a sparrow, worth only half a penny, can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it (Matthew 10:29 NLT).

The smallest of details are known by the living God.

6. God Knows Everything About Human Beings

God not only knows everything about the physical universe, He also has intimate knowledge of every human being. Jesus said that He even knows the numbers of the hairs on our head:

And even the hairs of your head are all counted (Matthew 10:30 NRSV).

This illustrates how deeply the Lord is concerned with each of us. It is comforting to know that God takes such interest in us.

7. He Knows Our Every Thought

The Bible says that God knows our every thought. The psalmist made the following statement about the thoughts of the unrighteous:

The LORD knows people's thoughts, that they are worthless! (Psalm 94:11 NLT).

He knows everything which we think about.

8. He Knows Our Needs Before We Ask Him

Jesus said that God knows what we need before we take the time to ask Him about it. Matthew records Him saying the following:

Do not be like them, [the hypocrites] for your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Matthew 6:8 NRSV).

This is a comforting truth. Before we ask or tell Him our needs, He already knows them. This does not mean that we do not ask Him to meet our needs—it merely tells us that He is aware of them before we ask.

9. He Knows What We Will Say

Before we speak, God knows what we will say. The psalmist wrote:

You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD (Psalm 139:4 NLT).

Therefore, nothing that comes out of our mouth surprises God.

10. He Knew Us Before We Were Born

Even before we were born, God knew us. God told Jeremiah about the knowledge He had of the prophet before he was born:

Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I set you apart for my holy purpose. I appointed you to be a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5 God's Word).

He knew us before we came into existence.

11. He Knows How Our Entire Life Will Turn Out

God knows ahead of time how our lives will turn out. The psalmist wrote about this:

Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all [my] days were written in Your book and planned before a single one of them began (Psalm 139:16 CSB).

Although we do not know how our lives will turn out God certainly does.

One writer put it this way:

Though limitless the universe, and gloriously grand, He knows the eternal story of every grain of sand.

Such knowledge that the God of the Bible has is indeed wonderful!

Summary To Question 3 According To The Bible, What Things Does God Specifically Know?

The Scripture not only tells us that the God of the Bible is a God of knowledge, it also informs us of many of the specific things that He does indeed know. They include the following.

To begin with, the Bible says that God knows everything under the heavens. Every detail is known by Him. For example, He knows the number of stars in the universe, as well as the name of each and every star. This shows how complete is His knowledge. He also knows every detail about all of the creatures in the universe. God knows everything that is occurring with them down to the smallest detail.

In addition, He fully knows human beings. This includes the number of hairs on our head. This is how specific is His knowledge of us. He knows our very thoughts. Indeed, before we even think our thoughts, He knows what we will think.

The Bible also says that He knew all about us before we were born. He knows everything we need before we even ask Him. Furthermore, He knows everything that we are going to say. In fact, He knows how our entire life will turn out. This gives us an idea as to the concern and care which He has for us.

Therefore, the obvious conclusion is that the God of Scripture does indeed know all things.

Question 4

What Is The Open View Of God? (Open Theism, Presentism, Relational Theism)

Does God know everything which will happen in the future? Is His knowledge limited in some sense? Traditionally Christianity has emphasized that the God of the Bible knows everything exhaustively. This includes events of the past, those occurring in the present, as well as those which will occur in the future. Indeed, as we have just observed in our previous three questions, this is the clear teaching of Scripture.

A New Controversy

However, this issue of the extent of the knowledge of God has become one of controversy among Bible believers. A relatively new perspective says that God's knowledge does not extend to all future events. This movement is known by a variety of names such as the "open view of God," "open theism," "relational theism" and "presentism."

It is called "open theism" because the future is open, not closed. Since the people who hold this view are Bible-believing Christians who argue that their perspective is actually taught in Scripture, it is important that we have an understanding of what they are saying on this most important of topics. Therefore, we will consider their view of God's knowledge and other related subjects.

The Case For Open Theism

It is important to understand that open theists are not merely refining certain aspects of the traditional view of God which has been held by Christian theologians. Indeed, they are advocating an entirely new perspective on who God is, what He knows, and how He deals with humanity. They believe in a God who has limited knowledge of the future, who has limited control over what occurs, and who has given human beings complete freedom to determine their own destiny.

In their study of Scripture, open theists have made the following observations about God, His knowledge of the future, and His responses to certain events.

1. There Are Verses Which Speak Of The Future As Unsettled

To begin with, open theists note that there are passages of Scripture which speak of what may happen in the future rather than what must happen.

For example, we read the following passage in Exodus:

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt" (Exodus 13:17 NIV).

In this case, God led the people away from the Philistines because He was concerned that they may be afraid and want to return to Egypt.

We find the same type of uncertainty with respect to the future in the life of Jesus. In the Garden of Gethsemane:

And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want” (Matthew 26:39 NRSV).

Jesus asked God the Father if another way, apart from the cross, was possible. This statement of Jesus supposedly means that the future is, in some sense, uncertain.

Consequently, from these and other passages, it is argued that the Bible teaches that the future is, in some sense, open.

Therefore, contrary to traditional belief, the future is not completely set or established. The future depends upon how human beings will freely act. Our decisions will determine what will occur in the future.

2. There Are Passages Where God Asks Questions About The Future

Not only is the future uncertain in many aspects, open theists point to passages where God actually asks questions about the future. In other words, even He Himself does not know what will happen. In the Book of Kings, the Lord asks the question as to who will entice Ahab. The Bible says:

And the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab to march up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ So one was saying this and another was saying that (1 Kings 22:20 CSB).

The Lord asked for advice as to who should cause or entice Ahab to march up and as well as fall at Ramoth-gilead. Open theists assume that God, like the rest of us, does not know what will occur. Therefore, the uncertain future for humanity is unknown to everyone—including God.

3. Open Theists Cite Passages Where God’s Tested People To Discover Their Responses

Another indication of God’s limited knowledge concerns His testing of certain people to learn their response. In Scripture, we find examples God testing people to discover how they will react to the test.

When Abraham obeyed God, after he was told to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, the Bible records this response of the Angel of the Lord, who is the Lord Himself:

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son” (Genesis 22:12 NIV).

It was only when Abraham obeyed God that God realized that Abraham truly did fear God. Only when Abraham was about to offer up his son Isaac did God know that Abraham truly feared Him. Before this time, He did not know what Abraham would do.

These passages, when read at face value, teach us that God did not know the outcome. Therefore, He must be learning new things. He did not know how they would respond. This gives further testimony that the future is uncertain even to God.

4. Open Theists Cite Passages Where God Expresses Surprise

Not only had God tested people to determine how they would react, we also find that He is genuinely surprised by certain reactions. Indeed, open theists point to a number of passages where God seems genuinely stunned by the outcome of certain events.

For example, we read the following passage in Jeremiah:

And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind (Jeremiah 7:31 ESV).

The Lord says that the building of the high places in Topheth was something He never thought would happen. This is further indication that God has not pre-determined every event which will occur, or that He even knows what will occur. He, like the rest of us, has to wait to find out what will happen.

Interestingly, not everyone who holds to open theism believes God is necessarily surprised by what occurs. They argue that He knew all the possible things which could happen, but He did not know which of these would occur. In that sense, He was surprised.

5. Open Theists Note Passages Where God Expresses Regret

There are also passages where God expresses feelings such as regret for past decisions. Scripture states God’s feelings as to why He sent the flood upon the earth:

And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart (Genesis 6:6 ESV).

Regret means that God has had second thoughts about previous decisions. Again, this teaches us that God did not know what was going to occur in certain instances. The events which did eventually happen caused God to regret some of the past decisions which He made.

Conclusions Drawn By Open Theists

Open theists generally make a number of conclusions about God's knowledge, His character, and His control of events based on observations from these passages. We say, generally, because not all open theists agree with each other on every point of this belief system.

Having said this, we can make the following basic points about the belief system of open theism.

1. God Has Limited Knowledge And Control Of The Future

Open theists believe that the God of the Bible is all-knowing, but they redefine what is meant by this. He knows everything which is possible to know but that does not include the future. They believe that His exhaustive knowledge is limited to the present and the past. Therefore, when certain events occurred God was surprised by their outcome and has actually regretted some of His previous decisions.

2. Some Believe God Has Chosen To Have Limited Knowledge

Some of those who hold the open view argue that this idea of God having only limited knowledge of the future is something which He has chosen to do.

While He could have created a world in which He determined every event ahead of time, God decided to create a universe where humans are completely free.

Thus, the future is not entirely knowable to Him. This has also been called "dynamic omniscience." Open theism believes that He has chosen to create we humans with a certain amount of freedom and this freedom does not allow Him to completely control us, or even know what we are about to do. This was His choice.

3. God's Sovereignty Should Not Be Equated With His Pre-determining The Future

Consequently, they insist that we should not equate God's sovereignty, or control over things, with the idea that He pre-determines every single event. God can choose any way He wishes to accomplish His purposes which is consistent with His character.

Indeed, if God has chosen to create a world where His will is accomplished through the free choices of human beings, then this is His absolute right to do so. We cannot insist He must work a certain way. If He relinquishes some of His control to humans so as to accomplish His purposes, then we should accept that fact. It is certainly His right to do this.

Most, but not all, of those holding to the open view believe that it is not possible that God could give human beings complete freedom of choice

and, at the same time, know exactly everything we are going to do in each instance.

Therefore, it is argued that either human freedom must be rejected, or God's absolute knowledge of the future must be rejected—we cannot believe both at the same time. Faced with this dilemma open theists argue that it is the teaching of God's absolute foreknowledge which must be abandoned. They assume God's complete foreknowledge of everything which will happen is incompatible with libertarian human freedom. In fact, some open theists say that it is impossible for both of these to be true at the same time.

Other open theists believe that it is possible that God could know the future free actions of humans, yet He has chosen not to know them. Since God wanted to give complete freedom to people, He, on His own, chose not to know how people would behave in the future.

4. God's Limited Knowledge Is Compared To His Power

This limited knowledge of God can be compared to His power. While He has all-power, God does not always choose to exercise it. In the same manner, while God has all-knowledge, at times, He chooses not to know certain things.

Other open theists believe that God does not know how human beings will react in the future, but they don't pretend to know why this is so. They are not certain whether He could know what they will do, or whether He could not know. The Bible does not tell us. Therefore, they believe that the Bible teaches that God does not know how humans will act in the future, but Scripture is silent on why this is the case.

Therefore, we do not have complete agreement among open theists as to why God does not know each and everything which will occur in the future.

Some open theists argue that God does know every possible thing which could happen in the future, however, He does not know which things will actually occur. Therefore, His knowledge is not limited as to what we may choose—He knows these possibilities. He just does not know what we will choose. This is because the future consists of free decisions and actions of humans. For God, the future is fully unknown and unknowable.

Open theists agree that God sometimes unilaterally intervenes in the affairs of humanity, but this is certainly not the norm. In other words, God has all the power that the traditional view attributes to Him, but He usually chooses not to exercise that power.

The reason that He holds back is because of the degree of freedom He has given to human beings. Again, we find that human freedom seems to be the dominant concern of God. He will not do anything to violate our freedom.

5. Humans Have Complete Freedom To Make Their Own Decisions

This brings us to our next point. Open theists strongly believe that we humans are absolutely free to make our own decisions. In other words, God will not generally interfere with our choices. This being the case, the interference of God in our affairs is minimal at best.

Instead of the view that God has pre-ordained or determined every event which will occur, open theists argue that God has chosen to give us freedom to act any way in which we desire. This idea of complete freedom, also called libertarian freedom, is at the heart of the system of open theism. Therefore, God does not normally override our freedom unless there is an extraordinary reason for doing so.

6. God's Main Attribute Is Love

We now come to one of the central beliefs of the system of open theism. Open theists think that the chief attribute, or characteristic, of God is love. This sums up who God is. He loves us and He wants us to love Him.

However, if love is to be genuine, then it must be freely chosen. Consequently, God cannot and will not control our actions. He gives us real freedom to do whatever we desire. We have been made in such a way that we can please God with our actions, or we can disobey Him. It is completely up to us.

Because God deeply love us, He is dynamically involved in the lives of human beings. The God of the Bible is not an aloof God who merely watches what occurs. God genuinely loves His creation and He is responsive to it.

In fact, God is responsive to the degree that He takes risks. In giving human beings freedom, He risks us disobeying Him and upsetting His plans. According to the open view, things do not always go as God has planned. This is the price of human freedom.

7. God's Attributes Do Not Change But He Changes

The fact that God loves us, and has given us complete freedom to act, leads to another major belief of open theism. Open theists, along with those who hold the classical view of God, do not believe that God changes in His basic nature. He does not become more loving or more holy.

However, contrary to the traditional view, God's actions do change based upon the response of humans. There is a give-and-take relationship between God and humans.

One example given by open theists is from the Book of Hosea. Scripture says that God rebukes His people for their spiritual adultery. In fact, He says that Israel is no longer His wife. We read the following words:

Rebuke your mother; rebuke [her]. For she is not My wife and I am not her husband. Let her remove the promiscuous look from her face and her adultery from between her breasts (Hosea 2:2 CSB).

The people moved away from the Lord in their behavior and commitment to Him. Consequently, the Lord did not consider them to be “His wife” any longer.

Because of their sin, the Lord makes a public disgrace of them:

Now I will expose her shame in the sight of her lovers, and no one will rescue her from My hands (Hosea 2:10 CSB).

This was the result of their sin. They brought this punishment on themselves.

However, we later find God reconciling with His people. Hosea wrote:

Therefore, I am going to persuade her, lead her to the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. . . I will take you to be My wife forever. I will take you to be My wife in righteousness, justice, love, and compassion. I will take you to be My wife in faithfulness, and you will know the LORD (Hosea 2:14,19-20 CSB).

These changing relationships shows that the actions of God will change—based upon the behavior of His people. However, God’s basic character or nature remains unchanged.

8. Prayers Do Make A Difference

All of these factors lead to another important aspect of open theism—the possibility of our prayers having a direct impact on the future. Prayer is seen as something which is of vital importance. Instead of the future being set, the future is open.

Therefore, the things which we ask the Lord about really do make a difference. God has chosen to allow that some of His actions to be based upon our actions. This includes our prayers. In other words, He actually responds to our requests. This is in contrast to the idea that God determines everything ahead of time—to the degree where humans have no real say so.

9. God Exercises General Providence Over Events

Open theism also says that God exercises “general sovereignty” over events rather than “specific sovereignty.” This means that He does not control or dictate everything which will happen ahead of time.

While God’s nature does not change, His actions or strategies do change based upon how we react. This is something which God has chosen to do because of His great love for humanity. It is certainly not because He

cannot control all things. Yet He has set things in such a way that both He and humanity determine the future.

10. God Works With Humanity In Time He Is Not Timeless

Open theists reject the idea that God is timeless. They believe that He is subject to time like the rest of us, and therefore, works with human beings in time. This also explains why He is not able to know what will occur in the future. It also explains why He has to change His plans when humans do not obey Him. He must choose another course of action.

11. God's Limited Knowledge Is Not Demeaning His Character

Open theists argue that saying that God has limited knowledge is not something which demeans or lessens His character. We cannot expect God to do something which is logically impossible to do. As we mentioned, some open theists believe that it is not possible for God to exhaustively know the future and at the same time, to create human beings who are completely free to act as they please. They argue that exhaustive knowledge of the future is a logical impossibility with the world God has created.

However, they say that this is consistent with Christian belief. Christians recognize that God is all-powerful, but this does not logically mean that He can do anything. All believers recognize that there are certain things which God cannot logically do.

For example, He cannot make a square circle; He cannot create a being which would destroy Him. Hence, He cannot do the logically impossible. In the same manner, He cannot know something which is logically impossible to know, the future. Therefore, we are not lessening God or His character by acknowledging that exhaustive knowledge of the future is not possible for God given the world which He has created.

12. Open Theists Believe They Have The Best Answer For The Problem Of Evil

The problem of evil has plagued Christians from the beginning. How can a good God allow evil to exist? Is He lacking power to do something about it? Or is He powerful enough to rid the world of evil but not desiring to do so? In other words, God must be either a bad God or a God which is not all-powerful.

Open theism believes that it has a better answer to this question than the traditional, or classical, belief of Christians. Evil exists because a loving God has created creatures who are completely free. Since God did not want to interfere with our choices, He gave us the choice to choose good or evil.

Unfortunately, we chose evil. God did not choose it for us. According to some open theists, God did He know that this is what was going to occur. He assumed that humanity would choose to obey Him and live happily in the perfect world He created.

In conclusion, open theism sees history as not something which has been pre-determined or foreordained before the world was created. Instead, history is something which is open. Indeed, it is what we humans make of it. Therefore, we have the responsibility of obeying God's Word and bringing about the sort of future which glorifies Him. Basically, it is up to us to bring about the best of all futures.

This is a short summary of the main beliefs of open theism. As we have emphasized, not everyone who holds to open theism agrees with each and every point. In addition, since open theism is a relatively new way of looking at God's character, His knowledge, and His dealings with humanity, we will probably see further refinements from those who hold this position.

Open Theism Believes It Provides The Best Model For Understanding God's Knowledge And Character

Open theists think that people today are seeking a more intimate relationship with God rather than believing in some Deity who is far removed from them. They believe their system meets that need in the God whom they present.

Open theists conclude that their understanding of the nature of God provides the best model for understanding all of the biblical facts. They think that the traditional view of God has a number of deficiencies which must be made right. They assume that their system does this.

Summary To Question 4

What Is The Open View Of God?

(Open Theism, Presentism, Relational Theism)

In recent years, a new understanding about God's knowledge and character has been put forward by some Bible-believing Christians. This model of God has been known as open theism, the open view of God, presentism, and relational theism. Basically, it says that the church has misunderstood much of the biblical teaching regarding the nature of God because it has uncritically accepted certain assumptions Greek philosophy.

The traditional idea that God is an aloof monarch who is interested merely in His own glory, and not in our human affairs and concerns, is incorrect. When the Bible is actually read, and studied on its own terms, the classical view of God will be seen to be deficient in a number of important ways. Therefore, a new understanding of His dealings with humanity is necessary. This correct understanding is the "open view" of God.

Among other things, open theism puts forward biblical arguments to state their case. They note that the Bible does not always portray the future as something which is settled. There are events which may or may not take place.

Furthermore, the Bible records that God Himself asks certain questions about future events. This indicates that the future is not only unsettled,

even God does not know exactly what will occur. Open theists also cite passages where God tested His people to discover for Himself how they would respond to Him. This is another indication that He was not certain how they would react.

In addition, there are instances in Scripture of God actually regretting what He has done in the past because of the disappointing behavior of humans. He has had to alter His plan because of the disobedience of humans. Supposedly, God did not know they were going to act in this manner so He had to modify His plan accordingly.

Passages like these cause open theists to come to a number of conclusions about God, His knowledge, and His control of history. Generally speaking, we can sum up their main beliefs as follows.

Open theists are united in their belief that God has only limited knowledge of the future. While His knowledge of the past and present are exhaustive, He knows everything which has occurred and is occurring, He does not know everything which will occur in the future. The future is open, not closed.

Open theists believe that God could have created a world where He exhaustively knew what was going to occur by determining every event ahead of time. Yet He chose not to do this. Instead He created a world where humans are totally free. He neither pre-plans our responses neither does He know how we will respond. Consequently, the limitation of God's knowledge of the future is something which is self-imposed.

Some open theists argue that it is impossible for God to have created a world where human beings are totally free—if He knows ahead of time the outcome of their every act.

In other words, God cannot have exhaustive knowledge of the future while, at the same time, human beings are free to act as they wish. It is either that God knows with certainty every event which will occur in the future, or that humans have the freedom to do and act as they so desire. Yet, both cannot be true at the same time. If humans are given complete freedom to act, then the future must be unknown even to God.

The reason why God chose to create such a universe is based upon His love for us. The open view of God believes that love is the main, or defining, attribute of God. Because God deeply loves humanity, He has given us the freedom to act. This freedom allows us to follow Him or reject Him. It is ultimately *our* choice.

While God's basic attributes or characteristics do not change, His actions and attitudes do change based upon our behavior. God is the same God, He is no less loving or holy, and neither is He any more loving or holy. These attributes do not change. However, His actions do change. In this sense, God is a changing God.

Open theism insists that prayers become more meaningful in their system. Instead of the future being completely pre-planned or determined, the future is open. Therefore, the prayers of people can and do make a difference concerning how future events will unfold. Thus, prayer should be looked at as something which can actually make things happen. This should encourage us to pray all the more. Because the future is not set, prayer does change things.

In keeping with their system, Open theists also maintain that God exercises general providence over events. He does not pre-determine everything which will happen but rather He exercises limited control. This makes our decisions both free and meaningful.

This view is certainly not unique to open theism. Many Bible-believing Christians, who do not accept the system of open theism as being the best way to understand God and His dealings with humanity, nevertheless also hold to the idea of general providence. They do not believe that every single event, thought, and deed has been pre-programmed by God.

Therefore, we cannot equate this specific position of God's providence with open theism. Indeed, many Bible believing Christians would accept the doctrine of God's general providence as the best way of understanding how He operates with humanity.

In addition, the open view of God sees Him as working with human beings in time. He has restricted Himself to dealing with events moment by moment as they occur. He is time bound like His creation. The future is thus unknown to Him unless He unilaterally declares something must happen. According to open theists, this is something which He rarely does but something He certainly can do if He so desires.

Some open theists emphasize that their perspective on God does not demean His character because we cannot expect Him to know things which are not logical to know. Just as we do not expect God to be able to do the impossible, He cannot make a four sided triangle, we should not expect Him to know the impossible, the future.

Finally, open theism contends that they have the best answer for the difficult problem of the existence of evil. Evil exists because God gave human beings the freedom to choose our own destiny. According to open theists, we chose to bring evil into the world. Indeed, God did not choose if for us, and according to some open theists, God did not even know that we would choose to do so.

Therefore, the existence of evil cannot be blamed upon God. He gave the human race the right to choose for ourselves and we have created our own destiny in these choices.

This is a basic summation of the open view of God. Those who hold to open theism believe that this the best way to understand the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture. It claims that it answers questions that no other system adequately answers.

Question 5

Is Open Theism The Best Way To Understand The Question Of God's Knowledge?

Open theism gives a new view of God's knowledge, His control of events, and His relationship with human beings. At many critical points, it differs from the traditional view of God which has been universally held by Christians. Yet, a number of Bible-believing Christians hold to some form of the open view of God. What are we to make of the claims of open theism? Does it really matter? Are the issues that important?

The Importance Of The Issue

To begin with, we must admit that these questions are indeed significant. Consequently, because of the importance of the issue, we will compare the teachings of open theism to the Scripture and see if they are consistent with God's Word, or whether they contradict what God has said.

We do not want to underestimate the importance of this issue. Open theism presents an entirely different view of God than what has been classically held and taught by Bible-believers. It claims that the church has misunderstood much about God's character because it has uncritically accepted certain aspects of Greek philosophy rather than what Scripture clearly teaches.

Open theists say that a proper interpretation of the Bible will set the record straight. They believe they have this proper interpretation. If they are correct, then the church must abandon many of its long-held beliefs about God, His knowledge, and His actions.

Since the Bible gives us a number of commands to search the Scripture "to see if these things be so," we will do exactly that. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

Instead, test everything. Hold on to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21 God's Word).

It is important to test everything.

John wrote about the need to test the spirits. He penned the following words to the believers in his day:

Dear friends, don't believe all people who say that they have the Spirit. Instead, test them. See whether the spirit they have is from God, because there are many false prophets in the world (1 John 4:1 God's Word).

We are commanded to test the spirits rather than believing everything which we read or hear.

The Jewish believers in Berea were commended for their searching of the Scripture. We read the following in the Book of Acts:

And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to check up on Paul and Silas, to see if they were really teaching the truth (Acts 17:11 NLT).

Thus, in obedience with God's command, we will search the Scripture to see if open theism has a more correct understanding of the nature of the God of Scripture than what has traditionally been taught.

As we have indicated, this is an all-important issue. If we think wrong about our view of God, then we will think wrong about other things pertaining to God. Therefore, our thoughts about Him must be consistent with that which He has revealed.

Evaluating Open Theism

Based upon their claims, we can make certain observations and evaluations of the system of theology known as open theism. In doing so, we will cite the common criticisms and objections which have come from other Bible-believing Christians.

10. Open Theists Believe Many Traditional Things About God

To begin with, it should be noted that open theists believe many of the traditional or classical teachings about the nature of God. For example, they believe that the God of the Bible is the only God who exists. They also believe that He is, by nature, spirit. In other words, He has no physical form.

They also believe that God is the Creator of the universe, who has made all things out of no pre-existing material. Furthermore, they believe that He does not need His creation to exist—He is not in any way dependent upon it.

The God of Scripture is complete within Himself, needing nothing. In these instances, as well as many others, open theists are in the mainstream of historical belief about the nature of God. Therefore, not everything which they teach about God differs from the historical beliefs of the church. This point is important to understand.

11. Open Theists Believe There Is Divine Ignorance Of The Future: God Does Not Know Everything Which Will Happen

While open theists have many beliefs in common with those who hold the classical view of God, they also have some differences. Traditionally, Christians believe that God knows all the details of everything which is currently happening in the present, every last detail of the past, as well as

all the details of things which are yet to happen in the future. This includes the future decisions of His free moral agents, the human race.

However, when it comes to God's knowledge, those who advocate open theism claim that God does not know certain things. Though they claim that the God of Scripture is omniscient, or has all-knowledge, they re-define what this means.

Open theists insist that the God of the Bible is omniscient or all-knowing. His knowledge is exhaustive and perfect—He knows everything that can be known. Yet, according to the open theists God does not know everything which will occur in the future because the future has not yet occurred. By their definition, He does not know these things.

To be fair, many open theists believe that this is a self-limitation which God has placed on Himself. He has the ability to create a world in which the future is known to Him. However, He chose not to do this. Rather He chose to create human beings as free creatures who would, to a large extent, determine the course of history. This distinction made by open theists must be appreciated.

Since human beings are free creatures which have been given the right to make free decisions, these decisions are not known to God. Consequently, there are literally billions of things which God does not know because humans, who have absolute freedom to choose, have not yet made these decisions. Therefore, the future is open. Neither humans nor God know exactly what is going to happen.

Consequently, God, like the rest of us, is waiting to see what will occur in the future. While God may have a good idea of what will occur, He cannot know, according to open theism, exactly what each of us will do. Otherwise, it is argued, we humans do not have true freedom. Therefore, the future is open.

Thus, God's omniscience is understood to mean that He has exhaustive knowledge of everything knowable, but since the future has not yet occurred, it is not completely knowable, even to God. This, it is argued does not diminish the character of God. It simply appreciates that there are certain things which are not even possible for God to know because this is the world which He has chosen to create. Therefore, open theists can still speak of God as being omniscient or all-knowing.

Those who hold to open theism recognize that God may indeed intervene in future events. While God surely realizes what He will do in the future, He does not know what we will do. Therefore, the future consists of things which must occur, the things which God has determined will happen, and things which humans bring about by their own free will. Therefore, the future is partly set and partly open.

Open theists also talk of God's "general plan" for the future. In other words, He has a basic or general idea of what will ultimately occur. His plan for the world will be accomplished.

However, open theists do not believe that He has a specific or detailed plan. Indeed, according to the open view, God cannot have a specific plan since He has left the future in the hands of humans who make their own free choices. Supposedly, God will rarely interfere in events because He does not want to violate human freedom. However, they do say that, if necessary, God will unilaterally act to accomplish His purpose. In the end, God's general plan will come to pass. However, the details of this plan have not been pre-arranged by God neither are they all known to Him.

Response To The Idea That God Is Ignorant Of Some Future Things

The idea that the God of the Bible does not know certain things which are going to occur in the future will come as a shocking statement for most Christians. Not only does this contradict what Christians have always been taught about God and His exhaustive knowledge, there are so many passages in Scripture that seem to clearly teach that God knows everything—including future events. Unless these passages have been seriously misunderstood, we must insist that God does indeed know what will occur in the future. This includes everything which will take place!

Of course, it is possible that God has purposely decided to limit His knowledge of the future. He has the right to create any world which He chooses. However, this is not the issue. It is not whether God could have created a world where His knowledge of the future is limited, or that the future is completely unknown to Him.

The real question is this: did He create such a world? Is there any biblical evidence that the world God created limits His knowledge of the future? This is the question which must be answered.

While those who hold to open theism cite passages which seem to demonstrate God's limited knowledge there are other passages which cannot be explained away so easily.

We will give a few examples.

1. The Lord Compares Himself To False Gods Who Do Not Know The Future

In one passage, the Lord actually challenges the false gods to tell us what will occur in the future in the same way which He has. We read His words in the writings of Isaiah:

Set forth your case, says the LORD; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come. Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified. Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you (Isaiah 41:21-24 ESV).

Isaiah also recorded the Lord as saying the following:

I declared the past events long ago; they came out of My mouth; I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they occurred. Because I know that you are stubborn, and your neck is iron and your forehead bronze, (therefore I declared to you long ago; I announced it to you before it occurred, so you could not claim: My idol caused them; my carved image and cast idol control them (Isaiah 48:3-5 CSB).

This entire argument is based upon the ability of the Lord to tell us exactly what will occur in the future. The fact that the Lord, the God of Israel, is able to correctly declare future events distinguishes Him from all other so-called gods. Therefore, according to the Lord Himself, He is able to tell us the future, and by doing so He shows that He alone is God.

Indeed, the Lord claims that He has told us that long ago He predicted certain events to come to pass and they did indeed come to pass. How could He know what was going to happen if He did not control the future?

In fact, the Lord appeals to His knowledge of the future to demonstrate that He is the one, true God:

You have heard; now look at all the evidence! Will you not admit that what I say is true? (Isaiah 48:6 NET).

The Lord knows the future, controls the future, and is therefore, able to predict what will occur. This is His claim—not ours!

2. God Says He Knows The Future

We also read another passage in Isaiah which emphasizes God's knowledge of the future. The Lord said:

Remember what happened long ago, for I am God, and there is no other; [I am] God, and no one is like Me. I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: My plan will take place, and I will do all My will (Isaiah 46:9-10 CSB).

It is crucial to realize that the Lord Himself is making this claim!

Therefore, from a number of plain statements of Scripture, God's knowledge covers everything both past, present, and future.

Thus, the idea that His knowledge is limited to only the present and the past does not square with the teachings of Scripture. Indeed, there are no clear statements in Scripture to indicate that the future, in any sense, is somehow unknown to God.

While there are some passages in which statements are made that could be inferred to teach that God has limited knowledge, these passages need not be interpreted in this manner. What we do know is this—nowhere does

the Bible unequivocally state that God's knowledge of the future is somehow incomplete.

There is also this simple rule of Bible interpretation—we use what is clearly stated in Scripture to interpret passages which could be understood in a number of different ways. Indeed, we do NOT do the reverse.

Therefore, there are a number of clear passages in the Bible which states that God has not limited Himself to merely knowing the past and the present—He also exhaustively knows the future. There seems to be no doubt about this whatsoever!

Open Theists Believe That God Is Surprised By Certain Events Including Human Tragedies Therefore He Cannot Be Blamed

The next belief of open theism builds upon the previous one. Since God does not know exactly what will happen in the future, He is actually surprised when certain events occur. In other words, He may have assumed that certain things would work out one way but, in the end, they did not. Therefore, the result is as surprising to God as it is to everyone else.

To be fair, open theists claim that God knows each possibility that may occur. Therefore, it did not surprise Him that such things could happen. The real surprise was that these events did happen. In other words, He was surprised by the course of action which was chosen by humans who were given complete freedom to choose.

Therefore, when human tragedies happen, God cannot be blamed for them for He did not know they were going to occur. This supposedly gives comfort to those people who suffer through tragic events.

Often, we ask why God allowed something like this to happen. If God is an all-powerful God, then why did He allow such-and-such a tragedy? With open theism, this is no longer a problem. They contend God did not know this tragedy would happen, therefore He could not have prevented it. This supposedly absolves God of any responsibility.

Instead of assuming that God was responsible for the tragedy, open theists conclude that He had nothing to do with it whatever. Therefore, we cannot look for some explanation for the tragedy that fits into God's great plan. The tragic event was pointless—it is an example of the pointless evil that continually goes on in our fallen world. There is no specific purpose for these evils in the overall plan of God.

That is not to say that God does not have a plan for humanity and the world. He does. However, while God has a general plan for the human race which He will bring to pass, the specifics of that plan are not pre-determined. This means there is no all-encompassing plan that God has for the human race in which every detail is known beforehand.

In other words, there is no single divine will which guides all things. The way in which God has made the relationship between Himself and the

human race does not allow for such a detailed plan. God does have a plan, but it does not include the day-to-day decisions of free human beings.

**Response To The Idea That The Lord
Does Not Know What Will Occur**

There are many Christians who reject the main ideas of open theism but who do agree with them that God does not have a specific plan for every detail of our existence. They too believe that He has a general plan but that He does not pre-determine all of the details of that plan.

However, there is a big difference between saying God does not pre-determine every detail, and saying that God does not know what is going to happen in the future, and therefore cannot prevent human tragedies.

It has been contended that if one holds this position, then there is really no practical difference between the Christian view of God and the views of the atheists or agnostics who say that God does not exist. Tragic events have no real meaning or purpose. Things just happen because they happen. There is no real explanation.

However, the idea that some events are without purpose contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture. Indeed, when Paul wrote to the Romans, he made this point clear:

We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28 CSB).

Note that he said that God causes “all things” to work together for good. In some sense, often unknown to us, God is causing these events to work together for His good.

Furthermore, this point of view, that sees these tragedies as pointless, does not always provide comfort to those who are grieving. Indeed, rather than providing comfort to those who have suffered through some grief, it would seemingly make things so much worse.

The grieving person is now faced with the claim that the entire episode was totally meaningless in the grand scheme of things. Even God could not stop it. He is as helpless as anyone to prevent it. While this may seem comforting to some people, others will have the opposite response. They will see God as impotent, as well as irrelevant in our daily lives.

God can and does work in ways which are beyond our knowledge and beyond our understanding. Indeed, He does not have to explain His ways to us. This is where faith enters. We may not know why something happened and we may never know why.

However, we trust that an all-loving, all-powerful, all-knowing God had a reason for allowing the event to occur. This alone should satisfy us. The

answer given by open theism does not truly comfort the hurting neither does it fit the biblical facts.

God Dwells In Time

Open theists also argue that God dwells in time. In other words, He is bound to the same time constraints as humans. He has not seen the future because the future has not yet occurred. The future is not a reality until it actually occurs. When it does happen, God sees it for the first time along with us. Therefore, according to the open view God is “time bound.”

Response To The Idea That God Is Time Bound

Historically, believers have understood God as not being limited to time as we ourselves are. He does not have to wait for events to happen to know for certainty that they will happen. The fact that He is able to tell us precisely what is going to occur in the future refutes the idea that He is somehow time bound.

The God Of The Bible Is Not Ultimately In Control Of The Future: He Is A Risk Taker

There is another aspect of open theism which differs from traditional belief. If God does not know everything which is going to happen in the future, then He certainly cannot be in control of all things. The God of open theism does not ultimately control everything in the universe. To the contrary, ultimate control has been left to the freewill decisions of sinful human beings.

Indeed, open theists argue that a number of things occur in the universe which are contrary to God's intents and desires. He expected certain things to happen, but they did not happen according to His expectations. Because He does not know what is going to happen in the future, He cannot completely control future events.

This is another of the main beliefs of open theism—the God of Scripture takes risks. Instead of determining future events, or even knowing exactly what will occur in the future, God has chosen to leave the future open. In doing so, He is taking risks.

By giving humans absolute freedom to choose their path in this life, God runs the risk of humans rejecting Him. Even believers may go astray. Yet, because God values the freedom that He has given each of us, He is willing to take this risk. Therefore, He does not know what will happen in the future, neither is He in control of these events.

They believe that this is a superior view to the traditional beliefs of Calvinists and Arminians. Calvinists hold that God has predetermined every event. Open theists argue that this leaves no room for any authentic interaction between God and humanity since everything has been pre-programmed.

They also reject the Arminian view that God does not pre-program all events but that He merely knows what will happen ahead of time because He has all-knowledge of the future. They claim that this too does not allow for any real interaction between God and human beings. If God has always known what is going to happen in the future, either by His programming it ahead of time, or by His exhaustive knowledge of all future events, then there cannot be any genuine freedom for humans. Their alternative is to say that God does not know what will happen in the future, and thus does not control what will occur.

Response To The Idea That God Takes Risks

The idea that God is a risk-taker is completely at odds with the biblical teaching on the subject. Passage after passage emphasizes God's knowledge of the future, as well as His control. We will give a brief sample. Paul wrote to the Romans:

And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose, because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Romans 8:28,29 NET).

Notice that the Lord has predestined believers to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. We are also told that these individuals are the ones whom He specifically "foreknew." In other words, He knew ahead of time who they would be.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians about how God has not only predestined certain things, or determined them ahead of time He also works all things to the counsel of His will:

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will (Ephesians 1:11 ESV).

Certain things have been predetermined to fit God's purpose. Furthermore, all things are working together according to the counsel of His will. In other words, they are NOT out of His control.

These passages, along with others, make it clear that the Lord knows the future and is in control of it. He does not take risks as open theists contend.

Anthropopathisms, Statements Which Attribute Human Emotions To God Are Accepted As Literal Truth By Open Theists

One of the hallmarks of open theism is the literal acceptance of statements which attribute human emotions and human responses to God. Traditionally, these have been seen as "anthropopathisms." This can be defined as statements describing God's emotions, responses and actions in human terms.

These passages which attribute human emotions and actions to God have traditionally been interpreted figuratively, not literally. However, those who argue for open theism believe these passages are to be understood literally. They believe God does repent, show regret and grieve. God does change His mind and regrets some of His previous decisions.

Why does God express regret? It is because He does not know what is going to happen in the future because the future is partly open and partly determined by the free choices of humans.

Open theists accuse those who understand these passages about God's emotions and actions in a figurative sense as not being true to what the passage is trying to teach us. God does have emotions such as grief and regret.

Therefore, open theists differ from the traditional understanding of God in that they see God as similar to humans in a number of significant ways.

Therefore, open theism sees the God of the Bible as the all-knowing sovereign Lord of history. The Lord decrees whatever He wishes to decree. There is nobody can tell Him what to do. Indeed, He controls whatever He chooses to control, and no force can stop Him when He determines to do something.

However, when things do not happen exactly as He anticipates, He is never caught off guard and He is never at a loss of options. He always has a backup plan. Therefore, He will always achieve what He sets out to achieve.

Response To The Idea That Anthropomorphisms Should Be Understood Literally

The interpretations of open theists to these passages which describe God's emotions are not convincing. Open theists selectively read the accounts and come to conclusions that do not fit with the totality of biblical teaching. They use obscure passages to be their "control passages." Clear passages are now interpreted in light of these obscure ones.

Furthermore, open theists often use narrative passages to establish their doctrine instead of passages which make doctrinal statements—the passages are descriptive, not prescriptive. In other words, they are merely describing what has taken place.

Again, this is the wrong way to approach the issue. In a narrative statement, we are merely told what has happened. Doctrinal, or prescriptive, statements explain the reasoning behind the events. Therefore, a direct statement which says God knows all things should be used as the basis for interpreting narrative passages which may seem to say something different.

In addition, there is another issue that must be addressed, anthropomorphisms. Open theists agree that certain descriptions of God are anthropomorphic. Indeed, they agree that God does not have eyes,

hands, ears or a nose. They realize that these descriptions are not meant to be understood literally.

If we are not to understand these physical references to God literally, then why must we understand the emotional descriptions of God in a literal way? Open theists are accused of being inconsistent. It is argued that they should either reject all physical or emotional descriptions of God as being non-literal or they should accept all of these passages as literal descriptions of God and His character.

God Does Not Change His Plans

As far as God changing His plans, the Scripture has a number of things to say about this. The psalmist wrote:

The LORD's plan stands firm forever. His thoughts stand firm in every generation (Psalm 33:11 God's Word).

Notice that we are told that His plan stands firm forever!

In another psalm, we read the following:

You are always the same. Years cannot change you (Psalm 102:27 CEV).

Years change neither God nor His plans. Truly this is a comforting thought.

In the New Testament, James declared:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change (James 1:17 ESV)

These passages indicate that God does not change His plans. Therefore, passages which seem to teach that He does must be interpreted in light of these clear texts. It should not be the other way around.

As we have emphasized, this is a basic rule of Bible interpretation—we are to interpret the obscure in light of the clear. Unhappily, open theists use obscure texts to make their point and often ignore the clear texts which teach something entirely different.

The Main Attribute Of God Is Love According To Open Theists

Open theists argue that God's main attribute is His love. All of His other characteristics or attributes flow from His love. Their key verse is found in the first letter of John:

The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love (1 John 4:8 CSB).

This verse summarizes the main contention of open theism—God is love. They believe that this is the most important description of God in Scripture. Furthermore, they contend that all of God’s attributes or characteristics are derived from His love. Consequently, the emphasis is on this relational aspect of God’s character.

Response To The Idea That God’s Main Attribute Is Love

The problem with this view is that the Bible nowhere places love above any of the other attributes of God. Scripture does not minimize God’s knowledge, power, lordship or any other of His attributes at the expense of His love. All of them are equally important.

There is also the problem of using one verse in First John as the interpretive key for the rest of Scripture. Why use this one verse which says God is love?

There are other passages in Scripture which say God is a consuming fire, God is light, or that God is spirit. Why not use one of these illustrations as our key to interpreting the nature of God? The Bible also says that God is holy. Why isn’t holiness His central attribute?

This shows the need to study everything which God has revealed. Paul said the following to the Ephesian elders:

For I did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole plan of God (Acts 20:27 CSB).

Everything which God has made known in Scripture should be studied. Our conclusions, about who God is and what He is like, should be based upon the totality of Scripture, rather than a verse here and there.

God Is Passible And Changeable: He Has Real Emotions And Certain Aspects Of His Character And Plans Change

Open theists also argue that God is both passible and changeable. This means that He has genuine emotions and that He does change as certain situations dictate. Therefore, He is a “risk-taking” God.

Because He takes risks there is the possibility of Him grieving, changing His mind, or repenting, and experiencing regret. He is not the changeless emotionless God of traditional Christian belief.

Response To The Idea That God Changes

Historically, it has been taught that God is both immutable and impassible. This means that He does not change in His character and His feelings are unchanged by events. This does not mean that God is incapable of sympathizing with us when we suffer. He does. The Bible does indeed teach that God is concerned with us.

The writer to the Hebrews said:

We have a chief priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way that we are, but he didn't sin (Hebrews 4:15 God's Word).

While God can sympathize with us and with our suffering, He cannot be harmed or emotionally moved by any outside source. The God of the Bible is not vulnerable to emotional attacks.

When Scripture says that God suffers and is somehow pained, it is not in the same way in which we suffer and experience pain. No creature, whether human, angelic, or any other created being, can inflict God with pain and suffering. If God shows emotions, then it is because He chooses to show emotion. He certainly does not react to our behavior with a surprised response because it caught Him off guard.

Open Theism Has The Best Answer To The Problem Of Evil

Open theists claim that they have the best answer to the problem of evil. Since God made human beings completely free, evil is our choice and ours alone. Open theists do not believe God made the first humans to choose evil.

Furthermore, some open theists argue that God was actually surprised when evil entered the world. This puts the responsibility for evil squarely on humans. It is our fault, not God's.

Response To Open Theism And Evil

Evil is indeed a problem, but Christianity does have an answer. However, the answer is not to deny that God knew in advance how Adam and Eve would behave. God did indeed give Adam and Eve a legitimate choice. Many Christians would agree with open theists that Adam and Eve had complete freedom to choose to serve God, or to choose to do evil. Therefore, evil is entirely our doing. However, they would not agree that the Lord was taken by surprise when Adam and Eve sinned.

We should note that there are some Christians who contend that God actually ordained that Adam and Eve would sin against Him. In other words, their sin was part of His plan for the world before He created it. This position is heatedly debated among Bible-believers. It is not our intention to look at the "pros and cons" of this question here. We plan to do so in future writings.

However, whatever the final outcome may be, we need not assume that the Lord was unaware that Adam and Eve would disobey Him and that sin would enter into the world.

Other Doctrines Are All Reinterpreted By Open Theists

Another logical step that is taken by open theists concerns other doctrines of Scripture. If we are going to re-interpret our view of God and His

knowledge of the future, of necessity, this is also going to cause us, to reinterpret many other teachings of Scripture.

If God does not know the future, then He did not know Adam and Eve were going to sin in the Garden of Eden. He did not know of the angelic rebellion. Among other things, this means that not all of the events which have occurred in history have a divine purpose.

Events Could Have Turned Out Differently

Furthermore, events which have occurred could have turned out differently. For example, in the life of Jesus Christ things did not have to happen in the way in which they did. Open theists tell us that Mary could have declined to be the mother of Jesus. She could have told the angel Gabriel that she did not want the responsibility to be the mother of the Messiah. God would have had a backup plan if this had occurred.

John the Baptist could have declined the position of forerunner of the Messiah. Moreover, he could have been accidentally killed before he had the chance to proclaim the coming of the Christ, or he may have died prematurely. All of these things are possible according to open theists. Therefore, God had a backup plan in case certain unforeseen circumstances occurred. This includes circumstances even unforeseen by Him.

Open theists also argue that the death of Christ did not necessarily have to occur. It did not happen according to some predetermined plan of God. While Scripture predicted the coming of Christ into the world before the world was created, it did not predict His death.

In other words, Jesus did not have to die. They point to His own prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane to establish this. Jesus asked the Father if there was some other way. This, it is argued, must mean that there were other choices. The cross was not the only way.

The list goes on and on. Therefore, open theism has a radically understanding of many of the traditional beliefs and teachings of the Christian faith.

Response To Other Doctrines Re-interpreted By Open Theists

If open theists are going to argue for a complete overhaul of our understanding of many of the biblical events, it is essential that they make their case with convincing evidence. However, they have not done this.

For one thing, the idea that Jesus could have somehow avoided the cross is not only contradictory to the teachings of Scripture, it could be considered to be bordering on the blasphemous. One must be careful here. Unless there are good reasons to think that the cross of Christ was not in the eternal plan of God, those who are Bible-believers should not attempt to deny the necessity of Jesus' death.

As we search the Scripture, we do not find any good reasons for adopting the ideas of open theism with respect to the death of Christ. Indeed, the Scriptures are quite clear that the death of Jesus Christ was in the pre-determined plan of God. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter wrote:

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men (Acts 2:23 ESV).

The translation God's Word puts it this way:

By using men who don't acknowledge Moses' Teachings, you crucified Jesus, who was given over to death by a plan that God had determined in advance (Acts 2:23 God's Word).

Clearly, Jesus' crucifixion had been planned in advance by God.

Later in the Book of Acts, we read of the following prayer of the believers who had gathered together:

For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place (Acts 4:27-28 ESV).

They recognized that the death of Jesus was part of the pre-determined plan of God. The Bible is thus clear on this issue. Jesus death was not an accident, not an afterthought. It was predicted before by the God of Scripture who exhaustively knows the future.

Open Theists Argue That It Should Not Be Rejected Merely Because It Is New

Finally, open theists contend that their system should not be rejected merely because it is new. They admit that the traditional view of God, with few exceptions, has been held by all members of the church for the last two thousand years.

Yet, they assert that the church throughout history has misinterpreted and misunderstood many of the references to God and His knowledge. It is argued that the church wrongly accepted Greek philosophy and its idea of an unchanging and unfeeling God. Consequently, it is time for the biblical view of God to be proclaimed.

Response To Why Open Theism Is Rejected

If someone comes up with a new perspective of God's nature after nineteen hundred years of Christians discussing and debating the subject, their arguments need to be truly convincing. If they are true, then Christians need to change their perspective of God and His character. However, the arguments in favor of open theism are unconvincing to say

the least. This being the case, open theism, deserves to be rejected for bringing a concept of God to the world which is foreign to the Scripture.

Open theism is not rejected merely because it is new. It is rejected because it contradicts the biblical idea of the God of Scripture. The God of the Bible is sovereign, all-knowing and all-powerful. The God of open theism is none of these things.

However, no one is saying that theologians in the past have always correctly explained God and His actions. They have not. Indeed, many of their explanations about God and His attributes could use some refining. Yet this does not mean we have to go the route of open theism and radically re-define who God is, and what He knows or does not know. Open theism is not the biblical answer—rather it is a doctrinal threat to the truthfulness of the Christian faith.

Concluding Thoughts On Open Theism

We have provided a brief summary of some of the main claims made by those who hold the open view of God, as well as how these claims have been evaluated and criticized by other Bible-believers. A few more thoughts are in order.

Open Theists Are Accused Of Mishandling Biblical Texts

One of the criticisms which is often made against open theism is the way in which biblical texts are handled. To prove their case, open theists cite a number of narrative passages where certain statements are made about God, His knowledge, and His emotions. These passages are used as proof texts that God does change His mind, that He does not exhaustively know the future, and that He expresses regret for past acts.

However, there are other passages which give clear statements to the contrary. Furthermore, these passages are in contexts where specific truths are being taught. It is from these statements that doctrines should be derived, not from historical narratives. Narratives usually tell us what happened and sometimes why things happened but there are other portions of Scripture which are written to teach specific truths. It is to these passages where one must first go. Open theists do not do this. This has caused their approach to be criticized.

Open Theism Cannot Guarantee The Inerrancy Of Scripture

Those who hold to open theism cannot guarantee the complete inerrancy of Scripture. Since their system insists that humans must always make totally free decisions without any interference by God, this would include the writers of Scripture.

Consequently, instead of holding to the traditional belief that God supervised or guided the writers to accurately record His words and thoughts, what we may have in the Bible is the personal understanding of the writers themselves as to what God said and meant. Therefore, in any

instance, we cannot be certain that we have God's thoughts on the matter rather than the opinions and thoughts of the biblical writers.

This, of course, brings up some obvious questions, "How do we know they understood God correctly? How do we know they were willingly led by God or merely injected their own ideas?"

Ultimately, under this system we cannot know. While certain people who hold to open theism may choose to believe that each writer willingly submitted to the leading of the Spirit of God, this is not a necessary conclusion.

If this is the case, then this leaves us with no final authority whatsoever. While an inerrant Scripture is theoretically compatible with open theism, it is also theoretically possible that it is not. There is no assurance here whatsoever. According to open theism, God cannot guarantee the finished result because He has given humans complete or libertarian freedom.

Scripture Is A Divine/Human Product

However, Scripture teaches that as far as the biblical writers are concerned the Bible was a divine/human project. The human writers wrote but God superintended their writings to bring about His desired result. The final outcome was God's inerrant Word. Paul wrote:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16 ESV).

Paul said "all" Scripture has been breathed-out by God. All of it.

Peter emphasized the divine nature of Scripture. He said:

Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20,21 ESV).

The Contemporary English Version puts it this way:

But you need to realize that no one alone can understand any of the prophecies in the Scriptures. The prophets did not think these things up on their own, but they were guided by the Spirit of God (2 Peter 1:20,21 CEV).

Notice that Peter insisted that Scripture did not come from the will of humans, things which humans made up on their own. Instead, Scripture ultimately comes from the Spirit of God.

If those who hold to open theism claim that the books of the Bible are an exception to the idea that God always gives humans complete freedom to

make their own choices, then they have conceded the argument. If in some cases, God does guide humans to accomplish exactly what He wishes, then why cannot He do it in other cases?

Once a person grants the possibility that God will override complete human freedom to accomplish His purposes, then it is then only a matter of where and when He does this. Therefore, open theism seems to collapse at its foundation.

Open Theism Has No Answer Concerning Bible Difficulties And So-Called Contradictions

There is also one other thing which we must address on this issue of the inerrancy of Scripture. What do we do when we find difficulties and so-called contradictions in the Scripture? Are we to assume they may be real mistakes?

Since open theism cannot guarantee that the Scripture is error-free Bible, then it is possible what we have are genuine contradictions. Is this how we are supposed to treat difficulties? Instead of attempting to harmonize them with other parts of Scripture, we merely admit that the writers made mistakes because they were completely free to write as they pleased.

Not only does this contradict the clear teaching of Scripture that the entire Bible is God's infallible Word, it leaves the believer with no confidence whatsoever that the Scriptures are to be trusted. Open theism is in serious error at this point.

We Do Not Have To Decide Between An Aloof God Or The God Of Open Theism

Often open theism is presented as an either/or proposition. Either one accepts the view of God's nature as an aloof king who is not intimately involved in the lives of His people, or the view of open theism which has Him as a caring, loving God who has our best interest at heart.

However, these are not our only choices. The classical view of God can and should be refined. However, any refinements which are to be made are to clarify what Scripture says about God's nature and knowledge. Open theism is not the answer.

Having said this, it is not a fair to conclude that all people who have held the classical or traditional idea of God have seen Him as unresponsive to humanity. Indeed, many, if not most, who have argued for the traditional view of God have recognized that God is both a mighty king as well as a king who is vitally interested in the well-being of His people.

He is a caring loving king—not the aloof monarch that open theism thinks the classical view makes Him out to be. Those who hold the traditional view recognize that Scripture teaches a God who is in complete control, One who exhaustively knows the future. Yet this same God is also dynamically involved in the lives of people. Indeed, He responds to our

needs, He answers our prayers. Therefore, it is wrong to say that classical theism has somehow removed God from His involvement with the human race.

Open Theism Is Criticized For Being Too Human-Centered

Open theism is usually criticized as being human-centered as an alternative to being God-centered. Instead of God being glorified, open theists see God working all things for the benefit of humans. Our happiness seems to be His chief goal.

Open theists have seemingly remade God into our image. Instead of God guiding history, it is human beings who are the ones determine their own destiny. We become the ultimate masters of our own fate. Open theism demeans God and exalts humans. This is certainly the reverse of what the Scripture teaches.

Consequently, we need to take seriously the passages which speak of God's majesty and power. In the Book of Isaiah there is a passage where the curtain is rolled back, and we have a glimpse of heaven.

It says the following:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and His robe filled the temple. Seraphim were standing above Him; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another: Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts; His glory fills the whole earth. The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices, and the temple was filled with smoke. Then I said: Woe is me, for I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, [and] because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts (Isaiah 6:1-5 CSB).

Here the Lord is pictured as the all-powerful King. We must have this proper picture of Him. He is not merely sitting on His throne in heaven waiting for humans to make the next move. Instead, He is the One in control of all things!

Therefore, it becomes clear that we human beings are not equals with God. Thus, we should never make the mistake of having our belief system to be too human-centered.

There Are Mysteries When It Comes To Understanding God's Nature

We also must appreciate that there are certain mysteries about God which we cannot comprehend. While we would certainly like to understand more about God, and the ways by which He works, we are limited to what the Scripture tells us. As we examine the Bible, we find that it speaks of God as acting in ways beyond our human understanding. For example, the psalmist wrote:

Does God Know Everything?

How great are your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep!
The stupid man cannot know; the fool cannot understand this (Psalm
92:5-6 ESV).

God's thoughts are deep. The stupid person cannot know them.

Elsewhere in the Psalms, we read that God's thoughts are beyond the understanding of the godly. The psalmist wrote:

Your thoughts are far beyond my understanding, much more than I could ever imagine. I try to count your thoughts, but they outnumber the grains of sand on the beach. And when I awake, I will find you nearby (Psalm 139:17-18 CEV).

This passage is highly instructive. God's thoughts for His people outnumber the grains of sand on the seashore. Consequently, they are beyond our understanding as finite human beings. We all should humbly admit this.

He Has Wisdom Which Cannot Be Measured

There is more. Isaiah the prophet wrote the following of the Lord:

Don't you know? Haven't you heard? The LORD is the eternal God, Creator of the earth. He never gets weary or tired; his wisdom cannot be measured (Isaiah 40:28 CEV).

God's wisdom cannot be measured. This is something all of us must appreciate.

His Thoughts Are Not Our Thoughts

Isaiah also recorded the Lord saying the following:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways. [This is] the LORD's declaration. "For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9 CSB).

Notice that the difference between God's thoughts and our thoughts is the difference between the earth and the highest heaven.

Paul wrote the following to the Romans:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and untraceable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor? (Romans 11:33-34 CSB).

The truths taught in these passages must be appreciated. God's ways are not our ways. In fact, we cannot always understand why He does things. Indeed, it is arrogant of us to think that we can.

Therefore, we will always have to live with certain tensions which we cannot completely understand. This is what faith in God is all about. It does not require that we know everything or have to be able to explain everything.

Contrary To Open Theists God's Plan Never Fails!

Open theists say that the plans and purposes of God sometimes fail. However, there are also a number of passages which make it plain that God's plans never fail! We read in Joshua:

Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass (Joshua 21:45 ESV).

All of His plans have come to pass. All of them will come to pass.

The psalmist wrote about the plans which God has for us:

How blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord and does not seek help from the proud or from liars! O Lord, my God, you have accomplished many things; you have done amazing things and carried out your purposes for us. No one can thwart you! I want to declare them and talk about them, but they are too numerous to recount! (Psalm 40:4-5 NET).

God does indeed have plans for us.

The psalmist also wrote:

The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations (Psalm 33:10-11 ESV).

Notice the contrast. The plans of the people are frustrated while God's counsel stands forever. His plans always work, theirs do not.

We read the word of Jeremiah in the Book of Lamentations about the faithfulness of the Lord to His plans:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22,23 ESV).

God is indeed faithful to His plan. It never fails.

Isaiah the prophet records the Lord saying that His plans and declarations never fail. Indeed, nothing can reverse what He sets out to do. We read:

"I, I am the LORD, and there is no other Savior but Me. I alone declared, saved, and proclaimed—and not some foreign god among you. So you are My witnesses"—the LORD's declaration— "and I am

God. Also, from today on I am He [alone], and no one can take [anything] from My hand. I act, and who can reverse it?" (Isaiah 43:10-13 CSB).

The Lord makes it clear that nobody can reverse His plan! It will happen exactly as He has decided. There will be no changes made by anyone.

The prophet Daniel recorded the testimony of the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar who recognized the greatness of the Lord as well as His control of all things. He said:

To him the nations are far less than nothing; God controls the stars in the sky and everyone on this earth. When God does something, we cannot change it or even ask why (Daniel 4:35 CEV).

These passages are about as clear as can be. God has certain plans for our world and His plans never fail!

Conclusion: Open Theism Is Not An Option For Believers

From the above points, we can see that open theism does not fit the biblical account of who God is, or what He does. Indeed, open theism contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture at so many places. The God of the Bible is not someone who is moving with humanity to some unknown and uncertain future which nobody, including God Himself, knows what will occur, or even can know what will occur.

Instead, He is the God who knows all things and is in control of all things. This being the case, open theism is not a real option for Bible-believers who are attempting to understand God's nature.

Summary To Question 5: Is Open Theism The Best Way To Understand The Question Of God's Knowledge?

Certain Bible-believing Christians have put forth a unique way of understanding God and His knowledge. It is called a number of things including open theism, the open view of God, freewill theism, and presentism. Those who hold this position are Bible-believing Christians who claim to derive this view of God from the Scripture itself. However, their position does not fit with the overall teaching of Scripture and in many places actually contradicts what the Bible says. We can summarize it as follows.

It must be noted that while their view of God differs considerable from the classical view, open theists do hold to a number of the traditional beliefs about God. For example, they believe that He is the only God which exists, that He is the Creator of the universe, and that Jesus Christ is God Himself who became a human being.

However, an essential belief, the inerrancy of Scripture, cannot be guaranteed by those holding to open theism. Since open theists insist God

has given human beings complete freedom to do whatever they wish, the writers of Scripture could not be supernaturally guided every step of the way to write exactly what God determined them to write. Inerrancy, therefore, cannot be certain.

If any open theist believes in inerrancy, it is not because his position demands it. Just as easily, someone holding to open theism could deny inerrancy insisting that the writers of Scripture decided to either insert their own ideas, or they made honest mistakes. There is no assurance of an inerrant Bible from open theism.

Though open theists have some beliefs in common with those who hold to the classical view of God, there are radical differences. Indeed, the open view of God in many ways, presents an entirely different God than the One in which the Bible portrays.

One major difference is in the area of knowledge. According to the open perspective, God knows everything that can be known—the past and the present. However, it is not possible for Him to know the future because the future has not yet occurred. Therefore, nobody, including God knows exactly what will happen in the future.

However, this position is in direct contradiction to what the Bible teaches and what God actually says about Himself. Indeed, one of the things which separates the God of the Bible from the gods of the ancient world is that God can, and does, accurately predict what will happen in the future. The Lord uses this as evidence that He is the only God which exists. Open theism denies Him of this.

According to open theists, since God does not know everything which will occur in the future, He is not responsible for any of the tragic events which occur. He, like everyone else, is surprised by these events. He could not prevent them because He did not know they were going to happen. This supposedly gives comfort to those who wish to blame God for some tragedy in their life.

Contrary to open theism, the idea of a God who is always responding to events, because He does not and cannot control them, certainly is a God who does not provide much comfort. An impotent God is not much difference than a God which does not exist.

As far as love is concerned, open theism sees “love” as the main attribute of God. Indeed, the rest of God’s attributes are all interpreted in light of God’s love for humanity.

However, the Bible does not do this, and neither should we. Whenever we highlight one attribute or characteristic of God against the rest of them, we come up with an imbalanced view of who He is. This is what open theism has done. God is indeed a God of love, but He is much more than that.

Open theists also deny there are such things as anthropomorphisms in Scripture. This consists of attributing human emotions to God. They

understand the passages literally which speak of God repenting, regretting, and feeling grieved. Open theists argue that God is intimately involved in His creation and thus takes risks. These risks may involve regretting what He has done or changing His mind.

While we should reject the idea that God is an emotionless Being, we should not go the other direction and assume that His emotions are somehow the same as ours. We have been made in His image and we do reflect Him in many ways. However, His character is perfect, ours is not. Therefore, we must be careful about assuming that passages which state His emotions in human terms have an exact correspondence to our emotions. They do not. There is an element of mystery here which we must appreciate.

This brings us to our next point. It must be appreciated that God's nature, as well as His dealings with humanity, cannot be completely understood by us. While we should certainly attempt to understand the truths which He has revealed, we should not go beyond what Scripture says. Since there are many things that God has not told us, we should leave it at that. We should not try to fill in the blanks where the Bible is silent.

Open theism claims that it has the best answer to the problem of evil. In fact, many people who reject open theism would agree that Adam and Eve had complete freedom to obey God or to disobey Him. However, they would not agree with some open theists that God did not know which way they would choose or that He was surprised by their choice.

Yet many Christians would claim that the sin of Adam and Eve was part of God's plan. He not only knew that they would sin, He pre-planned or pre-determined that they would sin. Since God predetermines all things, the sin of Adam and Eve must have been ordained ahead of time by God.

The idea that God predetermined the entrance of sin into the world is not accepted by all Christians. Indeed, it is a source of much discussion. Therefore, the view of open theism, that God gave Adam and Eve a completely free choice, is held by many, if not most, Bible-believing Christians. Yet their belief, that the Lord did not know how they would respond to the choices they had, is not what the Bible teaches.

Open theism is a new concept. Consequently, it should be carefully evaluated. In fact, for its supporters to claim that the church has misunderstood the character of God for the last two thousand years is a mighty big claim. There must be overwhelming evidence to back up such a contention. However, those advocating open theism do not provide the convincing evidence needed.

There are other problems. Open theism has been criticized for too much emphasis on humans and not enough emphasis on God. Too often humans are elevated, and God is diminished. This is not the proper way to understand the Scripture.

Does God Know Everything?

Furthermore, open theism tries to answer a number of questions to which Scripture gives no clear answer. Rather than attempting to understand these things which God has not explained to us, it is better if we reverently confess that we do not have enough information to make a reasonable conclusion.

In addition, we do not have to choose from the view of God as an aloof Monarch and the caring loving God of open theism. Indeed, these are not the only choices we have. The view of a God who is detached from humanity is not the biblical view. This has always been recognized by classical theologians. He does care. He does love His people deeply while at the same time He knows everything which will happen and is in complete control of all things.

Consequently, while the advocates of open theism are sincere, the evidence shows that they are sincerely wrong in their beliefs. A better answer is needed.

Question 6

Was God Unaware Of What Had Happened To Adam And Eve? (Genesis 3:9-11)

Does the Bible teach that there are some things beyond the knowledge of God? Or does God choose not to know certain things that He otherwise would be able to know? According to open theism, God's knowledge is limited to those things that can be known. Since the future is unknown, God cannot know exactly what will happen. Like the rest of us, God will have to wait and see what happens in the future. This means that God can learn new things.

Appeal Is Made To Scripture

Part of their appeal to this limited knowledge of God comes from certain passages of Scripture. Indeed, some people believe that a close examination of the Bible will show that God's knowledge is limited in certain areas. One of these passages which allegedly reveals this limited knowledge of God is found in the Book of Genesis. It records the original sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

The Episode Of Adam And Eve

Scripture says that Adam and Eve tried to hide themselves from God when they realized their sinful condition. The Bible records God arriving in the Garden and calling out to the man. Scripture puts it this way:

But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (Genesis 3:9-11 NIV).

The Book of Genesis records God asking Adam a number of questions. First, He asked Adam where He was. After Adam responded God then asked Him two other questions. He wanted to know how he knew he was naked, and if Adam had eaten from the tree which the Lord commanded Him not to eat from. Therefore, we find that the Lord God asked Adam three specific questions in the Garden of Eden after Adam had sinned.

How are we to understand these questions which the Lord asked Adam? A number of solutions have been offered. They include the following.

Option 1: God Had To Ask Because He Did Not Know

It is alleged that God did not know where Adam was, so that He had to ask. This, it is argued, shows limited knowledge on His part. In addition, God asked Adam if he had eaten from the forbidden tree. This also shows that God did not know that Adam and Eve had chosen to rebel against Him. God also wanted to know who told Adam and Eve that they were

naked. He was surprised to learn that Adam had disobeyed. Otherwise, why should He ask the question?

Option 2: God Asked Adam To Get Him To Confess

The idea that God did not know what had occurred with Adam does not fit the facts. God was not asking Adam where he was because He needed the information. Instead God wanted Adam to confess that he was hiding from Him. He also wanted Adam to admit his sin of eating from the forbidden tree.

The context is one of judgment. The Lord asked the questions to Adam so that he would admit his guilt before God.

Furthermore, this example would not prove that God does not know the future. Indeed, it would only prove that He does not know everything in the present, or in the past.

These are not future events which God is asking about. He asked Adam what had happened, not what was going to happen.

Therefore, from a look at this passage in its context, it is not necessary to conclude that God was somehow unaware or taken by surprise by the sin of Adam and Eve.

**Summary To Question 6
Was God Unaware Of What Had Happened
To Adam And Eve? (Genesis 3:9-11)**

The Bible says that when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they tried to hide from God. When God came to the Garden of Eden, He called out to Adam to find him. After Adam responded, God asked Him two further questions about his past behavior. He wanted to know who told Adam that he was naked, as well as if he had eaten from the forbidden tree. These three questions, which God asked, have been interpreted in a number of ways.

Some people believe that God did not know where Adam was or what had happened to him. Therefore, God asked him these questions. Furthermore, the Lord God was genuinely surprised by Adam's behavior. This indicates that God does not have all knowledge of all things as well as the fact that He can be surprised.

The usual way this is understood is not that God needed to know where Adam was, or what he had done. God certainly knew this. God's questions were to get Adam to own up to his sin. The context is getting Adam to admit that he had done wrong and that he needed to admit his wrongdoing.

Furthermore, this passage would certainly not illustrate God's lack of knowledge of future events. The questions God asked Adam concerned where he was at the present time, and what he had done in the past.

Does God Know Everything?

Therefore, this passage should not be used to argue that God does not know the future. However, it has been used to assert that God was surprised by past actions. Yet a proper understanding of the context will show that this is not the case. Nothing takes God by surprise.

Question 7

Was God Unaware Of What The People Were Doing At Babel? (Genesis 11:5-6)

When the people built the tower of Babel, the Bible records the Lord investigating what they were doing. Scripture records it this way:

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them” (Genesis 11:5-6 ESV).

How shall we understand what the Lord said? Does this mean God had to actually go down from heaven to the earth and then see for Himself what was happening? In other words, unless He left heaven and came to the earth are we to assume that He would not have known what was going on?

There are two options which are put forth.

Option 1: God Did Not Know What Was Happening

According to some, God did not know what was happening on the earth until He came down and saw for Himself. His knowledge was therefore limited to what He could personally see. This has been interpreted to mean that the writer of Genesis assumed that God had limited knowledge and understanding of events on the earth. It is argued that the writer of this portion of Genesis had a primitive view of God.

Option 2: The Language Was Anthropopathic: God Did Not Have To Come Down To See What Was Happening

The idea that God had to actually leave heaven to discover what was occurring in Babel is contrary to the totality of the teaching of Scripture. The usual way in which this is understood is that language is not meant to be understood literally. It is an anthropathism. It is describing God’s actions and feelings in human terms. Indeed, He did not have to come down to discover what was going on at Babel.

In this case, the Lord came down in the sense of judgment. He was going to make a comment upon the situation which was occurring in Babel. It is a way of expressing the fact that what the people at Babel had done was displeasing to the Lord.

We do not have to read this passage in such a way as to assume God only knows the things which He can observe. This is certainly not the view of God the Book of Genesis portrays—or anywhere else in Scripture for that matter. The God of the Bible is all-knowing. He does not have to investigate to learn anything because it is not possible for Him to learn anything new. Therefore, this passage does not give us an example of the limited knowledge of God.

**Summary To Question 7:
Was God Unaware Of What The People
Were Doing At Babel? (Genesis 11:5-6)**

In the Book of Genesis there is a statement made about the Lord which seems to indicate to some people that His knowledge is somehow limited. Scripture says that the Lord came down from heaven to see for Himself concerning certain things which were happening at the city of Babel. He wanted to discover firsthand what was occurring with the tower which was being built.

Some believe that this indicates that God's knowledge of events is somehow limited. It is claimed that the biblical writers did not assume that He had all-knowledge of everything which was taking place. Instead they believed that He had to leave His home in heaven and come down and personally see for Himself. However, this does not have to be the way to understand this passage.

Neither is it the best way to understand what is being taught. The language is anthropopathic. It is attributing human actions to God. The passage does not mean that the Lord has to literally come down and see for Himself before He knows what was going on. God's presence is not limited to one particular place. Indeed, the Bible says that He is everywhere present.

Therefore, this passage in Genesis does not teach that the God of Scripture is somehow limited in His knowledge. He is not.

Question 8

Did The Lord Have To Come Down From Heaven To Discover What Was Happening At Sodom And Gomorrah? (Genesis 18:20-21)

The Bible says that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had sinned terribly against the Lord. The Scripture says the following occurred:

Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know” (Genesis 18:20-21 NIV).

Again, we find Scripture saying that God must go down and look at something to see if it is so. Does this not indicate God’s lack of knowledge? There are a number of ways in which we can respond to this passage.

Option 1: God Had To Go Down To See For Himself

A literal understanding of these verses has God coming down to see what was occurring. Until He arrived, He did not know if their behavior was as bad as had been reported to Him. If this is what the passage is meant to teach, then the God of the Bible has limited knowledge of events happening on the earth.

Option 2: God Did Not Have To Leave Heaven To Know What Was Occurring

There are a number of ways of understanding this passage without assuming that God had to actually leave heaven and come down to earth to discover what was going on.

For one thing, the Bible speaks of God being omni-present or everywhere present. This being the case, He does not have to go anywhere to discover what is occurring because His presence is already everywhere.

Indeed, the Bible is clear that there is no place which a person can hide from the Lord:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths,
you are there (Psalm 139:7-8 NIV).

Consequently, the writer was not intending to teach that God had to actually come down from heaven to discover what was happening on the earth.

If this is the case, then how are we to understand the language? One perspective sees the language as figurative. In this context, God pictures Himself like a human. Human beings would have to go and check out something and see if it were as bad as they had heard.

The Lord pictures Himself that way to emphasize the severity of the sin against Him. We are not to assume that He had to literally leave heaven, then and come down to the earth to find out if the story about the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was true.

The point is that God did not have to personally visit Sodom and Gomorrah to discover what was going on in these wicked cities. Therefore, we should not assume that this passage is attempting to teach us that the God of Scripture is somehow limited.

Summary To Question 8:

Did The Lord Have To Come Down From Heaven To Discover What Was Happening At Sodom And Gomorrah? (Genesis 18:20-21)

The Lord is said to have had to come down from heaven to the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to discover if they were as sinful as it had been reported to Him. This gives the impression that He did not know the extent of their sin until He personally saw it for Himself. Is this what this passage is meant to teach?

Some feel that this passage shows that God's knowledge was somehow limited. He did not know what was occurring until He saw for Himself. If so, it would teach that God does not know everything that is presently going on.

Yet this is certainly not what this passage is teaching. Indeed, Scripture says that God is present everywhere in the universe. This does not mean that He is limited to knowing only what He can observe.

Therefore, the language has to be seen as figurative. God is spoken of as coming down to Sodom to see if the sin was really as bad as reported. This is to emphasize the depths of sin to which the people had slipped.

In addition, the idea that God would personally visit the city underscores the necessity of judgment. Therefore, we are dealing with figurative language in this instance.

Question 9

Did God Consult With Abraham About The Future Of Sodom And Gomorrah? (Genesis 18:22-33)

Sodom and Gomorrah were two evil cities. The Lord had determined to destroy them for their corrupt ways. While on His way to Sodom, the Lord, in human form, visited Abraham. Abraham approached the Lord during that visit and bargained with Him for the lives of the people of Sodom. The Bible records Abraham the following:

Abraham came closer and asked, “Are you really going to sweep away the innocent with the guilty? What if there are 50 innocent people in the city? Are you really going to sweep them away? Won’t you spare that place for the sake of the 50 innocent people who are in it? It would be unthinkable for you to do such a thing, to treat the innocent and the guilty alike and to kill the innocent with the guilty. That would be unthinkable! Won’t the judge of the whole earth do what is fair?” (Genesis 18:23-25 God’s Word).

Beginning with the number fifty, Abraham began to bargain with the Lord. Eventually, he got the Lord to agree that He would not destroy these cities if only ten righteous people were found. Scripture says:

“Please don’t be angry if I speak only one more time,” Abraham said. “What if 10 are found there?” He answered, “I will not destroy it for the sake of the 10” (Genesis 18:32 God’s Word).

How are we to understand this? Did God actually change His plans because of the influence of Abraham? Does this mean that we too can bargain with God and by doing so He will change His plans?

Option 1: Abraham Caused The Lord To Change His Mind

A literal reading of the account has Abraham actually changing the mind of the Lord. It has been contended that God’s plan was altered when Abraham convinced Him to reconsider what He was about to do. Instead of destroying the city outright, Abraham bargained with God to the point that if only ten righteous people were found, then God would not destroy these evil cities.

While ten righteous people were not found, this is not the issue. The fact is that God had decided to destroy the city but then agreed to spare it if some righteous were found. The number of the righteous started at fifty and was finally settled on at ten. Since the Lord agreed to everything Abraham had said, it seems obvious that the plans of the Lord were not unalterable. This, it is argued, is another illustration of God being flexible with how He is working out His plan for time and eternity.

Option 2: God Did Not Alter His Plan

The usual way of understanding this passage does not see the Lord as altering what He was planning to do. The fact that He agreed to spare the

city if only ten righteous were to be found shows both His knowledge of all things as well as the specific nature of His plan. The Lord was determined to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their evil practices. He knew that there were not even ten righteous in the city.

This is why He agreed with Abraham that He would spare the city if only ten were found. In the end, only four people left Sodom; Lot, his wife and their two daughters. Among other things, this shows that the destruction of these cities was justified—there were no righteous people dwelling there!

Consequently, this is not a case of God willingly consulting with humans to determine how He is going to work out His plan. Rather it is a case of the Lord knowing everything which will happen in the future. Thus, He agreed with Abraham that if a certain number of righteous were found He would not destroy the city. Yet, the Lord knew all along that this would never occur.

**Summary To Question 9:
Did God Consult With Abraham About The Future
Of Sodom And Gomorrah? (Genesis 18:22-33)**

The Bible says that the Lord had decided to destroy the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Before that occurred, Scripture records Abraham bargaining with God as to what it would take to spare the city from God's judgment.

We then have the account of Abraham and the Lord going back and forth as to how many righteous people it would take to spare these evil cities. Starting with fifty righteous, Abraham bargained with the Lord until the number reached ten. If ten righteous could be found in Sodom and Gomorrah, then the Lord would not destroy these evil cities. Unfortunately, they could not find ten righteous.

Many understand this episode as an example of the future being unsettled. To begin with, the Lord allowed the possibility of not destroying these cities. This is in contrast to His original Word on the subject. In fact, He agreed to a number of possible scenarios. He would not destroy the city if fifty righteous were found, if forty were found, if thirty were found, if twenty were found, and if ten were found.

This seems to show that the Lord was willing to consider a number of options. He could either destroy the cities or withhold judgment based upon a certain number of godly people who remained. Consequently, many people conclude that this episode teaches us that all of God's plans have not been predetermined but rather the future is something which has not yet been determined.

Others, however, do not see it this way. They reckon that the Lord agreed with Abraham to spare the city if ten righteous were found because He knew that this was not going to happen.

Does God Know Everything?

Since only four people actually left Sodom before the destruction, it shows that the determination of the Lord to destroy these evil cities was never in doubt.

Furthermore, it was well-justified. Basically, there were no righteous people in either of these cities. Hence, the judgment of the Lord needed to take place. The planned destruction was never in doubt. Consequently, we should not view this episode as an example of God not knowing what the outcome would be.

Question 10

Did God Have To Test Abraham To Know If He Actually Trusted Him? (Genesis 22)

One of the most memorable stories in all of Scripture concerns the patriarch Abraham and his son of promise, Isaac. Isaac was born in a miraculous way. Abraham and his wife Sarah had gone beyond the child-bearing age when Isaac was born.

After Isaac grew to be a young man, the Lord then commanded Abraham to sacrifice his promised son. Abraham obeyed in faith. Though Isaac was his only son, and the one whom the Lord promised would produce offspring, Abraham trusted God to do something miraculous.

The Bible says that when Abraham went to sacrifice his promised son he was interrupted by the Angel of the Lord. The Angel of the Lord then spoke to Abraham:

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you did not refuse to give me your son, your only son” (Genesis 22:12 God’s Word).

Does this mean that God did not know what Abraham was going to do before they actually reached the place of sacrifice? Did God have to first test Abraham to find out whether or not he would obey Him? Why did He say, “Now I know that you fear God?” Did He not know this previously? How should we interpret this episode?

Option 1: Some Argue That God Did Not Know What Abraham Would Do

There are those which argue that God did not actually know what Abraham would do until the time He stopped him from sacrificing Isaac. Consequently, they understand the language in Genesis as literal. In this instance, God learned something which He previously did not know.

The fact that the Lord said, “Now I know” shows that His knowledge of the future is not exhaustive. Open theists say this creates problems for those who insist God knows everything which will happen in the future. This episode, they contend, shows that He does not know what is going to occur.

Option 2: God Knew Ahead Of Time

The interpretation of this passage by open theists does not fit the facts. Again, we emphasize that God knew ahead of time what Abraham would do. The fact that Abraham obeyed God confirmed the fact that he totally trusted the Lord.

In addition, we are again dealing with God’s knowledge of the present, not of the future. If God knows everything that occurs in the present then

certainly He would know what was in the heart of Abraham. He would not have had to test Abraham to find out what he was thinking in his innermost thoughts. Elsewhere the Bible says:

And you, my son Solomon, learn to know your father's God. Serve the LORD wholeheartedly and willingly because he searches every heart and understands every thought we have. If you dedicate your life to serving him, he will accept you. But if you abandon him, he will reject you from then on (1 Chronicles 28:9 God's Word).

According to this passage, God presently searches our hearts and knows it thoughts and intents. If God did not know what was in Abraham's heart when He asked him to sacrifice Isaac, then God's present knowledge would be limited or defective. Yet the Bible explicitly states that God knows what is in the heart of each of us. Elsewhere, the Lord said:

I, the Lord, probe into people's minds. I examine people's hearts. And I deal with each person according to how he has behaved. I give them what they deserve based on what they have done (Jeremiah 17:10 NET).

Therefore, the passage cannot have the meaning that God did not know what was in the heart of Abraham until Abraham actually obeyed the Lord. He certainly did know the heart of Abraham as He knows the hearts of each of us.

There are several other points which need to be made about this episode.

God Already Knew Of Abraham's Faith

The faith of Abraham was not something which was unknown to God. In fact, on a number of occasions Abraham had shown His faith in the Lord. When God called him to leave his family and homeland, Abraham obeyed. The Bible says:

So Abram left, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran (Genesis 12:4 God's Word).

When the Lord called Abraham, he immediately left his place of residence and went to the place where the Lord had called him.

Later, the Lord said of Abraham:

For I have chosen him so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. This is how the LORD will fulfill to Abraham what He promised him (Genesis 18:19 CSB).

Thus, God had already expressed His confidence in Abraham. Therefore, although God had already chosen Abraham and had spoken of His

complete confidence in him, this particular test with Isaac was the culmination of the testing of Abraham's faith.

The New Testament makes the following comment upon Abraham and his faith:

By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise (Hebrews 11:9-11 NIV).

Consequently, the statement of the Lord, that “He now knows that Abraham truly trusts Him” is the testimony that Abraham did indeed live up to the confidence which the Lord had previously shown. It is not that the Lord realized, at this particular moment, that His previous words of confidence in Abraham were only now revealed to be true.

Thus, God's expression of delight at Abraham's act of faith should not be seen as something He merely found out at that time.

**Summary To Question 10:
Did God Have To Test Abraham To Know
If He Actually Trusted Him? (Genesis 22)**

The Bible records a now famous episode in the life of Abraham. God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac. Though Isaac was the son of promise, through whom many descendants would be brought forth, Abraham was commanded to sacrifice him. This took place before Isaac married and produced any offspring. This command caused an obvious problem for Abraham.

Abraham obeyed. He was about to go through with this commandment to sacrifice his son when the Lord stopped Him. At that time, the Lord made the comment that He “now knows” Abraham trusts Him because he was willing to sacrifice Isaac.

Does this mean that the Lord did not know this to be true until this time? In other words, did God have to wait and see what would actually happen? This statement of Abraham has been interpreted in a number of ways.

Open theists understand the words which God spoke in a literal manner. The Lord did not really know what Abraham was going to do until He did it. God was testing Abraham to see if he truly trusted Him. This, it is claimed, shows God's lack of knowledge of the future. It testifies to the fact that He has created a world in which the future is unknown even to Him. This is one of many passages which give evidence of this.

On the other hand, most commentators understand God's words differently. God certainly knew what was in the heart of Abraham before

this episode. In fact, Scripture clearly says that the Lord knows what is in the hearts of all people. Consequently, there would have been no need to test Abraham to discover what was in his heart.

Furthermore, we are told that God previously confirmed a covenant with Abraham and His descendants. Therefore, it was not necessary for Him to know whether or not Abraham would be faithful. The Lord would not have confirmed the covenant in the first place if He would have thought Abraham to be unworthy.

This episode is the culmination of Abraham's walk of faith. He had learned to trust God completely. The knowledge which God spoke of attaining was experiential knowledge. While He had known from eternity past what Abraham would do in this situation, when it occurred, God could testify experientially to Abraham's faithfulness. This is the sense which God "now knows" that Abraham trusted Him.

In sum, this particular episode does not give us any reason to believe that God has no knowledge of the future. To the contrary, all of the evidence says He knows exactly what will come to pass.

Question 11

Was God Unaware That Israel Loved Him (Deuteronomy 13:3)

The Bible says that God tested the people of Israel to see if the people actually loved Him. We read about this in the Book of Deuteronomy. It says:

You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 13:3 ESV).

This passage says that God was testing His people to see whether or not they would love Him. How are we to understand the meaning of this? There are a couple of options which are usually put forward to answer this.

Option 1: God Was Unaware That The People Loved Him

This, it is argued, assumes the lack of knowledge on the part of God. According to this interpretation of this verse, the God of the Bible was not aware whether or not Israel actually loved Him. He had to find out whether the people truly loved Him with all their heart. Consequently, it shows a lack of knowledge on God's part. It is another passage which indicates God knowledge is limited in certain areas. In other words, it is not exhaustive.

Option 2: This Says Nothing About God's Lack Of Knowledge

While some people try to use this verse to say that God's knowledge is somehow limited, this passage says nothing about God's knowledge, or lack of it. Israel is the one being tested in the wilderness! The tests will demonstrate whether or not they really love God. At Mount Sinai, they agreed to follow God's covenant, and be His representatives to the world. Now God is testing them to see if they really meant what they said. This is what the passage is saying.

Therefore, this passage is not testing God's knowledge. Rather it is testing Israel to see if they will live up to their agreement which they made at Mount Sinai. Consequently, this verse should not be used as evidence that the God of the Bible somehow has limited knowledge. He does not.

Summary To Question 11:

Was God Unaware That Israel Loved Him (Deuteronomy 13:3)

The Bible says that God tested the nation Israel to see if they really loved Him. This passage has been understood in a few different ways.

To some people, this indicates that the God of the Bible did not in fact know that they did love Him. Consequently, He had to test them to find out their true feelings for Him. Those who hold this interpretation see this as another example of the limited knowledge of God.

Does God Know Everything?

Yet this passage teaches no such thing. The context is the testing of Israel, not God. At Mt. Sinai, the nation had entered into an agreement or covenant with God to be His special people. They were to be His witnesses among the nations.

Now God was testing them to see if they truly meant what they said. God wanted them to demonstrate that they loved Him with all their heart. This is what this verse is all about.

Thus, we do not have an illustration of God's limited knowledge or God testing Israel to discover what they would do because He did not really know. Rightly understood, there is no conflict between this passage and the teaching of the rest of Scripture concerning the knowledge of God which informs us that He knows everything possible which there is to know.

Question 12

Was God Unaware That Israel Would Not Produce Good Grapes? (Isaiah 5:4)

In the Book of Isaiah, the Scripture talks about the God of the Bible seemingly being surprised by the lack of good grapes that were produced by the nation of Israel. The Bible has God asking the following question:

What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? (Isaiah 5:4 NIV).

This passage seems to teach that God was truly surprised that Israel did not produce good grapes. In other words, He was expecting something that did not happen. Does this not indicate that His knowledge is limited? How are we to understand His question? There are a few options that have been put forward.

Option 1: God Was Surprised

There is the position which some people hold which says that God was actually surprised that He did not find any grapes. This supposedly shows that God's knowledge is not exhaustive when it comes to future events. He was expecting something, but He did not find. It is one of many passages which teach that God does not know what is going to occur in the future. Instead, He constantly continues to learn new things. This shows His limited knowledge in certain areas.

Option 2: The Language Is Not Meant To Be Understood Literally

It is not necessary to understand this passage as teaching us that God's knowledge is somehow limited. This verse is actually the comment of God upon the lack of fruit that was borne. He is reminding the people that He expected grapes to be brought forth in His vineyard. He is not asking the question because He doesn't know the answer.

God wanted the people to consider the reason why the vineyard did not yield grapes. He wanted them to contemplate why they did not produce what they should have produced. It has nothing to say, one way or the other, about God's knowledge or lack of it. Therefore, it should not be used as a proof text that God's knowledge is somehow limited.

Option 3: These Are Not Meant To Be The Words Of God

There is another way of looking at this text. It is uncertain as to who is actually speaking here. This passage seemingly begins with Isaiah the prophet speaking for God.

In this verse, he actually speaks as God. Yet, it is still the prophet speaking. In other words, in this song of the vineyard, we have the words of Isaiah

the prophet speaking prophetically for God but not actually recording the words of God. If this is the case, then there is no problem with this passage.

Option two and option three both fit with the totality of Scripture. Option one contradicts what the Bible says in so many places. We again emphasize the fact that the God of Scripture knows everything which is possible for Him to know.

**Summary To Question 12:
Was God Unaware That Israel Would
Not Produce Good Grapes? (Isaiah 5:4)**

In the Book of Isaiah there is a song of the vineyard where the God of Scripture seems to be surprised at the outcome of certain events. The Lord looked into His vineyard and did not find good grapes but only bad grapes. Scripture portrays Him as surprised at the result. How are we to understand this?

This has been interpreted to mean that God does not always know what is going to occur in the future. In this case, He was expecting something which He did not find. Consequently, not only did He did not find what He expected to find, God also learned something new about the situation. This is taken to be one of many passages which teach God's limited knowledge. According to this viewpoint He is able to discover or learn new things because the future is unknown to Him.

However, this is not the way in which this passage should be understood. Isaiah the prophet is recording God questioning the people for the lack of fruit they produced. They needed to answer for this. It was not God expressing surprise as though He did not know what they were going to do, or that He expected to find fruit and He was shocked not to find it. This is not the case at all.

There is another way to interpret this song. These are the words of the prophet Isaiah—they are not the words of God. At the beginning of the song, Isaiah is speaking for God. However, in this verse, he actually speaks as God. Yet, it is still the prophet speaking.

If this is the proper interpretation, then we do not have the words of God at all in this passage. It is the words of His inspired prophet asking questions of the people. When Isaiah speaks as God, it is to ask the people the question about the lack of good grapes.

Indeed, it is not to express some idea that His knowledge is limited in some way. Thus, this verse does not have anything to do with the subject of God's knowledge. Nothing whatsoever.

Again, when we understand the context of this passage, there is nothing in it which teaches that God has limited knowledge of this subject or, for that matter, on any subject. The God of the Bible has all knowledge in areas where knowledge is possible.

Question 13

Did God Explicitly Say He Was Unaware What The People Would Do? (Jeremiah 18:6-11)

One of the key passages for open theists is found in the Book of Jeremiah. It is a warning for the people of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. The Lord Himself said:

O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand. If I announce that a certain nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, but then that nation renounces its evil ways, I will not destroy it as I had planned. And if I announce that I will plant and build up a certain nation or kingdom, but then that nation turns to evil and refuses to obey me, I will not bless it as I said I would. "Therefore, Jeremiah, go and warn all Judah and Jerusalem. Say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: I am planning disaster for you instead of good. So turn from your evil ways, each of you, and do what is right' (Jeremiah 18:6-11 NLT).

Open theists argue that the text could not be clearer. If the people repented of their sin, then they would be spared God's judgment. However, if they did not repent, then they would be judged. The outcome is conditional upon the behavior of the people.

We find that open theists argue that this shows that God's mind has not been settled on what will occur—the future is open to what the people make it. Is this what this passage is teaching us?

This Does Not Deny God's Foreknowledge

The fact that this announcement of judgment is conditional is obvious. The future will be decided by the behavior of the people to the promises of God.

However, this does not mean that God does not know which way they will choose! In fact, in the very next verse God predicts what they will do:

But the people replied, "Don't waste your breath. We will continue to live as we want to, stubbornly following our own evil desires" (Jeremiah 18:12 NLT).

Therefore, rather than not knowing what the people will do, the Lord accurately predicts their behavior.

Consequently, contrary to open theism, there is nothing in this passage which even remotely suggests that God does not have knowledge of what will occur in the future. In point of fact, God knows exactly what they will do, and He says so!

Though God warned the nation of the coming judgment they refused to listen. Therefore, Judah and Jerusalem were going to be judged. While God knew the outcome of their decision before it occurred the people were still held responsible.

**Summary To Question 13:
Did God Explicitly Say He Was Unaware
What The People Would Do? (Jeremiah 18:6-11)**

Open theists often appeal to Jeremiah 18:6-11 to show that the future is still open, or not settled. In this passage, the Lord Himself says that He will bring judgment to Judah and Jerusalem if they do not repent. The announced judgment is clearly conditioned on the behavior of the people.

Therefore, judgment may or may not occur. At the moment Jeremiah delivered this word, it was unknown what would happen because the people had not chosen what they would do. This passage has been interpreted in a couple of ways.

Open theists see this as a clear statement of the future being open—a statement by the Lord Himself. Indeed, it is argued, means the future is not settled for humans or for God. Until the people make their own freewill decision, God does not know what they will do. Therefore, it speaks of His limited foreknowledge.

Yet this is not at all what this passage is saying. Indeed, in the very next verse the Lord predicts how the people will act—they will reject His word through the prophet Jeremiah.

Consequently, instead of illustrating that God does not know the future, the passage states just the opposite! In fact, we have an excellent illustration of what the Bible teaches about human freedom and God's knowledge. While the people were free to choose whether or not they would obey God, God knew ahead of time what they would choose. The fact that God knew ahead of time did not relieve them of their responsibility.

This is consistent with what the rest of Scripture says about this subject. Humans are free to make choices and are held responsible for these choices. Yet, all along, God already knows what they will choose because of His exhaustive knowledge of the future.

Question 14

Why Does The Lord Use The Word “Perhaps?” Was He Uncertain Of The Future? (Jeremiah 26:2,3, Ezekiel 12:3)

There are some passages in the Old Testament where the God of Scripture uses the word “perhaps.” To many, this means God was not certain what would occur. Consequently, this is why He used a term of uncertainty. Those who hold this view believe that His knowledge of the future was limited. The evidence is as follows.

Did God Know The People Would Repent? (Jeremiah 26:2-3)

God told the prophet Jeremiah to tell the people to turn from their evil ways. In doing so, it sounds like He was not sure whether or not they would repent. The Bible records the following words of the Lord:

This is what the LORD says: Stand in the courtyard of the LORD’s house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done (Jeremiah 26:2,3 NIV).

God says, “Perhaps they will listen and turn from their evil ways.” The inference is that He did not know whether or not they would. Some people conclude that He was waiting to see what was going to occur. In other words, He did not know.

Was God Uncertain As To Whether The People Would Understand? (Ezekiel 12:3)

We find something similar taught in the writings of the prophet Ezekiel.

The Lord said the following to him:

Therefore, son of man, pack your belongings for exile and in the daytime, as they watch, set out and go from where you are to another place. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house (Ezekiel 12:3 NIV).

In this case, the Lord seems uncertain as to whether or not the people would understand. If God knows what will happen in the future, then why does He use the word “perhaps” which indicates uncertainty?

Do not these passages teach God’s ignorance of how Judah will respond to the message of the prophets, as well as His surprise that they are still worshipping idols?

**Option 1: This Passage Testifies To God's
Uncertainty Of Future Events**

There are those who believe that these passages are examples of God's lack of knowledge of future events. They testify that He does not know what is going to occur. Otherwise, we would not find Him using the word "perhaps."

**Option 2: This Does Not Mean God Was Uncertain
About What Would Occur**

While these passages are used by some people to teach that God's knowledge of the future is not exhaustive, such is not the case. There are a number of things that can be said.

First, God is giving orders to two of His prophets to proclaim His Word to the rebellious people. Their responsibility is to tell the people the Word of the Lord no matter what the results may be. It was not important for them to know how the people would respond. Therefore, initially, the word "perhaps" is for the benefit of these prophets. They did not have to know ahead of time what would happen.

We have the same idea in the New Testament. Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians:

So, what is Apollos? And what is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, and each has the role the Lord has given. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:5-7 CSB).

According to Paul, God gives the growth. The job of the messenger is to faithfully proclaim the message. The results are completely left up to God. Therefore, it is not necessary that the spokesman knows in advance how his message will be received. The spokesman is to proclaim the message while the Lord will bring about the results.

Therefore, when we properly understand these passages, the so-called problem disappears. God knows the future and these passages do not cast any doubt upon this.

**Summary To Question 14:
Why Does The Lord Use The Word "Perhaps?" Was He
Uncertain Of The Future? (Jeremiah 26:2,3, Ezekiel 12:3)**

The Bible gives a couple of instances where the Lord uses the word "perhaps." One instance is founding the writings of Jeremiah, and the other in the Book of Ezekiel. To some people, this shows that the Lord was uncertain as to what would happen in the future. Indeed, the fact that He used the word "perhaps" in dealing with the future is a demonstration that He does not really know what will occur.

Does God Know Everything?

However, as we examine these passages in their context, the idea disappears that God's knowledge is somehow limited. The word "perhaps" was for the benefit of the prophets. They were to proclaim God's message to the people without having to know the results ahead of time. Instead of God guaranteeing the results, He left the matter unknown.

It was not important that the prophets knew how the people would respond. Their job was to proclaim the truth. The results of their preaching were left up to God and to Him alone. Consequently, these particular passages have nothing to do with God's knowledge or lack thereof. It is not the subject which is addressed.

Question 15

Does God Forget Sin? (Jeremiah 31:34, Isaiah 43:25)

If God is all-knowing, as the Bible so clearly teaches that He is, then He cannot learn anything new, neither can He forget anything which He has learned. His knowledge does not increase or decrease.

However, there are a couple of passages in Scripture which seem to teach that God actually forgets certain things. They are as follows.

Jeremiah 31:34

There is a passage in the writings of Jeremiah that seems to teach that God has a memory lapse concerning sin. We read the following verse about what the Lord will do in the future:

No longer will one teach his neighbor or his brother, saying: Know the LORD, for they will all know Me, from the least to the greatest of them—the LORD’s declaration. “For I will forgive their wrongdoing and never again remember their sin” (Jeremiah 31:34 CSB).

The Lord says that He will never remember their sin again. This seems to mean that God will forget they had ever sinned.

Isaiah 43:25

The same thing is said in the writings of Isaiah. The prophet records the Lord saying the following:

I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins (Isaiah 43:25 ESV).

Here we have God saying that He will not remember the sins of the people. Does this mean that it is possible for God to forget certain things? Two options are usually presented to answer this particular question.

Option 1: God Does Forget

Some people actually assume that this passage teaches that God can forget certain things He has learned. This means His knowledge is not exhaustive. He can learn new things as well as forgetting certain things which He had learned. In other words, the knowledge of God is not always exhaustive.

Option 2: These Statements Are Not To Be Understood Literally

While there are those who understand this passage as saying that God actually forgets the sins of the people, this is not what the passage means. Indeed, the idea behind the words, “I will not remember” in this context

means, “not to hold it against them.” God will not remember their sins in the sense that He will not hold them against the people.

The translation God’s Word puts it this way:

No longer will each person teach his neighbors or his relatives by saying, ‘Know the LORD.’ All of them, from the least important to the most important, will know me,” declares the LORD, “because I will forgive their wickedness and I will no longer hold their sins against them” (Jeremiah 31:44 God’s Word).

This translation is more in keeping with the intent of the passage. The idea that God will not “remember” the sin of the people means that He will not hold it against them in the Day of Judgment. It certainly does not mean that somehow, they will escape His memory.

Elsewhere He says:

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:12 NIV).

Our sins have been forgiven and forgotten. When we say “forgotten” we mean that He will not hold them against us any longer.

Consequently, the term “remember” is used in the sense of bringing something up again. It does not mean that God will forget what had occurred. He never forgets.

**Summary To Question 15:
Does God Forget Sin? (Jeremiah 31:44, Isaiah 43:25)**

The Bible says in a number of places that the God of Scripture “will not remember” the sin of the people. This has caused some to assume that His knowledge is not exhaustive. Indeed, if He can “forget” certain things, then clearly He does not have all knowledge.

However, this is not what these passages are teaching. God does not forget anything in the sense that He cannot remember. The idea behind the words “will not remember” in these passages is that God will not hold their sin against them. He forgets it in the sense that He will not hold them responsible for what they have done. He will forgive them for their evil deeds. This is the meaning of these words in this particular context.

Therefore, the idea of God “forgetting,” or “not remembering,” is not to be understood in the same way as we forget something. Consequently, it has nothing to say about the amount of knowledge which God possesses.

Question 16

Did God Ask A Question About The Future Because It Was Unknown To Him? (Hosea 8:5)

One of the favorite passages of open theists, which they say indicates the future is unknown to God, is found in the Book of Hosea. It records the Lord asking a question about the future. Hosea records Him saying:

I have spurned your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? (Hosea 8:5 ESV).

The Lord asks a question without giving an answer. How are we to understand this question which He asks? Are we to assume that He did not know the answer?

1. Many Understand The Statement Literally: God Did Not Know The Answer

A number of people take the question of the Lord at face value. God asks the question of His people, “How long will they be incapable of innocence” because He does not know the answer. Thus, the best way to understand His question is exactly as it stands.

If the future had already been settled in eternity past, then why would God ask such a question? Surely, He would know the answer if He were aware of the future.

Open theists conclude that this illustrates that God does not know the future exhaustively. He does not know the answer to His own question.

2. There Are Better Ways To Understand This Verse

Yet, taking this statement literally is not the only way to understand God’s statement about the future of His people, or even the best way to understand it. What we have here is God’s lamenting over the people constant rejection of Him. The question is rhetorical—it does not expect an answer.

In fact, the New English Translation recognizes this and translates it as a statement instead of a question. It says:

O Samaria, he has rejected your calf idol! My anger burns against them! They will not survive much longer without being punished, even though they are Israelites! (Hosea 8:5 NET).

Thus, the natural way to understand this verse is to see it as God’s sadness and anger against the people for not listening to Him.

Indeed, it has nothing to do with His knowledge of the future. Instead it is a lament over their rejection of Him.

**Summary To Question 16:
Did God Ask A Question About The Future Because It Was
Unknown To Him? (Hosea 8:5)**

Open theists believe that the God of Scripture does not know the future exhaustively. Indeed, they assert that some things are unknown to Him.

One of the examples they use to demonstrate this belief is found in the Book of Hosea. In this passage, the Bible records God asking a question about how long the people will survive without being punished. Open theism sees this as another example of God's limited knowledge. The Lord asks a question, but He does not know the answer to His own question.

However, it is not necessary to assume that this is what the passage is saying. Hosea is recording God lamenting over the behavior of His wayward people. The question He asks is not because He is unaware of the answer. Indeed, the question is rhetorical. He is not expecting an answer. He is merely stating the facts—the people of Israel had constantly rejected Him.

Consequently, while this passage has often been used by open theists to show God's lack of knowledge of the future, in actuality, it has nothing to do with what He knows, or what He does not know. Therefore, it should not be appealed to in this discussion.

Question 17

Did God Wrongly Think Israel Would Come Back To Him? (Jeremiah 3:7)

Open theists hold that God is ignorant of how people will act in the future. They use a number of proof texts to establish this. One of them is found in the Book of Jeremiah. It reads as follows:

I thought that after she had done all this that she would come back to me. But she didn't come back, and her treacherous sister Judah saw her (Jeremiah 3:7 God's Word).

Here we are told that God thought that Judah would come back to Him. But Judah did not. Does this mean that God thought something was going to occur which did not occur? Are we to assume that this tells us?

Option 1: God Believed Something Would Happen Which Did Not Happen

Some people think that God genuinely believed one thing would happen, but it did not happen. Therefore, He was mistaken about what would occur in the future. Indeed, He was genuinely surprised and saddened by the results of Israel's behavior.

They also ask the following question, "How could God honestly say He thought the nation of Israel would turn to Him when He always knew they would not?"

They conclude He must not have known. This means God has true beliefs, as well as false beliefs.

Option 2: God Was Not Ignorant

We do not have to interpret this passage by assuming God was mistaken about what would occur. In fact, He predicted ahead of time Israel would turn away from Him.

We read about this in the Book of Deuteronomy.:

Assemble all your tribal elders and officers before me, so that I may speak these words directly to them and call heaven and earth as witnesses against them. For I know that after my death you will become completely corrupt and turn from the path I have commanded you. Disaster will come to you in the future, because you will do what is evil in the LORD's sight, infuriating Him with what your hands have made (Deuteronomy 31:28,29 CSB).

Thus, the Lord knew that Israel would not always be faithful to Him and would not always come back to Him when they went astray.

What we have in this verse is an anthropopathic way of describing God's chagrin, or disappointment, at the behavior of Israel.

Therefore, we should not assume ignorance on the part of the Lord in this instance. Indeed, no ignorance whatsoever.

**Summary To Question 17:
Did God Wrongly Think Israel Would
Come Back To Him? (Jeremiah 3:7)**

In the Book of Jeremiah, there is a statement from the Lord that says He thought that sinning Israel would come back to Him. But Israel did not come back as the Lord had thought. Therefore, it is concluded by some that the God of the Bible was mistaken in His belief about how the nation would behave. Is this what we should conclude from this passage? Was the Lord wrong in His assessment?

Open theists do indeed cite this passage as an example of God being wrong about past statements. Since He does not exhaustively know the future, we should expect to see Him make mistakes like this. In this verse, He supposedly admits His error.

Therefore, we should not expect Him to be able to do something which He is not capable of doing.

This particular interpretation of this passage, however, does not fit the facts. Indeed, centuries earlier the prophet Moses told the people of Israel that the Lord expected them to turn from His path to a path of sin. Consequently, He had predicted such a thing would take place. It certainly was no surprise to Him.

Basically, this passage is God expressing, in human terms that we can understand, His disappointment that Israel did not return to Him in faith—nothing more.

In sum, the fact that Israel would fall into sin was something God not only anticipated, He actually predicted its occurrence. Hence, this passage in Jeremiah needs to be read in light of this and other statements the Lord made about His people and their future.

Question 18

Did The Lord Think Israel Would Never Turn Away? (Jeremiah 3:19-20)

There is a passage in the Book of Jeremiah where the Lord said that Israel would never turn away from Him. Scripture records Him saying the following:

I thought: How I long to make you [My] sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of all the nations. I thought: You will call Me, my Father, and never turn away from Me. However, as a woman may betray her lover, so you have betrayed) Me, house of Israel. [This is] the LORD's declaration (Jeremiah 3:19-20 CSB).

The Lord gave Israel a desirable land. Therefore, He believed they would recognize His goodness, call Him Father, and never turn away from Him. Yet they betrayed Him. They did turn away from Him. Does this mean that the Lord did not expect this behavior? Was He truly surprised that the nation did not embrace Him for the goodness He showed them? Should we thus assume that the Lord was mistaken?

Option 1: The Behavior Was Unexpected To God

There is the interpretation which says God was actually surprised by the behavior of the people of Israel. Indeed, open theists use this verse as a proof text of God's limited, and sometimes incorrect, knowledge of the future. The Lord assumed these people would never turn away from Him, yet they did. This is one of many mistaken assumptions which He made in the past. These mistakes reveal His limited knowledge.

Option 2: God Was Not Actually Taken By Surprise

Again, we should not assume that this verse is trying to teach us that the knowledge of God is somehow limited or incomplete. The idea that God assumed that the people would naturally follow Him because of His gracious gifts to them is not the way to interpret these verses. We do not have to literally believe that the Lord understood that this alone would be sufficient for the people to follow Him.

In fact, there are a number of passages which teach just the opposite. The Lord clearly recognized that the people would not always be obedient to Him. This being the case, then we should not assume that their turning away from Him took Him by surprise. It did not.

Summary To Question 18:

Did The Lord Think Israel Would Never Turn Away? (Jeremiah 3:19-20)

In a passage in the Book of Jeremiah, it says that God thought that the people of Israel would never turn away from Him. The Lord said that He assumed that His gracious treatment of them would cause the nation to

remain faithful to Him. However, they did not. They turned away from this loving God. Was the Lord in error in His assumption?

Open theists point to this passage as an example of God's lack of knowledge of what will occur in the future. They take for granted that these verses support the idea that God has created a world where the future is unknown to Him. Therefore, He cannot accurately predict details about future events.

Yet, understanding this passage as literal does not appreciate the immediate context, or the way in which the Lord often speaks of Himself. Since He has clearly revealed that He knows all things, and is in control of all things, He certainly could not be guilty of thinking one thing would happen when the opposite occurred.

Therefore, we must not assume that the Lord is telling us that He thought the wrong things about the behavior of His people.

In fact, He had previously predicted that the people would eventually turn away from Him. Consequently, this passage does not reveal that God was surprised by their rebellion against Him.

Question 19

Was God Unaware That The People Would Build High Places? Why Did He Say “It Would Never Enter My Mind?” (Jeremiah 7:31, 19:5, 32:35)

There are several passages in the Book of Jeremiah where it says that the people were going to build the pagan high places for worship. The following passage seems to indicate God’s ignorance that this would happen. We read the following words in the Book of Jeremiah:

And they go on building the high place of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire—which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind (Jeremiah 7:31 NRSV).

According to this verse, God did not command the building of these high places, neither did the thought that they would do it come into His mind.

A similar thing is said later in the writings of Jeremiah. It says:

They have built worship sites to burn their children as sacrifices to Baal. I didn't ask them or command them to do this. It never entered my mind (Jeremiah 19:5 God’s Word)

Here the Lord said that such an act never entered into His mind.

We read a third passage about this subject of the high places. It says:

And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin (Jeremiah 32:35 NKJV).

Again, we are told that such an abominable act by the people never entered into the mind of the Lord. Does this mean He never thought such a thing would occur?

These passages have been used to argue that God did not think that Judah would continue to build the places of child sacrifice and He was wrong in His assumption. Is this what these passages are attempting to teach us?

Option 1: This Indicate God’s Limited Knowledge

There are those who believe that these passages actually express God’s ignorance of certain things. When the Lord said, “It did not come into His mind,” God is telling us that He did not anticipate this occurring. This supposedly indicates that God’s knowledge is limited as to how people were going to behave in the future. Thus, it is concluded that the future is unknown to Him. He can be just as surprised as the rest of us with events which have not yet taken place.

**Option 2: The Passage Does Not Mean
God Has Limited Knowledge**

While open theists use these passages as reflecting God's inability to know exactly how people will act in the future, this is not the best way to understand these passages. Indeed, the phrase "did not enter the mind of God" does not mean that God never thought about this possibility.

In fact, Scripture tells us that this very same practice had previously happened a century earlier in the reigns of two kings—Ahaz and Hoshea. Of Ahaz, it says:

He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites (2 Kings 16:3 NIV).

The king of Judah practiced the same horrible things as did the pagan kings of Israel. This included child sacrifices.

The same practices occurred during the reign of another king of Judah, Hoshea. We read about this in Kings. It says:

They made their sons and daughters pass through the fire and practiced divination and interpreted omens. They devoted themselves to do what was evil in the LORD's sight and provoked Him (2 Kings 17:17 CSB).

Hence, we have two specific past examples by kings of Judah of this type of detestable behavior. In other words, the events which Jeremiah recorded were not things which had never happened to this people before.

Thus, it is obvious that this passage cannot mean that God never thought about this sinful practice occurring. He certainly knew about the previous kings who had done the exact same thing. Of a truth, nobody who is a Bible-believer would want to accuse God of having forgotten events which took place some one hundred years previously.

The statements in Jeremiah mean that this was not His original intention. In other words, He did not intend for His kings to practice child sacrifice. This terrible practice violated the holy standards that God had established.

The Hebrew Does Not Have To Be Translated That Way

In addition, the Hebrew can be better translated, "It did not enter my heart." Therefore, the subject is God's intention, not His understanding of the situation.

Consequently, we can safely say that no passage in Scripture contradicts the doctrine that God is all-knowing. This is true for a number of other passages and statements in Scripture that seem, at first glance, to teach similar things. A closer examination will reveal that they are not teaching God's knowledge is somehow incomplete or limited. It is certainly not.

Summary To Question 19

Was God Unaware That The People Would Build High Places? Why Did He Say “It Would Never Enter My Mind? (Jeremiah 7:31, 19:5, 32:35)

There are three passages in the Book of Jeremiah which seems to say that the God of the Bible was unaware as to whether or not the people of Judah would build the high places. When they did build them, and offer children for sacrifice, this act shocked Him.

This response, it is claimed, indicates that God does not know the future. If He had known that which was going to occur, then His response would have been different. Open theists use this as part of their case that God’s knowledge is not exhaustive when it comes to future events.

This, however, is not how we should understand these references. In fact, it could not mean this. Earlier in the history of the southern kingdom of Judah, in the same Book of Second Kings, we find that the same problem arose with other kings of Judah.

Scripture says that two of the kings of Judah, Ahaz and Hoshea, did the exact same thing. Since other kings of Judah had already built high places against the commandment of the Lord, He certainly knew that this type of practice had previously occurred.

Therefore, He was not ignorant of what had occurred or that it could happen again. If one wants to argue this, then it would be His knowledge of the past which was limited or incomplete.

There is also something else which must be considered. The phrase “it did not enter the mind of God,” may be translated “did not enter into His heart.” If this is what these verses are trying to communicate, then it is speaking of God’s desire, not His knowledge.

Whatever the case may be, this is not an instance of Scripture portraying God as having some sort of limited knowledge.

Question 20

What Should We Conclude About Certain Passages That Seem To Teach God's Limited Knowledge?

There are a number of passages in the Scripture which seem to teach that the God of the Bible had only limited knowledge of future events. While He fully recognizes what has happened in the past, and knows what is going on presently, He does not know what is going to occur in the future. Therefore, the future is open as far as what will take place. Hence, even God does not truly know what will happen.

What should we conclude regarding these passages? Is the future open? Is God surprised by certain events which happen?

We can make the following observations.

There Are Clear Statements In Scripture That God Knows Everything

To begin with, there are a number of clear statements in Scripture about the knowledge of God. Indeed, they make it plain that He knows everything. These statements leave no doubt as to what the Bible teaches about the extent of the knowledge of God. He knows everything which is possible for Him to know—whether it be events of the past, the present or the future.

There is something else. Each section of Scripture that seems to teach that God has limited knowledge is a historical narrative—it is not a direct statement of the knowledge, or the lack of knowledge of God. Rather, it is an explanation of something that occurred in an historical situation.

It is an important rule of biblical interpretation that historical narratives are always read and interpreted in light of direct statements about a topic. It is not the other way around. We do not create doctrine from historical accounts that tells us merely what happened. Bible doctrine is compiled from direct statements in Scripture by God, or by one of His chosen spokesmen.

There Are No Clear Statements In The Bible About God's Lack Of Knowledge About Anything

What we do not find in these passages, or anywhere else in Scripture, are direct statements about the limitation of God's knowledge. On the contrary, Scripture from beginning to end asserts the fact that God is all-knowing, or omniscient.

This being the case, all of these passages which seem to imply that His knowledge is incomplete must be understood in that context. Thus, we have clear statements as to the extent of God's knowledge, but no clear statements declaring that He lacks knowledge.

There Is Figurative Language Involved In These Passages

The use of figurative language also has to be appreciated. The question needs to be asked, “Is the passage meant to be understood literally or figuratively?” The Bible testifies that it sometimes speaks in figurative, or non-literal, language. In fact, Jesus said to His disciples that He did use figures of speech in His teaching:

I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father (John 16:25 NRSV).

The fact that our Lord declared this should be taken seriously. Thus, everything He taught does not necessarily have to be interpreted literally. The context must determine how any passage is to be understood.

The Apostle Paul wrote about his use of this type of figurative language. He wrote the following to the Romans:

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? God is not unrighteous to inflict wrath, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) (Romans 3:5 TLV).

Here Paul admits that he is speaking in a “human way” or with “human terms.”

Again, when Paul wrote to the Romans, he specifically said that he spoke, at times, in human terms. He wrote:

I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness (Romans 6:19 NKJV).

Therefore, we have two instances of this type of speech occurring in the Book of Romans.

In Galatians, we read about Paul using an example “from everyday life.” He wrote:

Dear brothers and sisters, here’s an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or amend an irrevocable agreement, so it is in this case (Galatians 3:15 NLT).

Since the Scripture tells us that it sometimes communicates in this manner, we should not be surprised when we find it occurring.

We Must Interpret The Obscure In Light Of The Clear

Again, we emphasize, that there is a basic rule in biblical interpretation that says the obscure passages must always be interpreted in light of the clear ones. It is not acceptable to attempt to make a biblical doctrine out of an

unclear passage, and then reinterpret the clear passages in light of the unclear.

Indeed, if God has revealed Himself in Scripture, His revelation will be consistent. Since He has clearly and consistently revealed that He has all-knowledge, any thought to the contrary is inconsistent with what He has said, time and time again, about Himself.

Control Passages Should Be The Clear Ones Not The Obscure

There is something else. Those who believe in the limited knowledge of God use these passages as their “control passages.” They view all other passages in the Bible light of them. However, the reverse should happen. These passages need to be read in light of the clear statements found elsewhere in the Bible.

What is plain from Scripture is that God does have all knowledge. John declared that the God of the Bible knows everything:

Whenever our conscience condemns us, we will be reassured that God is greater than our conscience and knows everything (1 John 3:20 God’s Word).

This statement could not be clearer. He knows everything.

Everything means everything! We also read in the Book of Hebrews:

No creature is hidden from Him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account (Hebrews 4:13 CSB).

Nothing is hidden from Him. This also includes coming events.

This, therefore, should always be our starting point—the unlimited knowledge of God.

Summary To Question 20: What Should We Conclude About Certain Passages Which Seem To Teach God’s Limited Knowledge?

There are some Christians who believe that God’s knowledge does not extend to the future. While He knows everything about the past, and the present, He does not know what will happen in the future.

Since the future has not yet occurred, it is uncertain to every creature on earth, as well as in heaven. Even God does not know what will take place. To support their case that God does not have knowledge of future events, open theists appeal to Scripture. They believe that it clearly teaches that God’s knowledge is limited to the past and present.

Does God Know Everything?

There are some Old Testament passages which on the surface seem to teach that God did not know certain things which took place. He seemed surprised by what occurred.

However, once these verses are understood in their proper context, and with the totality of biblical teaching on the subject, they teach no such thing. Scripture is clear that God knows everything that is possible for Him to know.

Indeed, nothing escapes His notice. In fact, this is the Lord's own testimony about Himself! He makes it clear that His knowledge extends to the future as well as to the past and present.

In addition, when considering passages such as these, some key facts must be kept in mind. For one thing, there are no clear statements in these passages about God's lack of knowledge. Indeed, no direct statements can be found that teach God is somehow limited in His knowledge.

There is also the issue of figurative language in Scripture. The Bible itself testifies that it speaks in figurative language in certain instances. Jesus Himself said that He used this type of language. Consequently, we must ask ourselves if these passages are to be understood literally or figuratively.

Furthermore, there is a fundamental rule of biblical interpretation that the obscure passages must be interpreted in light of the clear. Thus, we first go to the passages which state the matter clearly, and then attempt to understand other passages based upon what these clear passages teach. We do not go to the obscure passages first.

Therefore, when all the evidence is in, it will be plain that these passages do not teach that the God of Scripture is limited in His knowledge. The God of the Bible knows the future exhaustively. Nothing will ever take Him by surprise.

Question 21

Does God Know Everything That Could Possibly Happen? (David And Saul, Elisha And Jehoash, Jesus And The Cities Which Did Not Repent)

The Bible teaches that God not only knows everything that will happen, He also knows everything that *could potentially happen*. The Bible gives several examples of this. They include: an episode in the life of David and Saul, the story of Jehoash and the prophet Elisha, as well as the account of Jesus and the cities which did not repent. The evidence is as follows.

The Episode Of David And Saul

Scripture gives the following episode in the life of King David that illustrates that the Lord knows what may happen, as well as what will happen.

We read what occurred in this manner:

When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod." David said, "O LORD, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O LORD, God of Israel, tell your servant." And the LORD said, "He will." Again David asked, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will." So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there (1 Samuel 23:9-13 NIV).

Here we find a great example of the God of the Bible knowing all future possibilities.

We learn the following things from this passage.

David Asked God What Would Happen If He Stayed In Keilah

David and his men were in the city of Keilah. David asked the Lord what would happen if Saul came to Keilah. Would the men of Keilah deliver David and his men over to his enemy King Saul? David wanted to know what would happen. So, he asked the Lord.

God Told David What Would Happen: He Would Be Handed Over To Saul

The Lord answered with a "Yes." If Saul came to destroy Keilah, the men of that city would not fight. They would hand over David and his men to King Saul. This is the fate that awaited David—if Saul came to Keilah.

David Chose Not To Be Captured

Once David had that knowledge, he and his men escaped. This prevented him being taken captive by Saul. God, therefore told David about a potential event in the future that never happened.

This shows that God's knowledge extends to not only actual events that will occur, but also every possible event that could occur. This gives further testimony to the omniscience of God. God not only knows what actually will happen, He also knows what potentially would have happened had David remained.

David Did Not Change The Future

Some people mistakenly think that David changed the future by leaving Keilah. But this is not what the Scripture says. We do not find God saying that it was ordained that David be captured by Saul at Keilah. In other words, David did not change the future by leaving the city.

God know what David's response would be and that he and his men would leave before Saul arrived. Therefore, we do not find here an example of a human being changing the preordained future.

We find God continuing to protect David from Saul after he left the city of Keilah. The Bible says:

David now stayed in the strongholds of the wilderness and in the hill country of Ziph. Saul hunted him day after day, but God didn't let him be found (1 Samuel 23:14 NLT).

Consequently, a number of important truths about God's knowledge are learned from this account of David, Saul, and Keilah.

Elisha And Jehoash

We have a similar instance with the prophet Elisha and King Jehoash. The Bible records the incident as follows:

When Elisha was in his last illness, King Jehoash of Israel visited him and wept over him. "My father! My father! The chariots and charioteers of Israel!" he cried. Elisha told him, "Get a bow and some arrows." And the king did as he was told. Then Elisha told the king of Israel to put his hand on the bow, and Elisha laid his own hands on the king's hands. Then he commanded, "Open that eastern window," and he opened it. Then he said, "Shoot!" So he did. Then Elisha proclaimed, "This is the LORD's arrow, full of victory over Aram, for you will completely conquer the Arameans at Aphek. Now pick up the other arrows and strike them against the ground." So the king picked them up and struck the ground three times. But the man of God was angry with him. "You should have struck the ground five or six times!" he exclaimed. "Then you would have beaten Aram until they were

entirely destroyed. Now you will be victorious only three times” (2 Kings 13:14-19 NLT).

There are a number of points to be made from this story. They include the following:

Elisha Told Jehoash To Strike The Ground With Arrows To Represent Victory Over His Enemies

God gave King Jehoash the opportunity to gain victory over his enemies. He simply had to strike the ground a number of times to represent the victories. Every time he would strike the ground, a victory would be achieved.

The prophet Elisha, speaking for God, told the King that he would have completely destroyed the enemy if he had struck the ground five or six times. Yet he did not do this.

Because He Only Struck The Ground Three Times, His Enemies Would Only Be Partially Destroyed

The king only struck the ground three times. The complete victory, that he would have won over his enemies, never did occur. Thus, we have another example of what the future might have been if only someone had acted differently. Yet, the future did not turn out that way.

Jesus And The Cities That Did Not Repent

We find in the ministry of Jesus an example of what would have happened to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Tyre and Sidon had they repented.

The Gospel of Matthew records it as follows:

Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you (Matthew 11:20-24 NKJV).

In this case, we have Jesus comparing the cities of Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida to Sodom and Gomorrah and Tyre and Sidon.

We learn the following.

These Ancient Cities Did Not See Jesus' Miracles

These ancient cities did not see the miracles of Jesus as did the cities which existed around the Sea of Galilee. They had only limited knowledge of God and His great power.

The Would Have Repented Had They Seen Them

The cities in Jesus' day were not ignorant. Indeed, they saw the great works that He performed. If the miracles that Jesus performed in these three cities around the Sea of Galilee would have been performed in the cities that were judged in the past, Tyre and Sidon and Sodom and Gomorrah, then these people would have repented. However, the miracles were not performed, and they did not repent.

This gives us an example of Jesus, God the Son, knowing what would have happened had these cities been visited by Him and His miraculous deeds. It is another example of God knowing all future possibilities as well as everything that will actually happen.

Conclusion: God Knows All Things That Could Possibly Happen

We conclude that the God of the Bible knows everything. This even includes things that did not happen—but could have happened. Speaking of God's knowledge, the psalmist said that it was too wonderful to comprehend! He wrote the following:

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain (Psalm 139:6 NRSV).

God knows everything that will happen, as well as everything that may happen. He knows all. This is the testimony of Scripture.

Summary To Question 21:

Does God Know Everything That Could Possibly Happen? (David And Saul, Elisha And Jehoash, Jesus And The Cities Which Did Not Repent)

From a reading of the Bible, we discover that the God of Scripture knows all things that will happen. Furthermore, He also knows all things that may potentially happen. Biblical examples of David and Saul, Elisha, and King Jehoash, as well as the Lord Jesus Christ and the cities that did not repent, illustrate the truth of God's knowledge of all potential events.

In one instance, the Lord told David that if he stayed in the city of Keilah the people of that city would hand him over to King Saul. David did not stay in Keilah, and Saul did not capture him. Thus, a potential future event was avoided.

In another example, God through the prophet Elisha told Jehoash to strike the ground with all the arrows that he had. This would represent God striking out against the enemies of Jehoash.

Does God Know Everything?

Yet Jehoshaphat only struck the ground three times instead of five or six times. This meant only partial victory over his enemies would be achieved. Elisha told him that if he had struck the ground five or six times, then he would have had a complete victory. Again, the future did not occur as it might have taken place.

In His day, Jesus told certain cities which were around the Sea of Galilee that the ancient cities of Tyre, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented had they had seen Jesus' miracles. He knew what would have happened if the miracles would have been performed in those cities of old.

In each of these three instances, God showed His knowledge of potential events. Although these events did not happen, they would have happened had circumstances been different. This illustrates the truth that God knows everything that will happen, as well as everything that might happen.

Question 22

Can Anything About God Change? (Immutability)

The traditional view of the God of the Bible is that He is changeless in His character, as well in as His actions. He always remains the same. However, there are many people today who contend that the God of the Bible can change. They insist that He does not remain the same but rather He reacts and interacts with humanity. Since He does not know exactly what is going to occur in the future, His knowledge changes as well as His actions. In other words, He reacts to the changing circumstances.

Is it possible that God can change in any manner? Does He react and change as the circumstances change? The Bible has much to say on this matter. Therefore, it is important to look at what Scripture says about all aspects of God's character with respect to change.

There Is No Change In God

To begin with, the Bible makes it clear that God cannot change. When one changes, they usually change for better or worse. Since God is absolute perfection, no change for the better is possible—since you cannot improve upon perfection. He does not develop, or grow. His knowledge does not increase since He already knows everything which is possible for Him to know.

The same holds true for changing for the worst. He does not deteriorate. He cannot forget what he already knows. Furthermore, He cannot change in any of His characteristics or attributes. Consequently, there is no inconsistency in Him.

Thus, as we search the Scripture, it makes it clear that God does not change in His character, purpose, His fairness toward humankind, or in His promises. The technical term for this is immutability. He always remains the same. We can make the following observations.

1. God's Basic Character Is Unchanged

The Bible speaks often of His changeless character. For example, we read the following in the writings of the prophet Isaiah:

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable (Isaiah 40:28 NRSV).

He does not grow faint or weary. Indeed, He cannot. Furthermore, His understanding of things is beyond our comprehension.

The psalmist wrote about the continuing love of the Lord for those who fear, or trust Him. He called it the “steadfast” love:

But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children (Psalm 103:17 RSV).

The love of God remains the same for His people.

In addition, the Bible insists that the basic character of God is not subject to change. The psalmist said of God:

But you are always the same; your years never end (Psalm 102:27 NLT).

This promise, in this context, is with respect to the guarantee of Israel's preservation. He won't change—therefore, His promises won't change.

In the Book of Malachi, God Himself declares that He is unchangeable:

For I am the Lord, I do not change (Malachi 3:6 NIV).

In the context of Malachi, God is also guaranteeing the preservation of the nation Israel. Because He does not change, His promises will be kept.

2. There Is No Change In The Character Of The Members Of The Trinity

God, by nature, is a Trinity consisting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He has always been a Trinity, and He always will be. His basic nature will remain forever the same. This means God the Son and God the Holy Spirit do not change.

For example, in the New Testament we find that James wrote about the unchanging nature of God the Father:

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change (James 1:17 NRSV).

The Father does not change in His nature. There is no variation in Him.

The same holds true for God the Son. The Bible says that the character or nature of Jesus Christ, God the Son, is unchangeable. In speaking of the Son, the writer to the Hebrews said:

Even they will perish, but you remain forever. They will wear out like old clothing. You will roll them up like an old coat. They will fade away like old clothing. But you are always the same; you will never grow old (Hebrews 1:12 NLT).

Clothing grows old and wears out. God the Son, Jesus Christ, does not. He will never grow old.

Indeed, His character will never change with the years.

The writer to the Hebrews stated this same truth about Jesus later in his letter:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8 CSB).

This is a comforting thought. The perfect character of Jesus will remain perfect for all eternity.

God Will Always Be Fair

Because God's nature does not change, His character always remains the same. For one thing, this means He has been and always will be completely righteous. Consequently, His dealings with humankind are always right or just. He is never unfair.

The Apostle Paul spoke of God and His consistent fairness toward humanity. The Book of Acts records him saying the following:

For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31 NLT).

God will one day judge the world "with justice." Indeed, He will judge humankind based upon the standard that He has set down. God will not change those standards. His judgment will be fair.

God's Purpose Does Not Change

There is something else about God which does not change. This is His purpose or plan. The writer to the Hebrews gave this comforting thought to his readers about the plan and purpose of God:

God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind (Hebrews 6:17 NLT).

When God plans something, it is carried out. He does not change His mind about what He has purposed. Therefore, when He tells us of His plan, we can rest assured that He will not modify it or change it in any way.

Indeed, the Apostle Paul wrote that God had a plan for the two sons of Isaac, Jacob and Esau, before he was even born.

He said the following to the church at Rome:

This son was our ancestor Isaac. When he grew up, he married Rebekah, who gave birth to twins. But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. (This message proves that God chooses according to his own plan (Romans 9:10,11 NLT).

God's plans and purposes have been unchangeable for all eternity.

In the Book of Job, we read that God does exactly as He pleases:

But he stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases (Job 23:13 NIV).

Again, His plans and purposes are not able to be altered by any one or any particular thing. They will come to pass.

Likewise, the psalmist declared that the purposes of God are firm—they do not change. He put it this way:

But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations (Psalm 33:11 NIV).

The plans are firm, they are set. Change is impossible.

Isaiah the prophet also records the Lord saying that His purposes will stand:

Remember what I accomplished in antiquity! Truly I am God, I have no peer; I am God, and there is none like me, who announces the end from the beginning and reveals beforehand what has not yet occurred, who says, 'My plan will be realized, I will accomplish what I desire' (Isaiah 46:9,10 NET).

God will not alter His purpose for any particular thing, or any person.

Therefore, it is abundantly clear from a study of Scripture that when God plans or purposes something that plan will come to pass exactly as stated. Change of plans is not something the God of the Bible does.

His Promises Do Not Change

The Bible also testifies that God does not change in His promises. Once He has made a promise, He keeps that promise. The Lord spoke the following truth through the Old Testament prophet Balaam who made this statement about God:

God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? (Numbers 23:19 NRSV).

What a tremendous comfort these words are! The unchanging God will come through with everything which He has promised to His people.

In First Samuel, we read that the God of the Bible is unlike humans in that He does not change His mind:

And he who is the Glory of Israel will not lie, nor will he change his mind, for he is not human that he should change his mind (1 Samuel 15:29 NLT).

He is not like humans in that respect. He will not go back on His promise.

Paul wrote to the church at Rome that God has given certain gifts and callings to His people that cannot be revoked. He put it this way:

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29 ESV).

Again, we find this to be a comforting truth.

The Bible emphasizes that God is faithful to the promises that He has made to humankind. The prophet Jeremiah said:

The unfailing love of the LORD never ends! By his mercies we have been kept from complete destruction. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each day (Lamentations 3:22,23 NLT).

Great indeed is His faithfulness!

The New Testament also says that God will not deny His promises. Paul made this clear to Timothy when he wrote:

If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13 NKJV).

While we are unfaithful, He is faithful to that which He has promised.

God has the power to follow through with His unchangeable promises. We read about the following promise that God made to Abraham:

No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised (Romans 4:20,21 ESV).

Abraham could rest in God's promises—because he knew the Lord always kept His Word.

Some Promises Of God Are Conditional

When God promises something to us, we can be confident that He will complete His promise. This is a fact. However, some of the promises God has made to humankind are conditional. In other words, they are based upon humanity's response. The prophet Jeremiah records God saying:

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be

built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it (Jeremiah 18:7-10 NIV).

This particular promise is based upon the obedience, or disobedience, of the people. God, however, knew what they would do since He has knowledge of all events whether it be past, present, or future.

Though God Does Not Change He Is Not Inactive

There is something else that needs to be emphasized. When we claim that God does not change, we do not mean that He is a static, impersonal being, or is without passions or emotion. Indeed, the God of the Bible dynamically interacts with His creation.

Although God does not develop, or grow, He is not inactive. To the contrary, He is actively involved with humanity. Jesus made this clear when He said the following to the religious leaders:

But Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17 NKJV).

Although God’s actions and dealings with humanity may vary or change, He Himself does not change. In His essential being He is always the same. Human beings can change, God cannot.

Thus, the idea that God changes with the circumstances is not a biblical idea. When He lovingly interacts with His people, it is not based upon the changing circumstances with which He was previously unaware. He knows ahead of time what will occur. Nothing ever takes Him by surprise.

Summary To Question 22: Can Anything About God Change? (Immutability)

There are Bible-believing Christians who insist that change is possible with God. Since they think that God does not know what will happen in the future, then He must, of necessity, change with the changing circumstances. Is this what the Bible teaches us about God?

It is not. The Bible says that God will never change. This includes His future plans, as well as His dealings with humanity. They are not revised or altered based upon changing circumstances.

Indeed, there are a number of specific ways in which the Bible says that the God of Scripture will remain the same.

First, there is His basic character. Nothing about it will ever change. He will not become more loving or less loving, more holy, or less holy. His character will remain constant. In point of fact, He is perfection and perfection cannot be improved upon.

Does God Know Everything?

Next are His purposes, they will remain constant. His plan and purposes are once-and-for-all set. Consequently, there is no power in the universe which can change them. When the God of the Bible plans something, it will come about. This is a fact.

His promises to the human race will not change either. When He gives His Word, He keeps His Word. He is unlike human beings who change their mind or go back on their promises. God never does this. Indeed, it is not possible for Him to do this. God always keeps His Word. This is a comforting thought for believers.

While the God of the Bible does not change, some of the promises which He has made to humankind are conditional. In other words, they are based upon how we respond. While we do not know what the outcome will be, God certainly does.

Therefore, though the promises are based upon our behavior, the Lord knows exactly how we will behave.

Though God does not change in His character this does not mean that He is inactive. To the contrary, the Bible portrays God as being actively involved in the lives of humanity. He is a God who cares and who does get involved. In fact, from the first page of the Bible until the last, we find God involved with His people. He is truly a God of action.

In sum, God does not change or alter His plans because of the behavior of humans as some have claimed. Nothing takes Him by surprise—so He does not have to react to changing circumstances. While we do not know what is going to occur, the God of the Bible, the God of knowledge, does know.

Therefore, we should never use the word “react” when describing God. He does not react to us in the same sense as we react to others. Indeed, He does not have to react because He knows exactly what will occur.

Question 23

Was God Sorry That He Made Human Beings? (Genesis 6:6)

There are a number of passages in Scripture which seem to say that God changed His mind when certain circumstances presented themselves. Furthermore, the Bible says that He was actually sorry about something He had done.

One instance is found in the Book of Genesis. It seems to say that God was sorry or grieved, that He had made humanity. As an explanation as to why God sent the flood, we read the following words:

And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart (Genesis 6:6 RSV).

The New International Version translates the verse in this manner:

The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain (Genesis 6:6 NIV).

Does this mean God was sorry that He created the human race? Did He think He had made a mistake? Does this mean that He actually regretted His original creation? Is God second-guessing Himself?

This is a difficult verse to interpret. There have been a number of ways in which Bible-believers have responded to it. They are as follows.

Option 1: The Language Is To Be Understood Literally

Open theists believe God does react to circumstances and sometimes changes His mind. Thus, they assume that this verse should be understood literally. Because humans were in continuance rebellion against God, He expressed sorrow and regret that He had originally made them. The emotions expressed are real. His is truly pained by what has occurred. This pain caused Him to re-think His decision to create humanity.

Moreover, this passage also indicates that God's plan for the human race did not go as He had intended. This extreme sinful behavior of humans was not foreseen by God. This further indicates that God did not know what was going to occur in the future when He created humanity. He did not foresee that He would have to destroy them with a flood and basically start all over. It was not part of His original idea for the race.

Open theists see a number of important implications from this verse. Not only does God experience genuine emotions such as grief and regret to the degree that His heart can become pained, His plans for the human race can be thwarted by our actions. Humans can actually make God change His plans. This indicates that the God of the Bible is willing and ready to change based upon the outcome of our behavior.

Furthermore, it shows that when He created humanity, He did not know that He would have to judge them in this manner. It is another indication of His limited knowledge of the future. Therefore, this passage goes a long way to make the case for open theism.

**Option 2: The Expression Is Anthropopathic Language:
Human Terms Are Used To Describe God's
Emotions**

The usual way of dealing with this passage is to assume that we have an anthropopathism. This consists of attributing human feelings and emotions to God. In other words, God does not actually feel these emotions as we feel them. Instead these terms are used of God to help us understand His response.

Thus, these words are for our benefit—they are not describing God's true feelings. God does not become happy when we obey, or sad when we disobey, in the same manner as humans become happy or sad.

In other words, His emotions do not change based upon whether we obey Him or disobey. In this instance, the Scripture is using these human terms in expressing God's displeasure at the sin of the people.

There Is The Belief That God Does Have True Emotions

Some traditional theologians believe that the idea that God is without emotions is not exactly correct. While His emotions are certainly not the same as ours, we should not think of Him as an emotionless Being. He does have genuine emotions, but they are not the same as ours.

In other words, while He does experience definite feelings such as love and hate, they are not in response to our behavior. Neither does He express these emotions because He was unaware of what was to occur. Therefore, there is not a one-to-one comparison of His emotions and our emotions.

God Knew Ahead Of Time What Would Happen

This brings us to the next point. As far as God's knowledge is concerned, since He knows all things, He knew the people were going to rebel to the point where He would have to send a flood. This was not something He merely learned when the people reached a certain level of sinful behavior.

From all eternity He had known that this would occur. However, at a certain point in time, the knowledge became experiential. The fact that God personally experiences events in time has nothing to do with His lack of knowledge of the event. He knew how the people were going to behave and at the time of their rebellion He then experienced what He had known would take place.

Also, this verse says nothing about God being ignorant of the future behavior of the people. The verse does not say that God did not know

what would happen in the future. This is only an inference which some people draw from this text.

But there is nothing in the text itself to suggest this. When we examine other passages in Scripture which state clearly that God knows all things, we must interpret this verse in light of these statements. We should not take this statement in isolation and infer that it means that God was surprised by the events which lead up to the flood. In other words, this should not be our “control passage” in understanding what the Bible says about God’s knowledge of things.

Therefore, we find nothing taught in this passage which would make us alter the traditional view of God and His behavior. He did not have to switch His plans because humans behaved in a manner in which He was not expecting.

**Option 3: The Word Translated Regret
 Has An Entirely Different Meaning**

There is also the possibility that the word translated “repent” or “regret” has a different meaning than what is usually assigned to it. Indeed, the Hebrew word translated “repent” is translated by a number of different English terms elsewhere in Scripture.

Therefore, the idea may not be that of being sorrowful or repentant but rather the idea may be that God wanted to set things right. In other words, He wanted to right the wrongs that the human race brought about. If this is the proper understanding of this word, then it has nothing to say, one way or the other, about God’s feelings or emotions. It is merely stating that the sinful behavior of humans needed to be dealt with. Nothing more, nothing less.

In sum, however we interpret this passage we do not have to assume that God was regretting past decisions such as the creation of the human race. Neither was the Lord unaware that He would have to judge sinful humanity by means of a flood. This is not what this passage is teaching us. Consequently, we should look elsewhere for the biblical teaching on these subjects.

**Summary To Question 23:
Was God Sorry That He Created Human Beings? (Genesis 6:6)**

There is a very difficult expression found in the sixth chapter of the Book of Genesis which has led people to make a number of conclusions about the character of the God of the Bible, His knowledge, and His feelings.

In some translations, it says that God was grieved or had pain in His heart that He had created humans. Accordingly, He repented or regretted the fact that He had created human beings. This seems to teach that God actually regretted His past decisions.

Moreover, this passage is said to indicate that God was unaware as to the fact that He would have to send a flood to judge them for their sin.

We find that Christians interpret this difficult passage in a number of ways.

Open theists understand the language of God repenting and being grieved as literal expressions of His feelings. They insist there are no good reasons for understanding these words figuratively. Therefore, God felt pain when humans were constantly rebelling against Him. Furthermore, He did not know this was going to happen when He originally created the human race. Consequently, He had to alter His original plan by sending a flood to destroy humanity. He would now have to start over.

Open theists conclude from this passage that God not only experiences genuine emotions in response to our behavior, He has to change His plans when things do not work out as He anticipated. This means He did not know ahead of time the degree of sin to which humans would sink. It is one of many passages which shows that He does not know what is going to occur in the future.

However, this is certainly not the only way in which this passage can be understood. This verse is usually interpreted as a figurative expression of God's feelings. In other words, it is an anthropopathism. The classical view is that God does not show any emotions. He does not get angry or sad. These words are used for our benefit to help us understand why God did what He did.

Some classical theologians argue that this goes too far. God does have emotions such as anger or grief, but we should not try to categorize them or understand them in the same manner as we understand human emotions.

Indeed, they are not surprise reactions to the behavior of others. God does not get sad or pained when humans sin because our sin comes unexpectedly. He knew ahead of time how humans were going to behave. Nothing ever takes Him by surprise.

This leads us to our next point. There is nothing in this passage which states that God did not know these things were going to occur. While the limited knowledge of God may be inferred by this verse, one may also infer His complete knowledge of all things. This passage does not settle the issue. One must look elsewhere for direct statements about the degree of knowledge which God possesses.

A number of passages will be found which clearly state that God knows all things. This verse should be understood in light of those passages. It should not be made the "control passage" by which all other things about God and His knowledge are interpreted.

Consequently, we can conclude that there is nothing in this verse that teaches that God changes His plans in response to our sinful behavior

because this behavior was not foreseen by Him. This is not how we must interpret this passage.

It is also possible that the word translated “repent” or “regret” does not really have this idea in this particular passage. The word is used elsewhere with completely different meaning. Some have suggested the idea is more of God “balancing the books.” In other words, because humans sinned, God had to make right the wrongs they committed. Therefore, He sent the cataclysmic flood to destroy most of humankind. If this is the correct understanding, then the passage says nothing about God’s feelings or emotions.

In sum, we should not make this one verse in the Book of Genesis our basis or standard for assuming that God has regrets about past deeds or that His knowledge is limited in some manner. To discover God’s character, we must go to passages that give us a clear indication of who He is, as well as what He does. It is only by doing this that we will come up with the proper view of God and His character.

Question 24

Did Moses Persuade God To Change His Mind? (Exodus 32:14)

When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai after receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 32), he found that the people had fallen into sin. They had made for themselves a golden calf and were worshipping it instead of the Lord. The Lord then told Moses that He was ready to destroy the nation. The Bible says the following:

Then the Lord said to Moses: “I have seen this people. Look what a stiff-necked people they are! So now, leave me alone so that my anger can burn against them and I can destroy them, and I will make from you a great nation” (Exodus 32:9-10 NET).

The death sentence on the people was certainly just. Indeed, they had continually rejected God’s truth and turned to idol worship. Instead of honoring the Lord for their deliverance from Egypt, they attributed their freedom to idols.

Consequently, the Lord told Moses that He would destroy the people and start the entire nation over again.

However, Moses pleaded to God not to destroy the people. The Scripture then says the following occurred:

Then the Lord relented over the evil that he had said he would do to his people (Exodus 32:14 NET).

The Holman Christian Standard Bible has this to say:

So the LORD changed His mind about the disaster He said He would bring on His people (Exodus 32:14 CSB).

The New Living Translation puts it this way:

So the LORD withdrew his threat and didn’t bring against his people the disaster he had threatened (Exodus 32:14 NLT).

Is this not a clear example of God changing His mind? Indeed, Scripture seems to say that this is exactly what happened. How are we to understand this description of God repenting, or changing His mind?

This is a difficult portion of Scripture. As can be imagined, there have been a number of ways in which this passage has been interpreted by people.

Consequently, we must make a serious attempt at understanding what it really says, and what it is trying to teach us. Bible-believing Christians have interpreted this passage as follows.

Option 1: God's Change Of Mind Should Be Understood Literally

Those who hold the "open view of God" believe the passage should be understood at face value. In other words, it is saying that God actually changed His mind when Moses prayed, or interceded, for the people. While He was determined to destroy the nation of Israel, the prayer of Moses actually changed His behavior.

According to open theism, this verse has a number of important implications.

First, it shows that God's plans are not irrevocable, or set in stone. In fact, He can change what He is about to do. Indeed, according to this passage, He changes His mind and His plans when prayers are offered up by believers. This should be a tremendous encouragement to all of us about the need to pray. Prayer truly does change things!

Open theists further believe this is a much more encouraging and satisfying interpretation than the traditional way in which this verse is understood.

Traditionally, it is taught that God did not alter His plans because of Moses prayer. He was never really going to destroy the people. He only said that to Moses to bring out his godly reaction and cause him to fervently pray for the people.

This, it is argued, makes the prayer of Moses meaningless. Those who hold the open view of God believe that because of the relationship Moses had developed with God. Hence, the Lord decided to heed Moses words and not destroy the people. In simple terms, Moses caused God to change His mind.

Option 2: This Is An Anthropathism: Human Actions Are Attributed To God (He Did Not Really Change His Mind)

While open theism believes that their interpretation of God actually changing His mind is the best way to understand this passage, the traditional view of an unchanging God, who does not alter His plan, is the proper way to interpret this episode. A number of points need to be made.

In this situation, God was angry because the people had rejected Him in favor of an idol, a golden calf. His desire to destroy them at that time was not unalterable. Moses' intercession on behalf of the people kept them from being destroyed at that particular moment. From humanity's point of view God's mind was changed but God had known all along what would happen. Moses prayed for mercy and God answered his prayer. The people were granted a reprieve.

Therefore, this verse does not truly mean that God changed His mind or altered His plan because of Moses' prayer. He never was planning to destroy all the people at that time for that particular sin.

God Wanted Moses To Intercede For The People

In fact, there are hints in this passage that God wanted Moses to intercede for them. The Bible records the Lord saying:

Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation (Exodus 32:10 NIV).

The fact that the Lord asked Moses to leave is perhaps significant. If he left, God would destroy the people. However, if Moses stayed, he could intercede in their behalf and possibly stop the judgment the Lord pronounced.

In fact, we find in the Book of Exodus that the role of Moses was as the intermediary between God and the people. Here was another opportunity for him to fulfill that role. More than ever, they needed him as their representative at that particular moment. While a holy God must judge the people for their sin, the judgment could become less severe.

God Could Not Have Started Over With Moses

There is something else in God's statement which must be considered. His words, "I will make you into a great nation" are almost exactly the same words God spoke to Abraham when He initially called him. The Lord said to Abraham:

I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing (Genesis 12:2 CSB).

Abraham was promised that a great nation would come from Him.

Now the Lord says the same thing to Moses. These words caused Moses to remind God of the promises which He had made to Abraham:

But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth?' Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever'" (Exodus 32:11-13 ESV).

The fact that Moses appealed to God's previous promises, as prompted by the Lord, shows that God could not have started the nation again with Moses, and him alone. Indeed, God had made promises to Isaac and Jacob which must be fulfilled. The nation could not be entirely destroyed at that time.

The People Were Eventually Judged By The Lord

However, these people would indeed be judged by God. None of the people of that generation of Israel, except for Joshua and Caleb, were allowed to enter the Promised Land.

Consequently, in this case, the judgment was merely postponed. Therefore, instead of changing His mind, God merely altered the timing of the judgment until a new generation could arise and replace this sinful generation. These people were eventually judged for these as well as their other sins of unbelief!

We Should Still Pray Though We Do Not Completely Understand Why It Works

The fact that God knew all along what would happen should not be seen as a discouragement to pray. Prayer does work. Yet how prayer works is somewhat of a mystery. Scripture records examples of people praying and God answering their prayers. It does not, however, explain the process of what happens to cause these prayers to be answered.

Indeed, we do not understand many things which God has done, why He did them or even how He did them. Yet, since we are commanded to pray, we should pray.

We Should Be Careful About Drawing Conclusions From This Passage

While it does seem that God responded in some way to Moses words, we should be careful about drawing conclusions from what transpired. In fact, the Bible does not give us any specific reasons as to why God did not follow through with His immediate judgment upon the people.

The argument of Moses cannot be what changed God's mind. Moses certainly did not provide God with any new information. He merely informed Him of His earlier promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Certainly open theists will not contend that God forgot His previous promises to these men! Therefore, the content of Moses argument could not have been the key which changed God's mind.

Option 3: God Had Not Determined That The People Were To Be Destroyed

Some commentators argue that God had not decided that He was going to destroy the people when He told Moses His intentions. Instead of telling Moses that He had determined to eliminate all of the people, God was merely telling Moses that He was contemplating doing this. In other words, God was still undecided. Moses helped Him make the decision not to destroy the nation at that time.

This, however, does not seem to be what actually occurred. A straightforward reading of the passage has God already deciding to destroy

the people and merely informing Moses of His decision. Hence, this is not the best way of explaining this difficult passage.

Conclusion: This Passage Should Not Be Used To Assert That God Changes His Mind

In conclusion, this passage does indeed contain a number of difficulties. However, as we consider it in light of the totality of Scripture, we can determine that the God of the Bible does not change His mind, or His plans as humans change their mind. God has a plan for our world. Nothing can stop Him from fulfilling this plan.

Yet, He does not always share the details with us as to why He does certain things. Thus, there are a number of things about God with which we will remain ignorant. We must accept this fact that we cannot know everything about what He does, or why He does it. On the other hand, there are many things which we can know. These are the things to which we must give our attention.

**Summary To Question 24:
Did Moses Persuade God To Change His Mind? (Exodus 32:14)**

There is a passage in the Book of Exodus where God seemingly changed His mind in a response to a prayer by Moses. While Moses was on Mt. Sinai meeting with the Lord, the people constructed a golden calf. They attributed their deliverance from Egypt to this calf. They did not give credit to the Lord, the God of Israel. The Bible says that God was going to destroy the entire nation until Moses intervened. Scripture specifically says that He changed His mind about His immediate judgment.

This change of mind of God has been understood a number of ways.

Those who hold to the open view of God believe that the Scripture means exactly what it says. Indeed, God changed His mind concerning what He was about to do when Moses pleaded to Him on behalf of the people. This, they say, is a clear example of God repenting or changing His mind as to what He was about to do. Simply put, this means that it is possible for God to alter or change what He has planned to do.

Furthermore, this passage also indicates that prayers of believers truly are meaningful. Instead of God already arranging everything which will happen in the future, the future is open to a certain degree. Our prayers can truly influence what will occur. This is why Scripture encourages us to pray. Consequently, those who hold the open view think they have the best explanation as to what exactly happened.

However, there are other ways to understand this account without resorting to the idea that God actually changed His mind. Many commentators believe this is an anthropopathism. This means that Scripture explains God's behavior in human terms. God did not change His mind as the literal language would indicate.

Does God Know Everything?

In fact, God had previously made promises to Abraham, as well as to Isaac, and the sons of Jacob. For them to be fulfilled, God could not destroy the entire nation at that time.

Yet God did not retract His vow to judge the people. Indeed, they were judged. None of them except Joshua and Caleb were allowed to enter the Promised Land. Justice was delayed until a new generation arose. Therefore, the judgment which God threatened did indeed come to pass.

Contrary to the open view, this interpretation does not mean that our prayers are meaningless. While prayers are indeed meaningful, and we are commanded to pray, there is a certain amount of mystery which we cannot completely understand. This should not stop us from praying. God tells us to pray, and we should do what He commands.

Another way to see this passage is to understand God's statement to Moses as conditional or something that He was contemplating. In other words, God did not tell Moses that He was actually going to destroy the people but that He was merely considering this as an option. Moses prayer removed that option.

This, however, does not seem to truly express what God said or meant. He clearly said that His intention was to punish the people. It should not be understood as something which He was merely contemplating.

In summary, this is a tough passage no matter how a person attempts to understand it. Indeed, there are many things which God does where He does not explain the motivation behind His actions. We need to accept the fact that we cannot know certain things about Him. Thus, our attention should be turned to the things which we can know, and admit our ignorance on these other matters.

Question 25

Did The Lord Actually Regret That He Made Saul King Of Israel? (1 Samuel 15:11)

There is a passage in the Bible where the Lord seemingly expresses regret. Indeed, Scripture appears to say that God had second thoughts about making Saul the first king of the nation of Israel. The Lord said the following to the prophet Samuel:

“I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.” And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord all night (1 Samuel 15:11 NKJV).

Other translations have God showing sorrow for installing Saul as the king:

“I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has refused to obey my command.” Samuel was so deeply moved when he heard this that he cried out to the Lord all night (1 Samuel 15:11 NLT).

Does this indicate that God had second thoughts about His choice? Did He actually regret or sorrow that He made Saul the first king of Israel?

Option 1: God Actually Regretted His Decision About Choosing Saul

Open theism believes that God truly regretted His decision that He made Saul king of Israel. This, they claim, is one of many examples of God having second thoughts about a previous decision. It supposedly shows that God takes risks and sometimes these risks are regretted. In this case, installation of Saul as Israel’s first king was one that the Lord later regretted.

Indeed, this was no small thing. Saul would not only cease being king, there would be no dynasty of kings from his family. Therefore, this decision of the Lord not only affected Saul, it affected the entire history of the nation.

Option 2: The Language Is Anthropopathic: It Is Not To Be Understood Literally

This passage is usually understood as a statement which is not to be understood literally. God did not literally regret His previous decision to make Saul king.

The reason why this is understood in this manner concerns another statement found in the Book of Samuel it says:

Moreover the Glory of Israel will not recant or change his mind; for he is not a mortal, that he should change his mind (1 Samuel 15:29 NRSV).

The NET Bible translates the verse in this manner:

The Preeminent One of Israel does not go back on his word or change his mind, for he is not a human being who changes his mind (1 Samuel 15:29 NET).

The statement could not be more clearly made. God does not change His mind, or feel sorrowful for any of His past decisions!

Therefore, any passage which seems to say that God changed His mind, or regretted what He had done, must be read in light of this statement. This is especially true of a statement found in the same book.

**Summary To Question 25:
Did The Lord Actually Regret That He
Made Saul King Of Israel? (1 Samuel 15:11)**

In the Book of First Samuel there is a passage where the Lord “regretted” that He made Saul the first king of the nation of Israel. Other translations say that God was grieved when He made Saul king.

Does this actually mean that God expressed sorrow or regret that He actually made Saul king over Israel? Did God assume that He had initially made the wrong decision?

Those who hold to the open view of God see this as a true change of heart on the part of God. The God of Scripture actually regretted His previous decision. He did not know that Saul would turn out to be such a bad king. He was, therefore, sorry that He had installed him as their king.

However, this is not the case at all. Usually this statement is understood as Scripture attributing human emotions to God for our sake. In other words, they are given to us so that we can better understand His actions. It is not that God regrets, repents, or changes His mind. He does not. Certainly not in the same sense as we do.

In fact, later in the same chapter we are specifically told that God never recants or regrets His previous decisions. This should be the “controlling” statement as to how we are to understand other passages which seem to say that God regrets any past decisions, is sorry for them, or changes His mind.

In sum, we should not use this passage about King Saul to provide us with any specific information about God’s feelings or the extent His knowledge.

Question 26

Did Hezekiah Convince God To Allow Him To Live Fifteen Extra Years?

The Bible says that the Lord instructed the prophet Isaiah to tell King Hezekiah of Judah that he was going to die. We read about this in Second Kings:

In those days Hezekiah became terminally ill. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came and said to him, “This is what the LORD says: ‘Put your affairs in order, for you are about to die; you will not recover’” (2 Kings 20:1 CSB).

Hezekiah was told that he was about to die. This word came from the Lord Himself. Yet, Hezekiah pleaded for his life. The Lord then responded to his prayer and told him that he would live an additional fifteen years. The Bible says:

Isaiah hadn’t gone as far as the middle courtyard when the LORD spoke his word to him: “Go back and say to Hezekiah, leader of my people, ‘This is what the LORD God of your ancestor David says: I’ve heard your prayer. I’ve seen your tears. Now I’m going to heal you. The day after tomorrow you will go to the LORD’s temple. I’ll give you 15 more years to live. I’ll rescue you and defend this city from the control of the king of Assyria for my sake and for the sake of my servant David’” (2 Kings 20:4-6 God’s Word).

God then allowed Hezekiah to live another fifteen years as He had promised. The Lord also promised Hezekiah that He would deliver him from the control of the Assyrians. As always, God’s promises came true. Hezekiah lived another fifteen years, and the people of Jerusalem were not placed under the control of Assyria during that time.

Interestingly, during that period two significant things occurred which would have long-term consequences for the kingdom of Judah.

First, Hezekiah unwisely showed off his wealth to the envoys of Babylon. He was then told that his descendants would one day serve in the palace of the king of Babylon. Scripture records that this took place some one hundred years later.

Also during that last fifteen years of his life, Hezekiah fathered a son who would succeed him as king over Judah. His name was Manasseh.

Unfortunately, Manasseh was one of the worst kings in Judah’s history. He brought untold misery to the people with his idolatrous practices. Indeed, his evil deeds stopped the worship of the Lord, the true God. Therefore, the extra fifteen years which Hezekiah was granted became disastrous to the nation.

Did God Change His Plan?

However, the question here concerns God's plan and Hezekiah's request. It has been argued that God actually changed His plan because of the prayer of Hezekiah. Is this what the Bible teaches? There are a number of views as to what, in fact, occurred.

Option 1: God Altered His Plan Because Of Prayer

There are those who believe that God adjusts and alters His plan as circumstances change. He does not have one set plan. Therefore, when God announced that Hezekiah was going to die through the prophet Isaiah, this was not meant to be some unalterable decree. This was His initial plan but it certainly was subject to change.

Indeed, the prayer of Hezekiah made the Lord change His mind and thus change His plans. This, it is argued, is another indication that prayer can change how God behaves towards us. At times, He will change His plans based upon our requests. This episode is an example of this taking place.

Option 2: God's Word To Hezekiah Was Not A Decree

It is possible to read the word of the Lord to Hezekiah as something other than a decree. In expressing what He was about to do, God did not say that He had determined Hezekiah was to die. Furthermore, there is no statement in this passage that God changed His mind after Hezekiah prayed. Hezekiah's prayer was answered because God had committed Himself to David.

In fact, in answering Hezekiah's prayer, the Lord emphasized that He did this for the sake of David and the promises made to him.

There was the problem. Hezekiah did *not* have an heir to the throne. Thus, to fulfill the promises to David, that one of his heirs would be the Messiah of Israel, Hezekiah was allowed to live another fifteen years. Scripture emphasizes that God always keeps His promises. Centuries earlier, Moses wrote the following:

Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength, to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today (Deuteronomy 4:37-38 NIV).

As mentioned, during those fifteen years he fathered a son, Manasseh, who would become heir to the throne. God kept His promise.

Why then tell Hezekiah he was about to die? The best answer seems to be that the initial words of Isaiah to the king were for the purpose of humbling him. The heart of Hezekiah had been swelled with pride. In actuality, God did not change anything. The length of Hezekiah's life, like the rest of us, had already been determined by God. The psalmist wrote:

Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:16 NIV).

This is another indication that the Lord is in complete control of everything.

How Could God Know He Would Live Exactly Fifteen More Years?

There are a couple of other things in this account which open theism must answer. The fact that God specifically said that Hezekiah would live another fifteen years actually argues against the beliefs of open theism. The statement of the Lord is significant.

If God does not know the future, then how could He guarantee that Hezekiah would live exactly that long? How could He know Hezekiah would live fifteen years, no more, no less, if God does not know the future? There are seemingly innumerable things which could have happened to Hezekiah during those fifteen years—given the view of open theism that humans are absolutely free to do what they wish.

Indeed, he could have been accidentally killed, murdered, developed a terminal illness, or took his own life. How then could God know he would survive exactly that long? According to open theism, He could not guarantee this to Hezekiah. Yet, this is exactly what happened.

How Could God Know Hezekiah Would Have Descendants Who Would Serve In Babylon?

There is something else which needs to be answered. How could God tell King Hezekiah that his descendants would one day serve in the palace of Babylon if the future is open? This especially problematic if Hezekiah did not have any descendants at that time. How could God be certain this would occur?

The answer seems obvious to both of these questions. The God of the Bible knows the future exhaustively. Therefore, He could make these promises to Hezekiah; promises which came true exactly as given.

Summary To Question 26 Did Hezekiah Convince God To Allow Him To Live Fifteen Extra Years?

The Bible records an incident where Isaiah the prophet told King Hezekiah of Judah that he was about to die. At that time, Hezekiah had been sick. Isaiah told him that sickness would be fatal. Hezekiah then prayed to the Lord—asking Him if he could live longer. Isaiah the prophet then told the king that the Lord would give him an additional fifteen years to live. As promised, Hezekiah did live another fifteen years.

Does God Know Everything?

This has been used by open theists as an example that the future is uncertain. God has one plan, but the prayer of Hezekiah made God change His plans. He supposedly reacts to our needs and changes His plan accordingly.

Yet there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that God alters or amends His plans because of humans. He does not seek our counsel when making His decisions. To the contrary, Scripture is clear that God makes His own decisions without asking the advice of anyone. He does not take our advice and He certainly does not need our advice.

There is also an historical footnote to this episode. During the extra fifteen years of Hezekiah's life he showed the Babylonians the treasures which were contained in the temple. Some one hundred years later these same Babylonians would come and destroy the city and the temple and take its treasures.

In addition, Hezekiah conceived a son, an heir to the throne in those last fifteen years. Before this took place, the Lord told Hezekiah that his descendants would actually serve in the court of Babylon. Again, this occurred exactly as the Lord has predicted.

These events are problems for those who hold to open theism. Indeed, they actually prove the case against the open view.

First, there is the question as to how the Lord could know that Hezekiah would live exactly fifteen more years. If the future is open, how could the Lord make such a specific prediction? How did the Lord know Hezekiah would not be murdered, or accidentally killed? If the future is open, then He could not know this.

Furthermore, how would the Lord know that Hezekiah would have a son and that his heirs would one day serve in the court of Babylon? This last prediction was not fulfilled until one hundred years later. During that time, how many choices did human beings make which could have altered this prediction?

Indeed, there were countless choices made by humans during that period which could have affected the prediction. How then, was the Lord able to make it with certainty?

The only answer is that the God of the Bible exhaustively knows the future. Otherwise this prediction does not make any sense. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that this passage actually argues against open theism.

Question 27

Did God Change His Mind As To What He Was To Do With The People Of Nineveh?

In the Book of Jonah, we have a situation where God was going to destroy the people of Nineveh. However, the people repented of their sins and God had mercy on them. The Bible says the following about God's response to these people:

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened (Jonah 3:10 NIV).

How are we to understand this episode? Do they not clearly speak of God changing His mind concerning what He said that He was going to do? Does this mean that our actions can make God change His mind?

Option 1: God's Mind Was Changed

Many who hold to the open view of God believe that this is an example of the mind of God truly being changed. When the people of Nineveh repented of their sins, God then repented of what He was about to do. Hence, we have a case of God changing His plan. He reacted to their repentance by holding back His threatened destruction of the city.

Option 2: God Did Not Change What He Had Planned To Do

The people of Nineveh prayed to God and asked His forgiveness. God heard their prayer and granted mercy to them. The traditional understanding of this passage is that He did not change His mind—for He knew all along that they would repent of their sins.

Yet from a human point of view this was unknown to anyone. The people had not been assured that God would stop His predicted judgment if they repented. However, Jonah had an idea that this might happen. When the prophet realized that Nineveh would not be destroyed, he prayed to the Lord and acknowledged His graciousness. We read:

And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster" (Jonah 4:2 ESV).

Jonah knew well that the Lord was a gracious God. He was afraid that the people of Nineveh would repent, and that God would indeed spare them. This is exactly what happened.

The seeming changing of God's mind in this situation makes people wonder if God is wavering in His word. But this is not the case. The

Scripture represents God's attitude with respect to the situation as it was at that particular moment. God always knew what He was going to do. The description of how He responded is for our benefit. God does not change His mind.

Summary To Question 27:

**Did God Change His Mind As To What He Was To Do
With The People Of Nineveh?**

In the Book of Jonah there is the account of the people of Nineveh repenting at the preaching of Jonah. In response to their repentance, the Bible says that God repented of what He was about to do to them.

This has been used as a classic example of God changing His mind—with reference to people humbling themselves and asking His forgiveness. It is also believed that God's plans change because of the actions of humans. The conclusion is that the future is not set. It can change based upon the behavior of humans.

Yet this is not the only way to look at this passage. For one thing, there was no message of repentance in Jonah's preaching. None! He said that the city of Nineveh was to be destroyed. Period. No hope was offered, no forgiveness was extended.

On their own, the people of Nineveh humbled themselves and asked God's forgiveness. From a human perspective God changed His mind and did not destroy Nineveh. Yet we should not assume that God actually altered His plan. Since He exhaustively knows the future, He knew that they would repent. Therefore, the message of Nineveh's destruction was not something which God decreed would happen.

Question 28

In His Prayer In Gethsemane, Did Jesus Believe It Was Possible To Bypass The Cross?

After the Last Supper, on the night in which Jesus Christ was betrayed, He went to the Garden of Gethsemane. At Gethsemane, Jesus withdrew from His disciples a short distance and prayed to God the Father. During that agonizing prayer, He asked God the Father a number of things. The Bible says:

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:36-39 ESV).

There are several questions which naturally arise from these statements of Jesus. Did He really believe that He could bypass the cross? Was He uncertain about the future? Had the future been planned, or was it still open to change? How are we to understand His requests?

The following observations need to be made.

Option 1: The Future Was Not Settled: Jesus Thought He Could Bypass The Cross

There is the view that the future was not settled in the mind of God the Father. Until that particular time, He was not certain what He would do. In other words, there was no single plan of God that was in place. Jesus' prayer supposedly illustrates this. He asked God the Father, if possible, to remove the cross, or at least to postpone it.

Why would He ask unless it was possible? This, it is argued is another demonstration that the future is not settled. God's plans adjust to the circumstances.

Option 2: Jesus Knew He Must Die: The Prayer Was Not To Bypass Calvary

The traditional way of understanding Jesus' prayer is to see it as His human nature in agony. Indeed, Jesus was fully human as well as fully God. Realizing what events were ahead, Jesus experienced a fully human reaction. It does not mean that He wanted to bypass the cross, or that He even thought this was possible.

We must remember that Jesus was fully God as well as fully human. As God, He certainly knew the plan which He Himself formulated before He

created the world. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter said the following to the crowd which gathered:

Men of Israel, listen to these words: This Jesus the Nazarene was a man pointed out to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did among you through Him, just as you yourselves know. . . . He was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge (Acts 2:22-23 CSB).

Jesus was delivered up to death by God's determined plan and foreknowledge. This being the case, it makes little sense to argue that Jesus thought that He could somehow bypass that plan which He Himself formulated!

Therefore, we have little reason to believe that Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane was an attempt to bypass the cross or formulate some other plan for the future. Instead, we should see it as a request from His human nature to a loving Father.

**Summary To Question 28:
In His Prayer In Gethsemane, Did Jesus
Believe It Was Possible To Bypass The Cross?**

The Bible records the prayer of Jesus Christ at the Garden of Gethsemane as He was waiting to be betrayed by Judas Iscariot. Scripture records Jesus, in agony, asking God the Father if it was possible that the cup could be passed from Him. The cup referred to the suffering He was about to experience.

This prayer of Jesus has been interpreted in a number of ways by Bible-believers.

Some think that it reveals that the future is uncertain. Jesus, it is argued, would not have prayed the prayer unless things could have turned out differently. In other words, He would not ask God the Father if the cup could be removed unless it could be removed. Open theists see this as an illustration concerning how the future is open, not closed. God's plans are not unalterable or settled.

The traditional view is that Jesus, who was fully human as well as fully God, was agonizing in His humanity over the coming events. He did not expect that the future could be changed, and He was not asking for it to be change.

This is especially the case since the Bible emphasizes that the death of Christ was in the eternal plan of God. Indeed, since Jesus is God Himself it was His eternal plan for this to happen to Him.

Therefore, we should not see this prayer of Jesus as Him somehow believing that His death could be postponed or avoided. He knew that it could not be.

Question 29

What Should We Conclude About Passages That Seem To Say That God Has Changed His Mind?

If we accept the fact that God is perfection, and that He cannot change, then how do we account for certain parts of the Bible that seem to indicate that God changed His mind? What are we to make of such passages?

In addition, why does the Bible speak of God regretting that He did something? As we have noted, there are several instances in the Scripture where God seems to relent, or change His mind, about something that He was going to do as well as passages that speak of God having regrets. How shall we view these parts of Scripture?

We can make the following observations about this important subject.

We Know That God Does Not Change

To begin with, we know that God does not change in His character, or His promises. This is what He says about Himself. This is clear from Scripture. In fact, all Christians believe this to be true.

How Do We Explain The Passages?

If God does not change, then how do we understand these passages that seem to teach that God does change in certain ways? How can they be consistent with the idea of a changeless God? There are three things which we must note.

The Change Was With Humanity

We see in each of these instances when God “changed His mind” that a prayer of repentance is what altered the outcome of the situation. The change was not with God, but with humanity. When the conduct of human beings changed towards God, the conduct of God appeared to change toward humankind. Yet, God was consistent in His behavior all along.

For example, in the case of Hezekiah, God answered his prayer and extended his life for fifteen years. Again, the change was for the benefit of humanity, not for their detriment.

The Change Is Always God Stopping Punishment

When Scripture tells us about God changing His mind of what He said He would do, each instance is in regard to punishment, or in the case of Hezekiah, death. It is never a case of God promising to do something good, and then changing His mind and judging the people. His promises to His people will not be broken.

The Bible says:

For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable (Romans 11:29 NIV).

God never breaks His promises. There is not one example in Scripture of God doing so. Indeed, there never will be.

Sorry Has The Idea Of Being Grieved Rather Than Having Regrets

There is something else that has to be considered. When the Bible says God was "sorry," it has the idea of being grieved. It does not have the idea of regret in the same way that humans regret.

In fact, God cannot have regrets in the same way which we regret because He knows everything that has happened, as well as everything which will happen. Thus, He cannot regret any decision.

In sum, when we look at these passages which seem to say that God has changed His mind, or that He had regrets about past decisions, we should not understand these statements as if humans had made them. God is not a human being. Statements about His nature and His actions do not have a direct correspondence to how we think and feel.

Indeed, these statements are for our benefit. They give us a better idea of His character by comparing them to things with which we can relate. However, the comparison is never exactly the same. We always need to keep this in mind. Otherwise we are going to run into a number of problems.

Summary To Question 29: What Should We Conclude About Passages That Seem To Say That God Has Changed His Mind?

There are several passages in the Bible where it says that God repented, or changed His mind, as well as Him regretting certain things which took place. To many, this indicates that God can have second thoughts, and can change His plans if necessary. While there are a number of passages which seem to teach that God actually changes His mind in certain instances, this is not the case at all.

In fact, the Bible assures us that God will not change his mind. Furthermore, He has no regrets, no second thoughts. When dealing with these passages there are three things which we must keep in mind.

First, any seeming change in God's dealings is from humanity's point of view, not God's. It is from our perspective that God changes. Indeed, Scripture gives us a number of direct statements which say that God never changes. Thus, we should not assume that the change has been with Him. It has not.

Second, every time God is said to have changed His mind it was in favor of humanity rather than against. We never find God going back on any

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promise He has made to the people to bless them or be with them. He always keeps those promises!

Third, there is also the possibility that the word translated “repent” has more the idea of being grieved or sorry. If this is the correct translation, then there is no issue here with respect to God’s dealings with humanity.

In sum, the biblical writers are not trying to tell us that God changed His mind or regretted what He had previously done—rather they are attributing emotions to God which express how He looks at the particular situation.

Therefore, we conclude that the God of the Bible does not change His mind. He does not ever do this.

Question 30

Does God Dwell In Time?

Time can be defined as “the measurement of events that appear one after another.” When God created the world He created time. Indeed, He existed before the first event of creation.

Therefore, God dwells outside of time. From Scripture, we learn a number of things about God and time.

The Bible Acknowledges The Existence Of Time

From the first page of the Bible until the last, we find that the existence of time is recognized. Indeed, the Bible speaks of yesterday, today, and tomorrow as well as God’s intervention in history and in the lives of individuals.

In the first chapter of Genesis, we are told that God made the sun, moon and stars for us to mark the times and seasons, days, and years. The Bible says:

And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years” (Genesis 1:14 NIV).

These lights in the sky were created by the God of the Bible for a number of purposes. One of them was to mark time.

In the gospels we read of Jesus saying that He existed before the time of Abraham.

John records the following:

Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58 ESV).

Therefore, Scripture recognizes that time exists.

God Is Not Limited By Time

The Bible also says that God is not limited to time. This means that He is a timeless being—the One who inhabits eternity. We read in Isaiah:

The high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, the Holy One, says this: “I live in that high and holy place with those whose spirits are contrite and humble. I refresh the humble and give new courage to those with repentant hearts” (Isaiah 57:15 NLT).

While God inhabits eternity, He deals with His creation in time. This is another example of a paradox—two truths that seemingly conflict. Consequently, we can only approximate the truth when we speak of God

living outside of time, yet interacting with His people in time. We must appreciate our limitations here.

Indeed, the Bible records God saying the following about His ways and our ways:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9 ESV).

Notice God's comparison between His thoughts and our thoughts, as well as His ways and our ways.

We read in the Book of Job about God's greatness. Scripture puts it this way:

Behold, God is great, and we do not know Him; nor can the number of His years be discovered (Job 36:26 NKJV).

Time and space do not, in any way, limit God.

Time Is Relative To God

We find that time is merely relative to God. The Bible gives this comparison:

Dear friends, don't let this one thing escape you: with the Lord one day is like 1,000 years, and 1,000 years like one day (2 Peter 3:8 CSB).

God is certainly not limited by time. Although we cannot totally understand how an eternal being operates in time, we believe it to be true because the Bible says so.

He Is The Alpha And Omega: The Beginning And The End

There is something else which the Bible teaches. The God of Scripture never had a beginning point and will never have an end. The Bible recognizes that He is both the beginning and the end. In the first part of the Book of Revelation, we read the Lord God saying:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8 ESV).

Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet while Omega is the last letter. The Lord God is saying that he is both the first and the last.

The same truth is restated at the end of the Book of Revelation. It says:

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Revelation 22:13 CSB).

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He was there before time began and He will be there when time, as we know it, ends.

Isaiah the prophet also recorded the Lord saying that He was the first and the last. The Bible says:

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last, besides me there is no god (Isaiah 44:6 ESV).

God Himself claimed to be the first and the last.

In another place, Isaiah recorded God saying that He is the first and the last:

Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last. My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together (Isaiah 48:12,13 NIV).

This tells us there was none who came before God, and none will come after Him.

God Can Predict The Future Because He Is Above Time

The fact that God is above time allows Him to see future events as though they had already occurred. This is why we find God telling us what will happen in the future. The Lord has made the following claim with respect to His ability:

And do not forget the things I have done throughout history. For I am God—I alone! I am God, and there is no one else like me. Only I can tell you what is going to happen even before it happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish (Isaiah 46:9,10 NLT).

Only the Lord knows what will occur in the future.

We also read the Lord making the following claims about Himself:

Speak up and present [your case] yes, let them take counsel together. Who predicted this long ago? Who announced it from ancient times? Was it not I, the LORD? There is no other God but Me, a righteous God and Savior; there is no one except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:21 CSB).

Only the God of the Bible, who is outside of time, can predict future events with 100% accuracy.

In sum, the Bible says while God exists outside of time, and is not limited to it, He interacts with His creation in time. While we cannot completely

understand how this can happen, this is what the Bible tells us. Consequently, we can believe it.

**Summary To Question 30:
Does God Dwell In Time?**

Time and space were part of God's original creation. When the Lord created the universe, He created time. Thus, God existed before there was such a thing as time.

As we search the Scripture, we find that it recognizes the existence of time. Indeed, we are told that God set certain lights in the sky for us to have the ability to mark time. These great lights, including the sun and the moon, help us mark the day, months, and years. Jesus also acknowledged the reality of time. Indeed, He told the religious leaders of His day that He existed before the time of Abraham.

While the Bible acknowledges the existence of time, God is not bound or limited by it. In fact, we are told that He dwells in eternity, not time. Because He dwells in eternity, He sees both the beginning and the end.

Though God dwells in eternity He interacts with His creation in time. This is one of the biblical mysteries. How can a Being who lives in eternity, interact with other beings which are bound by time? Although humankind cannot completely comprehend how this can be true, it is the biblical teaching on the subject.

The fact that God is not limited in time is evident by the way He can accurately predict the future. He sees things which will occur in our world as if they had already taken place. Therefore, He can always accurately tell us what will come to pass.

Therefore, the God of the Bible is the eternal God who inhabits eternity but interacts with His creation in time.

Question 31

Does God Have Any Passions Or Emotions? (The Impassibility Of God)

The Bible constantly speaks of God demonstrating His emotions. Indeed, a number of different emotions are attributed to Him. God is spoken of as having a full range of emotions such as love, hatred, and concern— though they are not the same as human emotions. He is a personal being who loves, hates, and feels. Of this there is no doubt.

Accusation: Some Believe God Has No Real Emotions

However, there is the perspective that some Christians hold that God does not have any emotions whatsoever. The technical term for such a belief is the “impassibility of God.” The following passage in the Book of Acts is used in support of this belief:

And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein (Acts 14:11-15 KJV).

The people thought Paul and Barnabas were gods because of the miracles they performed. Paul told the people that they were not gods but rather they had similar, or like, passions with humans. Because of the way in which Paul made the distinction between God and humans, some infer that God must not have similar passions to humans, or any passions whatsoever. Therefore, they embrace the idea of the impassibility of God. What are we to make of this claim?

Response To The Idea That God Does Not Have Emotions

There are a number of responses that can be made to the claim that the God of the Bible does not have any real emotions.

1. The King James Translation Gives The Wrong Idea

First, the Greek word translated “like passions,” in this passage in the Book of Acts, has the idea that they are merely human beings. It is not making any statement about their passions or emotions or lack of them. Thus, the translation in the King James Version gives the wrong idea.

The New King James Version translation renders the verse as follows:

Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them (Acts 14:15 NKJV).

Here the translation brings out the idea that Paul and Barnabas testified that they were of the same nature as these people. In other words, they were humans, not gods.

Consequently, this passage in the Book of Acts has nothing to say, one way or the other, as to whether or not God has genuine emotions. There are other passages in the Bible do this.

2. God Has Emotions

As we examine the Scripture, we find that it is full of references of God having passions or emotions. He is described as reacting to situations with emotion or passion.

For example, we read the following in the Book of Hebrews:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15 NRSV)

God can and does sympathize with us. While God's passions are not sinful passions, they are part of His character. Therefore, the Bible does not teach that God is a passionless God—One who is without genuine emotions or feelings.

3. God Does Not Have Bodily Passions

While the Bible teaches that God has passion, it does not teach that God has bodily passions such as hunger, thirst, or the need for sexual fulfillment. He is without passions in this sense. This, however, as we have seen, does not mean that He is without feelings. He is a God who cares deeply for His people.

4. He Is Not Subject To Suffering

There is something else which we should mention. There is a sense where God is impassible. Indeed, the Greek word which is translated impassibility means "not subject to suffering." In this sense, God is certainly impassible. He cannot suffer and there is no outside power which can harm Him. In other words, He is not vulnerable to anything or anyone.

Summary To Question 31 Does God Have Any Passions, Or Emotions? (The Impassibility Of God)

Based upon a statement found in the Book of Acts, found in the King James Bible, there are some who argue that God has no passions or

emotions whatsoever. In this particular episode, the Apostle Paul supposedly made the distinction between humans and God by inferring that God is without any human passions or emotions. This has caused some to infer that the God of the Bible does not have genuine passions or emotion. This is one of the distinctions between Him and us.

Yet this is not what the passage is teaching. Paul is not comparing an emotionless God to emotional or passionate human beings. In other words, the people should not assume only humans have passions while God does not.

Indeed, the Bible teaches that God does have passions or emotions. This is clear. Yet they are not the same as human emotions or sinful passions. Therefore, the idea that the God of the Bible is somehow “impassible,” that He is without any passions or emotions, is not found in Scripture. He is a God who love, hates, and feels. He does have these passions and emotions. Yet, He does not possess these emotions in the same way as humans.

Furthermore, since God does not have a body, He does not have bodily passions or needs such as hunger or thirst. Therefore, whatever passions or emotions He does have do not directly correspond with our passions.

There is something else we should note. The meaning of the Greek word translated as “impassible” means “not subject to suffering.” Certainly God is impassible in this sense of the word.

In sum, we can conclude that God is like us in His passions and emotions in some sense. He loves, He hates, and He expresses emotion. Yet there is certainly a mystery here as to how that corresponds with our feelings or passions.

Question 32

How Do Open Theism Deal With Predictive Prophecy?

The Bible clearly teaches that God knows the future in each and every detail. Everything in Scripture testifies to this fact. Of this, there is not the slightest doubt. However, this is denied by those who hold the position of “Open Theism.”

If God does not know the future, as open theists claim, then how can he make predictions about what will occur in the future? If the Lord does not know the future, then how can there be such a thing as Bible prophecy?

We can make the following observations about predictions which we find in Scripture from the perspective of open theism.

1. Certain Prophecies Depend Upon God’s Alone: They Will Come To Pass

There is one set of predictions which are dependent upon God alone. They are not dependent upon anything that humans may or may not do. Open theists agree that these will come to pass. Consequently, the future is set to some degree because of certain declarations which the Lord has made about things which will come to pass.

2. Certain Prophecies Are Conditional: They Are Likely To Occur

Open theists believe that certain prophecies are likely to occur but will not certainly occur. There is some doubt about them. There are a number of passages which fit into this category.

3. Certain Prophecies May Come To Pass

There are other predictions which may or may not come to pass. These depend upon the behavior or faithfulness of humans.

This is a brief summation of how open theism can claim to believe the Bible and what it teaches about predictive prophecy but deny that God exhaustively knows the future

Response To Open Theism’s View Of Bible Prophecy

While there are certain predictions in Scripture that may fit one of these three categories, there are also numerous predictions which will not. These are specific predictions by the Lord which involve innumerable decisions by humans before they come to pass. Open theists do not mention these. Indeed, their whole system comes tumbling down when these predictions are carefully looked at.

Furthermore, open theism attempts to redefine predictive prophecy in such a way as to hold on to the doctrine that God is all-knowing, yet explain away why certain prophecies did not come to pass. This is a fruitless exercise. In what sense can God be considered to be all-knowing if He makes predictions which do not come true? The simple answer is that He cannot.

It is important that we listen to what the God of Scripture says about His knowledge of the future. For one thing, He challenges the so-called gods to predict the future. In doing this, it reveals the difference between Himself and them. We read the following in the writings of Isaiah:

“Submit your case,” says the LORD. “Present your arguments,” says Jacob’s King. “Let them come and tell us what will happen. Tell us the past events, so that we may reflect on it and know the outcome. Or tell us the future. Tell us the coming events, then we will know that you are gods. Indeed, do [something] good or bad, then we will be in awe and perceive. Look, you are nothing and your work is worthless. Anyone who chooses you is detestable” (Isaiah 41:21-24 CSB).

These gods cannot predict the future because they do not exist. The God of the Bible can do this because He does exist, and He knows what will take place in the future.

The prophet Isaiah also recorded God saying:

Remember what happened long ago, for I am God, and there is no other; [I am] God, and no one is like Me. I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done, saying: My plan will take place, and I will do all My will (Isaiah 46:9,10 CSB).

God said there is nobody like Him because He can declare things which have not yet come to pass. This makes Him distinct from all other creatures in the universe.

We need to take seriously what the Lord, the God of Israel, has said about Himself. He says that He declares the beginning from the end because He knows all things. This includes everything which has happened in the past, is happening in the present, and will happen in the future. He is the God of knowledge. This is the God of the Bible, not the god of open theism.

**Summary To Question 32:
How Does Open Theism Deal With Predictive Prophecy?**

The God of the Bible knows all things past, present and future. He has all-knowledge. There is nothing that He can learn. This is the consistent teaching of Scripture.

This basic truth of the Christian faith is denied by certain Bible-believing Christians who hold to the position of open theism. If God does not know the future, as those holding to open theism believe, then how do they explain predictive prophecy? How is God able to know the future?

Does God Know Everything?

Open theism attempts to answer this question by dividing prophecies into three different categories. Some prophecies in Scripture will come to pass, others are likely to occur, while there are others which may or may not occur.

However, their desire to deny that God exhaustively knows the future does not match the evidence. There are too many examples of the God of the Bible specifically predicting certain events to occur. These events involve literally millions of contingencies. All of these must fall into place for the predictions to come true. The fact that they do come true shows that God knows the future exhaustively.

Question 33

Does God Know What Will Happen In The Remote Future? (David's Son The Messiah, King Cyrus, And The Rise Of Greece)

One of the many things which separates the God of the Bible from the so-called gods in other religions is that the God of Scripture knows what will happen in the future. In fact, not only does the Lord know what will happen in the future, He also tells us certain things which will happen. Furthermore, these predictions can be checked out to see if they are true.

Scripture Gives Examples Of Long-Range Predictions

We find many examples, in both testaments, of the God of the Bible making predictions which have literally come true. Not only does God know the immediate future, He also knows the remote future. Indeed, there are a number of biblical examples where God foretells events which will occur hundreds of years in the future.

We will list three of these predictions as well as their fulfillment. They include the predictions that one of David's descendants will be the Messiah, that King Cyrus will give the commandment for the Jews to return from exile, and the rise of Greece as a great kingdom. The evidence is as follows.

Example 1: One Of David's Descendants Will Be The Messiah

The first example will be the prediction that one of David's physical descendants would be the Messiah, the King of Israel. We read the following words to King David in Second Samuel:

When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever . . . Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever (2 Samuel 7:12,13,16 NIV).

These prophecies are specific. David's son, Solomon will build the temple for the Lord. Then, at some indefinite time in the future, an actual descendant of David will be the promised Messiah.

This occurred literally as predicted. Some one thousand years later, Matthew opened his gospel by stating the following:

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1 NRSV).

Jesus, the Messiah, was a literal descendant of King David. The prophecy was fulfilled.

Conclusion On The Prophecies Concerning David's Son

The fact that the Lord predicted that one of David's descendants would be the promised Messiah shows that God knows the remote future. Indeed, there is no other way that He could guarantee to David, one thousand years before it took place, that one of His heirs would be Savior.

Example 2: The Decree Of King Cyrus For The Jews To Return To Their Homeland

The next example concerns a decree made by the Persian king Cyrus to allow the people of Judah to return to Jerusalem. In fact, this is one of the most amazing prophecies in the entire Bible. We can summarize what occurred in the following manner.

The Historical Background

The southern kingdom of Judah had been sent into captivity for seventy years. This exile had been predicted by the prophets. However, just as the prophets predicted the coming captivity, they also predicted the return from captivity. In one remarkable prophecy, Isaiah the prophet predicted the specific person who would give the command for the Jews to return. His name was Cyrus.

King Cyrus is an important figure in biblical history. Indeed, he fulfilled the prediction of the Lord with respect to the end of the Babylonian Empire. This destruction of the empire ended the seventy-year captivity of the Jews. In addition, it allowed the people to return to the land of promise.

The prophecy is truly astounding! About one hundred and fifty years before Cyrus was born, the prophet Isaiah recorded the Lord making the following prediction concerning Cyrus—as well as one of the commandments He would give. Isaiah wrote:

This is what the Lord, your Redeemer who formed you from the womb, says: I am the Lord, who made everything; who stretched out the heavens by myself; who alone spread out the earth; who destroys the omens of the false prophets and makes fools of diviners; who confounds the wise and makes their knowledge foolishness; who confirms the message of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers; who says to Jerusalem, "She will be inhabited," and to the cities of Judah, "They will be rebuilt," and I will restore her ruins; who says to the depths of the sea, "Be dry," and I will dry up your rivers; who says to Cyrus, "My shepherd, he will fulfill all my pleasure" and says to Jerusalem, "She will be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Its foundation will be laid" (Isaiah 44:24-28 CSB).

Before his birth, King Cyrus of Persia was foreordained by the living God to carry out a number of specific tasks. In fact, he would be the person who would give the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem and to lay the foundation of the destroyed temple.

There are further predictions of the Lord concerning Cyrus:

The Lord says this to Cyrus, his anointed, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and disarm kings, to open doors before him, and even city gates will not be shut: “I will go before you and level the uneven places; I will shatter the bronze doors and cut the iron bars in two. I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches from secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord. I am the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. I call you by your name, for the sake my servant Jacob and Israel my chosen one. I give a name to you, though you do not know me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; there is no God but me. I will strengthen you, though you do not know me, so that all may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is no one but me. I am the Lord, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:1-5 CSB).

The Specifics Of The Predictions

With respect to the predictions made by the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, we can note a number of things.

1. The Nation Would Be In Captivity

The first thing that this passage assumes is that the people of Judah and Jerusalem would be exiled from their land. This assumes that some foreign invader would remove them from their homeland.

2. The City Of Jerusalem Would Be Destroyed

Not only would the people be removed from the land, the holy city of Jerusalem would be destroyed in the process.

3. The Temple Would Be Destroyed

The city would not be the only thing to be destroyed. The Bible says that the First Temple would also be destroyed along with the city.

4. A Command Would Be Give To Release The People From Captivity

The exile would not last forever. At a particular time, a commandment would be given to release the people from this captivity.

5. This Commandment Would Be Given By A Man Named Cyrus

The person who would make this commandment would be named Cyrus. Cyrus is specified as the one who would allow the people to come back to their homeland, rebuild their city and the temple.

6. Though Cyrus Did Not Know The Lord, He Was Still Used By Him To Carry This Out

The prophet makes another important point. Cyrus was the instrument which would be used by the Lord to carry out His purposes. This is in spite of the fact that Cyrus did not personally know the God of Israel!

All of these things were specifically predicted by Isaiah the prophet.

The Predictions Were Fulfilled

Each of these predictions was literally fulfilled. We can note them as follows.

1. Jerusalem Went Into Captivity 100 Years After Isaiah's Prophecy

As predicted, in three stages, the nation was taken into captivity to the city of Babylon. Despite repeated warnings, the people did not turn to the Lord. Therefore, they went into a seventy-year captivity as was stated by God's prophets.

2. The City And Temple Were Both Destroyed

The Babylonians not only took the people away from their land, they also destroyed both the city of Jerusalem and the temple. Again, the prophecies were literally fulfilled as God had predicted.

3. Cyrus Gave The Command For The Return

After the captivity was over, miraculously the commandment to allow the people to return to their land and build the city and the temple was given by a Persian King named Cyrus—a king who had no personal relationship with the Lord, the God of Israel.

The Miraculous Nature Of These Predictions

There are a number of miraculous things we find about these predictions recorded by the prophet Isaiah.

1. The Captivity Was Predicted

To begin with, the prophet Isaiah predicted a captivity for the nation that would not occur for some one hundred years after he wrote it down.

2. The People Would Be Released From That Captivity

We are also told that the people would be released from this captivity. It is one thing to predict a captivity, it is quite another to confidently assert that the people will return to their homeland from this captivity. Yet, it came about exactly as predicted—some one hundred and seventy years after it was prophesied!

3. Cyrus Would Be The Ruler Who Would Make This Decree

The most miraculous part of this prophecy is that the man who would give the command to release the Jews, Cyrus, is mentioned by name before he was even born! Only an all-knowing God who knows every detail about the unknown future could make such a prediction.

Was It Written After The Fact?

How can critics respond to this obvious miraculous prediction? The typical response of Bible critics is that this prophecy had to have been written long after the time of Isaiah.

Indeed, the Book of Isaiah is usually divided into a number of authors the latest of which wrote hundreds of years after the time of the first Isaiah. While some scholars have attempted to deny the unity of the Book of Isaiah, their arguments have been answered time and time again by Bible-believing scholars.

However, the Person who settles this issue is the only One who could speak with complete authority on the subject, Jesus Himself.

It is common today in many circles to argue that the Book of Isaiah was written by at least two different authors. Isaiah 1-39 is assumed to have been written by first Isaiah, and 40-66 by a second Isaiah.

However, we find that Jesus and the New Testament writers, quoted from both parts of Isaiah, and attributed the entire work to the same author, Isaiah.

We read in Matthew about how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases” (Matthew 8:16,17 NIV).

This cites Isaiah 53:4 from the so-called “Second Isaiah.”

There is another illustration where “Second” Isaiah is cited. This time it is from Luke’s gospel. It says:

Now Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The

eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him” (Luke 4:16-20 NET).

This passage quotes Isaiah 61:1,2. It is in the section written by the so-called Second Isaiah. Yet here it is attributed to Isaiah the prophet.

Jesus Directly Quotes Isaiah

There is also a passage where Jesus clearly spells out that Isaiah wrote it. We read about this in John. It says:

Although Jesus had performed so many miraculous signs before them, they still refused to believe in him, so that the word of Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled. He said, “Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (John 12:37,38 NET).

Jesus personally attributed this passage to Isaiah. Yet this is a citation from Isaiah 53, the so-called Second Isaiah.

He then proceeds to cite the first section of Isaiah:

For this reason they could not believe, because again Isaiah said, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn to me, and I would heal them.” Isaiah said these things because he saw Christ’s glory, and spoke about him (John 12:39-41 NET).

This citation is from Isaiah 6:10. Jesus said that Isaiah was the person who said these things.

Therefore, the testimony of Jesus is that the Book of Isaiah was written by only one man, the prophet Isaiah. Since Jesus Christ has come back from the dead to demonstrate that He is the One whom He claimed to be, His Word is final. One human being wrote the Book of Isaiah, Isaiah himself.

Conclusion On The Prophecy Regarding Cyrus

From the above evidence, we can conclude that the predictions concerning King Cyrus of Persia clearly demonstrate that the God of the Bible knows the future. Indeed, He would have to exhaustively know the future to be able to make such precise predictions.

Example 3: The Rise Of Greece As A World Empire

The third example concerns the nation of Greece. The Lord predicted that they would succeed Babylon and Media/Persia as a world empire. The Scripture says:

The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. The shaggy goat represents the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes represents the first king. The four horns that

took the place of the shattered horn represent four kingdoms. They will rise from that nation, but without its power (Daniel 8:20-22 CSB).

After the kingdom of Media and Persia, Greece will be the next world kingdom. This prediction was made by Daniel the prophet about 530 B.C.

The Specifics Of This Prophecy

There are a number of specifics contained in this prophecy.

1. Greece Shall Be The Next Great World Empire

After the Medes and the Persians, the next empire will be Greece. They will be the third empire in Daniel's interpretation of the four great kingdoms which will rule the earth.

2. Greece Will Split Into Four Parts

The little horn, which is the first ruler of the Greek kingdom, will be a strong ruler. However, after his demise this kingdom will eventually split into four parts. This is very specific.

3. The Four Parts Will Not Be As Strong As The Original Kingdom

These four parts will not be as powerful as the original Greek kingdom. In other words, they will lack the power that the kingdom had under the leadership of the first king, the little horn.

The Fulfillment

The predictions were literally fulfilled. We can list them as follows.

1. Greece Was The Next Great Empire

As predicted by the prophet Daniel, the Greeks succeed the Medes and the Persians as the next great empire. Alexander the Great conquered the known world, which included the empire of the Medes and the Persians. This occurred about 330 B.C.

2. At Alexander's Death, The Kingdom Was Later Divided Into Four Parts

The first king, the little horn, was Alexander the Great. At the death of Alexander, the kingdom was divided into four parts. This fulfilled the prophecy given by Daniel.

3. The Four Kingdoms Were Not As Strong As The Original

However, the collective power did not match the original kingdom. The power of Greece never reached the same heights after the death of Alexander.

Conclusion On The Prophecy Regarding Greece

The fact that the Lord could specifically say that Greece would be the empire which succeeded the Babylonian and the Medes, and the Persians shows His absolute knowledge of the future.

Furthermore, that He knew that the kingdom would later be divided into exactly four parts is another prediction which can only be made and fulfilled if someone exhaustively knows the future. Indeed, we must again emphasize that this prophecy of Daniel was made some two hundred years before Greece succeeded Media/Persia as a great world empire. We are forced to conclude that the God of the Bible has exhaustive knowledge of the future.

There Are Many More Examples

These are just three of many examples which we could cite. The conclusion seems obvious—the God of the Bible not only knows events which will happen in the near future, He also can predict accurately what will occur in the remote future. Only someone with exhaustive knowledge could do this.

Summary To Question 33

Does God Know What Will Happen In The Remote Future? (David's Son The Messiah, King Cyrus, And The Rise Of Greece)

The God of the Bible does indeed know what will happen in the remote future. In fact, it is His claim that His specific knowledge of the future is that which separates Him from the so-called gods of the ancient world. Indeed, He challenges them to do what He does, foretell the future. They cannot because they do not exist. He can do it because He knows exactly what will occur in the future since He has all knowledge of all things.

We list three examples which demonstrate God's exhaustive knowledge of remote events. Examples which make it clear that the God of Scripture is all-knowing with respect to events which are yet to take place.

In the first instance, God promised King David of Israel that one of His descendants would be the promised Messiah. This did not become fulfilled for some one thousand years after the prediction was made. It would not be possible for this to happen unless the Lord knew the future exhaustively. In fact, except for God's exhaustive knowledge of the future, such a prediction would be absurd.

Humanly speaking there were so many possible things which could have kept this from happening. But it did happen exactly as the Scripture said. Jesus Christ was a literal descendant of King David. He fulfilled everything which was promised to David and He fulfilled it exactly as it was written.

In a second example, the Lord predicted that King Cyrus would be the one who would give the commandment to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple. When the Lord made this prophecy, the

people were not even in captivity! In fact, it would be some one hundred years before they would be taken captive by the Babylonians.

Eventually, some one hundred and seventy years after the prediction, a Persian king by the name of Cyrus did indeed give the edict that allowed the Jews to return from captivity and rebuild their city and temple. Only a Being who exhaustively knows the future could do something like this. Indeed, this prediction is truly amazing.

In the third example, the Lord predicted that the name of the empire which would succeed the Babylonians and the Medes and Persians. Three specific things are mentioned.

First, the empire would be Greece. Second, when the king of this empire died, it would be split into four parts. Third, the four-part kingdom would not be as strong as the original Greek kingdom.

All of this was literally fulfilled. Greece conquered the Medes and the Persians. After Alexander of Macedon died, the kingdom was split into four parts. The fourth parts, as predicted, were not as strong as the original Greek kingdom.

Furthermore, this did not occur until some two hundred years after the prophecy of Daniel. Again, this could not have happened unless God knows the future exhaustively.

These are three of many examples which we could give from Scripture. The point is clear. Only a Being who has exhaustive knowledge of the future could predict such events with such specificity. This puts to rest the false idea of open theism that the God of the Bible does not know the future.

Question 34

Did Jesus Know That Judas Would Actually Betray Him?

The claim of open theism is that God does not know what is going to occur in the future. In other words, the future is open. Therefore, He, along with the rest of us, must wait and see what occurs.

The problem with this point of view is that there are numerous prophecies in Scripture where God makes specific predictions as to what will occur in the future. One of the most celebrated instances is the prediction of Jesus that He will be betrayed by Judas Iscariot.

Did Jesus Know He Would Be Betrayed And By Whom?

There are those who say that Jesus did not know Judas would actually betray Him, or at least, He was not certain that this would happen. Indeed, when Judas arrived at Gethsemane, Jesus greeted Judas by calling him, "Friend." To some people this means He did not expect Judas to betray Him.

In fact, when Jesus offered bread to Judas after dipping into the same bowl this was supposedly another sign of friendship.

Therefore, we should not read the account of Judas betraying Jesus as a straightforward prediction of what would occur in the future.

Conclusions We Can Make From The New Testament

The New Testament sets out a number of facts in the account of Judas' betrayal of Jesus. We can make the following observations.

1. Judas Had Met With The Chief Priests About Betraying Jesus

To begin with, we find that the Bible says that Judas initiated a meeting with the chief priests about betraying Jesus.

Matthew records what occurred as follows:

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-15 NRSV).

Therefore, Judas made the first move. He contacted them, they did not contact him.

2. Satan Entered Judas When He Went To The Chief Priests

The New Testament also says Satan entered Judas Iscariot when he did this deed. We read the following in Luke's gospel:

Then Satan entered Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles. Judas went to the chief priests and the temple guards and discussed with them how he could betray Jesus (Luke 22:3-4 God's Word).

This puts to rest any idea that Judas had some pure motive when he turned Jesus over to the religious leaders. He was offered money to betray Jesus and he took the money. His motive was pure greed.

3. Jesus Predicted His Betrayal By One Of His Own Disciples

We also discover that Jesus knew this would happen. He made it clear that He would experience betrayal. Not only did Jesus say that He was going to be betrayed, He said that His betrayal would be done by one of His own disciples. Therefore, it was going to be somebody close to Him who would be the betrayer.

John writes:

After saying this, Jesus was deeply troubled. He declared, "I can guarantee this truth: One of you is going to betray me!" (John 13:21 God's Word).

Thus, Jesus specifically said that one out of the Twelve would be His betrayer.

Jesus went further. He said it would be one who dipped in the bowl with him. Mark records Jesus saying this. We read:

"It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me" (Mark 14:20 NIV).

Not only would it be one of the Twelve, it would be one who dipped with Him in the dish. The fact that Jesus willingly ate out of the same dish as Judas was no sign of friendship. Rather, it shows the awfulness of the betrayal.

4. Judas Iscariot Was Specifically Mentioned As The Betraying Disciple

Jesus went a step further. He specifically stated that Judas Iscariot would be the disciple who would betray Him. In fact, at the Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples that one of them would betray Him that very night. When Judas asked Jesus if he would be the offending party, Jesus said that he would indeed be the betrayer. Matthew records the highlights of the conversation:

Then Judas, His betrayer, replied, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" "You have said it," He told him (Matthew 26:25 CSB).

Judas Iscariot was specified as the betrayer.

5. Jesus Knew From The Beginning That This Would Happen

The Bible also emphasizes that Jesus knew from the beginning of His ministry that one whom He had chosen as a disciple would betray Him. John records Jesus saying:

Yet there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him (John 6:64 NIV).

This shows that He knew for about three years that Judas would be the betrayer.

6. Jesus Was Betrayed By Judas

As predicted, Judas did betray Jesus. Matthew records what occurred as follows:

While He was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, suddenly arrived. A large mob, with swords and clubs, was with him from the chief priests and elders of the people. His betrayer had given them a sign: “The One I kiss, He’s the One; arrest Him!” So he went right up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!”—and kissed Him. “Friend,” Jesus asked him, “why have you come?” Then they came up, took hold of Jesus, and arrested Him (Matthew 26:47-50 CSB).

This records the act of betrayal. The fact that Jesus addressed him as friend does not suggest that Jesus was unaware what was about to take place.

In fact, Scripture says the following:

Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer! (Matthew 26:45 NIV).

Judas was identified as the “betrayer” before Jesus greeted him. Furthermore, the Greek word translated “friend” does not have the idea of some deep friendship. Jesus knew why Judas was coming. Therefore, His greeting was not an act of friendship.

In the end, Judas did not enjoy the rewards of his evil deed. Realizing he betrayed an innocent man Judas threw the money in the area of the temple and then went out and hanged himself.

Jesus gave a fitting epitaph to Judas:

The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born (Mark 14:21 NIV).

Indeed, it would have been better if Judas Iscariot had never been born.

Conclusion: Jesus Knew What Would Occur In The Future

Therefore, from the above facts, any objective examination of the evidence sees Jesus as knowing He was going to be betrayed, specifically predicting who the offender would be, and pronouncing doom upon His evil betrayer.

Thus, the various explanations which advocates of open theism give to the betrayal of Jesus do not fit the facts. To attempt to say that Jesus really did not predict His betrayal ahead of time ignores what the New Testament clearly says. There is no way of getting around it.

Summary To Question 34

Did Jesus Know That Judas Would Actually Betray Him?

The Bible says that Jesus Christ specifically predicted that He would be betrayed by one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot. Some open theists attempt to explain away the fact that Jesus actually predicted Judas would betray Him.

Since they argue that no one, including God Himself, knows exactly what will occur in the future, Jesus could not have predicted His betrayal by Judas. However, their counter explanations really do not fit the details which the New Testament provides to us.

When we examine the Scripture, we discover the following facts about the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot.

To begin with, one of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot, approached the religious leaders with the idea of betraying Jesus Christ. They agreed to give him a certain amount of money, 30 pieces of silver the price of a slave. We are also told that Satan actually entered Judas when he approached these leaders. This removes all doubt as to Judas' motivation. He did it for money and he was led by the devil himself. We also learn that Jesus had predicted that He would be betrayed. Furthermore, Jesus said that this betrayal would be by one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot. Scripture says that Jesus knew this from the beginning of His public ministry. In other words, this was not a surprise for Him for He had known this would occur some three years before it happened.

At the Last Supper, when Jesus announced that He would be betrayed on that very night each disciples asked if it were he who would betray Jesus. When Judas asked the question, Jesus answered in the affirmative. Thus, Jesus specifically said that Judas would be the betrayer.

Following Jesus' words, Judas went to the religious rulers and brought them to Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane. The betrayal then took place as the Lord Jesus Christ had predicted.

Thus, each of the specific things which Jesus predicted with respect to His betrayal was literally fulfilled. This is another indication that the future is not unknown to God. Jesus, God the Son, knew in advance the details of His betrayal. The explanation of open theism does not fit the biblical facts.

Question 35

What Should Our Conclusion Be About Open Theism? Is It A Legitimate Option For Believers, Heresy, Or Something Else?

Open Theism has a number of beliefs about the nature of God which are contrary to the positions of historic Christianity. Nobody denies this. Those who hold the open theist position argue that Christians have misunderstood what Scripture teaches about various aspects of God and His character. What then should we conclude about this system?

Final Observations On Open Theism

Having looked at the claims of open theism as well as the criticisms of this system, we can make a number of observations. They include the following.

1. The Advocates Of Open Theism Claim They Are Fairly Representing Scripture

Open theists do not see themselves as heretics or those who are perverting the truths of Scripture. To the contrary, they believe that their perspective actually solves many of the problems about God that the classical view has failed to solve. Instead of being contradictory to Scripture, open theism believes that it gives the best solution to many of these thorny issues.

2. Open Theism Draws Attention To Important Issues About God

The open view of God does highlight some important issues. One of the truths which open theism does draw attention to is that the Scripture does indeed speak of a caring, loving God. Too often, God is looked at as an aloof king who rules with an iron hand. His only concern is for Himself and there is no real concern for human beings. This is a distorted picture. God does indeed love His people and is intimately concerned with our well-being.

3. Not All Issues About God's Actions Have Clear Answers

We should also note that not every issue with which open theism deals has an uncontested answer from Bible-believing Christians. An example of this would be the extent of God's control over events.

Open theists believe that God has given believers freedom to act. In other words, they do not believe everything has been pre-planned.

However, this view is not unique to them. Many Bible-believers, who reject open theism, also hold to this view. They do not see every event which has happened in our world was pre-planned by God before He created the universe.

4. The Main Issue Is God's Foreknowledge: Does The Position Of Open Theism Make Them Heretics?

This is the central question which is at the heart of the debate about open theism. Is their belief about God's lack of exhaustive knowledge of how the future will unfold an acceptable way of looking at this issue? Can Bible-believers remain Bible-believers by denying that God exhaustively knows everything which will occur in the future or is this one of these issues which can and should be debated? Do we have to draw the line here?

Open theists assert that their view about God's lack of exhaustive knowledge of the future is only a small part of their overall system. They contend that their system emphasizes that a loving God wants to have a genuine relationship with humanity.

Consequently, He has given us authentic freedom to choose our destiny. Their doctrine of divine foreknowledge must be seen in that light. It is God Himself who decided that He did not want to control everything neither does He desire to know what decisions we will make before we make them. While He knows all the possibilities, He does not know which of these possibilities will be chosen.

According to open theists, God has willingly done this. That is, He has willingly emptied Himself of this knowledge so that the relationship between us and Him can be genuine. Therefore, rather than be a heresy, it is actually what the Bible teaches about God's own knowledge of coming events.

If we conclude that open theism contradicts what Scripture says about the knowledge of God, then should it be seen as a heresy or merely as a misunderstanding of Scripture? In other words, is this where we draw the line?

Can a Bible-believing Christian accept the views of open theism regarding God's lack of knowledge, His seemingly incorrect decisions, and change of mind about His past actions? Should it be seen as a viable option, though a mistaken option, or should it be considered a serious threat to traditional belief about God? Bible-believing scholars come to various conclusions.

We can sum them up as follows.

Some Think That Open Theism Is A Real Alternative To The Traditional View

There are certain Bible-believers, while not embracing open theism, think it is a legitimate biblical alternative to the traditional view. They see it as a debate which is similar to those who have different views on end-time events, the age of the earth, and the cessation of certain spiritual gifts. Good people differ on these issues and nobody should claim that their particular view is the "right" view.

As long as those holding their views claim to accept the full truthfulness and authority of Scripture, they should not be seen as embracing false doctrine. Consequently, they see the discussion about open theism as one that Bible-believers can honestly debate.

Though they do not think that open theists have made their case, some will say that the interpretations of open theists are possible. Indeed, in a number of passages it is those who hold the open view of God who understand the Scripture as literal while those holding the classical view have to opt for some sort of symbolic or non-literal interpretation.

While the interpretations of open theists may not be correct, they are attempting to understand the Bible on its own terms. Since those who hold to open theism have plausible interpretations of certain Bible passages about God's limited knowledge, His change of mind, and regret for past actions, their views should be given a hearing. Therefore, it is argued, that they cannot be faulted for wanting to understand Scripture in a literal manner in certain passages. Consequently, they should not be branded heretics or seen as those who are outside of the camp of Bible-believing Christians.

Others Believe Open Theism Is A Dangerous Heresy

Others are not so charitable to the open view of God. They do not believe that the interpretations of open theism about the limited knowledge of God are even plausible. Indeed, they state that open theism is a serious threat to the Christian view of God, even to the gospel message itself. Consequently, they have no sympathy for those who embrace this particular theological system.

In fact, they do not see the debate over open theism as similar to Christians debating the age of the earth, if certain spiritual gifts still exist, or that if the church will experience great tribulation before the return of Christ. These are issues which Bible-believers can and should debate. However, the subject of God's knowledge of the future should not be up for debate. This doctrine is foundational to Christian belief.

The problem is not that open theism has refined the traditional view of God. Indeed, the problem is that open theism has created an entirely different God than the One found in Scripture. The God of open theism does not know the future, is not able to guarantee the inerrancy of Scripture, did not know that Jesus Christ was going to have to die on the cross, etc.

This is completely contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture. Therefore, open theism should not be seen as an alternative view of God. Rather it is portraying a different God.

Some Bible teachers believe that Paul had these sorts of teachings in mind when he wrote the following to the Galatians:

I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from Him who called you by the grace of Christ, [and are turning] to a different gospel—not that there is another [gospel], but there are some who are troubling you and want to change the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you, a curse be on him! As we have said before, I now say again: if anyone preaches to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him! (Galatians 1:6-9 CSB).

While the motives of those who hold to the open view of God may be sincere, they are sincerely wrong. They are preaching a different gospel and presenting a different God to this world. In fact, it is a God which does not exist! They also see another problem with open theism, where it leads.

When one accepts the open view of God many biblical concepts have to be re-interpreted or outright rejected. Indeed, almost every aspect of traditional belief has to be re-thought and re-stated. People will end up not really knowing what they believe. For these and other reasons, they believe open theism should not only be rejected by Bible-believers it should be renounced as heresy or false doctrine.

Open Theism Does Not Reflect God's True Nature

However a person decides to label open theism, it certainly should not be seen as the biblical model of God and His knowledge of the future. In an attempt to understand some of the mysteries of God, His character, and His dealings with humanity, we should not reinterpret the Scripture to make Him more understandable or more manageable.

There are some mysteries in which we do not understand and perhaps we were not meant to understand. We should accept this fact rather than trying to re-define God in such a way that these problems are now solved.

Conclusion: Open Theism Is Not A Legitimate Option

Therefore, in conclusion, the open view of God should not be seen as a legitimate option for those who take the Bible seriously. There seem to be two main reasons as to why this is so.

First, it directly contradicts what the Lord Himself says about His ability to accurately predict future events. There is no doubt about this.

Second, open theism cannot guarantee the Bible is the infallible, inerrant Word of God. This is another insurmountable problem for Bible-believing Christians.

Open Theism Contradicts What God Himself Says About His Ability

Open theism says that the God of the Bible has willingly given up His omnipotence, His control over the universe, as well His omniscience; that He has exhaustive knowledge of the future. Denying God's knowledge of

the future as well as denying His absolute control over all things is a dangerous step to make. This is especially the case since this is one of the arguments, He uses to distinguish Himself from the so-called gods of the ancient world. We need to listen to His own words:

This is what the LORD, the King of Israel and its Redeemer, the LORD of Hosts, says: I am the first and I am the last. There is no God but Me. Who, like Me, can announce [the future]? Let him say so and make a case before Me, since I have established an ancient people. Let these gods declare the coming things, and what will take place. Do not be startled or afraid. Have I not told you and declared it long ago? You are my witnesses! Is there any God but Me? There is no [other] Rock; I do not know any (Isaiah 44:6-8 CSB).

According to God Himself, the thing that separates Him from the so-called gods is His ability to accurately predict what will take place in the future. Open theism denies Him of this attribute.

When King Solomon dedicated the temple in Jerusalem, he prayed a prayer of dedication. The following word of that prayer should reflect our desire:

So that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God. There is no other! (1 Kings 8:60 CSB).

All the people of the earth need to know the true identity of the God of the Bible. The God of Scripture has said that He is the only God who exists. Indeed, He alone is all-powerful, He alone knows all things, and He alone knows and controls the future. This sets Him apart from all other beings in the universe. There is indeed none like Him.

Open theism denies that the God of the Bible does know the future. They focus more on His ignorance than His knowledge. This is tragic.

Open Theism Cannot Guarantee An Accurate Scripture

The second problem for open theism which does not make it a real option concerns its handling of Scripture. Since open theists insist that humans have complete freedom, they cannot guarantee that the human authors of Scripture accurately recorded God's truth.

Therefore, what we have in Scripture are human beings who, without any supervision by God, wrote the various books of Scripture. Such a view causes enormous problems.

While one could argue that each of these writers accurately and inerrantly wrote exactly what God wanted them to write, given the view of open theism concerning human freedom, there is no guarantee for this.

In fact, we can have no confidence in the Scripture whatsoever if we accept the open view of human freedom as it pertains to the writers of Scripture.

Contrast that with Jesus' view as well as the view of the New Testament writers. They believed that God's Word is trustworthy in all that it says. They had no doubt whatsoever that what was written was the very Word of God.

The Line Must Be Drawn

Christians must draw a line where certain teachings are recognized as not being acceptable. Open theism has crossed this line. For these and other reasons, open theism should be decisively rejected! It is not sound biblical teaching.

Summary To Question 35

What Should Our Conclusion Be About Open Theism? Is It A Legitimate Option For Believers, Heresy, Or Something Else?

Open theism, or the open view of God, claims to present an alternative to the historic or classical view of the God of the Bible. Rather than seeing God as an aloof monarch who sternly judges His people, open theism portrays God as a relational being who seems to be interested in our well-being above all things. Those who hold this open view claim this better fits what the Bible has to say about God and His dealings with humanity.

However, the evidence is to the contrary. Open theism does not merely refine the traditional view of God it re-defines God into a different Being than which the Bible portrays. For this reason, it must be rejected as the best way to understand the nature and character of the God of the Bible.

While those who hold to the open view of God should be commended for highlighting some of the deficiencies in the way God has been traditionally explained they go much too far in their quest. The idea that God somehow limited Himself to what He can and cannot know is not something which is taught in Scripture. Indeed, it is contrary to what the Lord clearly says about Himself and about His knowledge.

However, there is something else which needs to be emphasized. While open theism does not provide all the biblical answers to questions of God and His knowledge, this does not mean that we reject everything which it teaches.

For example, open theism agrees with many other Christians in the idea of general sovereignty. This means God has a general plan for the universe but does not plan every detail in eternity past. Others argue for a specific sovereignty where every detail has been planned before the universe was created. There is no "Christian" answer to this question. There are good Bible-believers on each side of this issue. The views of open theism on this particular matter may indeed be the correct one.

If open theism is not the correct way to understand the God of Scripture then how shall we categorize it? Bible-believing Christians who reject open theism have a variety of responses to it.

Some see it as a possible alternative to the traditional view. Since open theists claim to get their position from the Bible itself, some Christians say the issue comes down to a matter of interpretation. The correct doctrine of God, His knowledge, His control over all events, is something which has to be decided from a study of Scripture. Good Christians can come up with different conclusions on these issues. The interpretations of the Bible by open theists may indeed be incorrect but that is what must be decided by examining Scripture.

Therefore, these believers see open theism as one possible attempt to understand God's nature. Consequently, they do not want to call it a heresy even though they do not accept its conclusions.

However this is not nearly strong enough. Others rightly believe open theism constitutes a real danger for Bible-believing Christians. They recognize the doctrine of God is of all-importance. If we think wrong about God we will be wrong about other issues. Open theism has gone too far in its understanding of the God of Scripture. It robs God of some of the attributes which He clearly claims to possess.

Whichever way a person wishes to categorize open theism, it is certain that when we consider all the facts, open theism falls short of what the Bible says about the majestic God of Scripture.

Indeed, there are two main reasons why open theism should be rejected as a viable option for Christians. First, it rejects God's own testimony about His ability to accurately predict the future. Second, open theism cannot guarantee that the Scripture are God's inerrant Word.

Rejecting the idea that God knows the future is denying a central biblical truth about the God of the Bible. This we cannot do. Since the Lord Himself argues that this is what separates Him from all other beings in the universe, we should not rob Him of this attribute. Indeed, instead of highlighting His ignorance we should be highlighting His knowledge.

Furthermore, not being able to guarantee an accurate inerrant Scripture is something which is not acceptable. The Bible is God's authoritative and infallible Word. Those who hold to open theism cannot guarantee this. With their view of human freedom we cannot have any confidence that God's Word is exactly what it is supposed to be. For all we know the problems and difficulties in Scripture may be actual contradictions. Open theism cannot assure us that this is not the case. Again, Christians cannot accept this conclusion.

While those who embrace open theism are sincere, they are sincerely wrong about a number of essential beliefs. Therefore, the system of open theism should be soundly rejected by Bible-believing Christians. It is not an option for us.

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