

## Session 9

### Old Testament Survey with Apologetics

#### Reference:

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#### Supporting Scriptures

##### Gen 6:5-8

##### JUDGMENT DECREED

<sup>5</sup> When the LORD saw that human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time, <sup>6</sup> **the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and he was deeply grieved.** <sup>7</sup> Then the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I created, off the face of the earth, together with the animals, creatures that crawl, and birds of the sky — for I regret that I made them." <sup>8</sup> Noah, however, found favor with the LORD.

##### Exodus 4: 19-20, 24-26

<sup>19</sup> Now in Midian the LORD told Moses, "Return to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead." <sup>20</sup> So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took God's staff in his hand.

<sup>24</sup> **On the trip, at an overnight campsite, it happened that the LORD confronted him and intended to put him to death.** <sup>25</sup> So Zipporah took a flint, cut off her son's foreskin, threw it at Moses's feet, and said, "You are a bridegroom of blood to me!" <sup>26</sup> So he let him alone. At that time she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood," referring to the circumcision.

##### Exodus 32: 7-14

<sup>7</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses: "Go down at once! For your people you brought up from the land of Egypt have acted corruptly. <sup>8</sup> They have quickly turned from the way I commanded them; they have made for themselves an image of a calf. They have bowed down to it, sacrificed to it, and said, 'Israel, these are your gods, who brought you up from the land of

Egypt.’ ”<sup>9</sup> The LORD also said to Moses: “I have seen this people, and they are indeed a stiff-necked people. <sup>10</sup> Now leave me alone, so that my anger can burn against them and I can destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

<sup>11</sup> But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God: “LORD, why does your anger burn against your people you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a strong hand? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, ‘He brought them out with an evil intent to kill them in the mountains and eliminate them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger and relent concerning this disaster planned for your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel — you swore to them by yourself and declared, ‘I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and will give your offspring all this land that I have promised, and they will inherit it forever.’ ” <sup>14</sup> **So the LORD relented concerning the disaster he had said he would bring on his people.**

### **Isaiah 38: 1-6**

#### **HEZEKIAH’S ILLNESS AND RECOVERY**

**38** In those days Hezekiah became terminally ill. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came and said to him, “This is what the LORD says: ‘Set your house in order, for you are about to die; you will not recover.’ ” <sup>A</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD. <sup>3</sup> He said, “Please, LORD, remember how I have walked before you faithfully and wholeheartedly, and have done what pleases you.” <sup>B</sup> And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

<sup>4</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: <sup>5</sup> “Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘This is what the LORD God of your ancestor David says: I have heard your prayer; **I have seen your tears. Look, I am going to add fifteen years to your life. <sup>C</sup> <sup>6</sup> And I will rescue you and this city from the grasp of the king of Assyria; I will defend this city.**’ ” <sup>7</sup> This is the sign to you from the LORD that he will do what <sup>D</sup> he has promised: <sup>E</sup>

#### **ARTICLE page 113 in Apologetics Study Bible (ASB)**

### **EXODUS 32**

#### **DOES THE BIBLE AFFIRM OPEN THEISM?**

by John M. Frame

A group of thinkers known as “open theists,” such as Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, Gregory Boyd, and William Hasker, seek to do justice to the give-and-take in Scripture between God

and human beings. For example, in [Exodus 32:7-10](#), God tells Moses he will destroy Israel for worshiping the golden calf and raise up a new nation from Moses himself. Moses intercedes, however, and in [verse 14](#) God “relented.” God also seems to change his mind in several places, such as in [Isaiah 38:1-5](#), where Isaiah prophesies that King Hezekiah will die, but in response to Hezekiah’s repentance adds 15 years to his life. Another example is [Jonah 3–4](#), where God retracts an announcement of judgment in response to Nineveh’s repentance.

From these and other such passages, the open theists infer that God is a temporal being (not “above time,” as in much traditional theology, but within time), that he changes his mind, that his plans are influenced by creatures, that he sometimes regrets actions that he has performed (see [Gn 6:6](#)), and that he does not have exhaustive knowledge of the future. In their view, God’s regretting and relenting come about because free human decisions are utterly undetermined and unpredictable. Therefore, God must adjust his plans to the free choices of human beings.

We should not ignore these “relenting” passages. On the other hand, we should also not forget the pervasive biblical emphasis on God’s sovereign control of the world and his exhaustive knowledge of past, present, and future. God brings about natural events ([Ps 65:9-11](#); [135:5-7](#)), even apparently random ones ([Pr 16:33](#)). He controls the smallest details of nature ([Mt 10:29-30](#)). He governs human history ([Is 10:5-12](#); [14:24-27](#); [Ac 17:26](#)). He hardened Pharaoh’s heart ([Ex 4:21](#); [7:3](#)), and others as well ([Dt 2:30](#); [Jos 11:18-20](#); [1Sm 2:25](#); [2Ch 25:20](#)), for his own purposes ([Rm 9:17](#)). He is also the source of human faith ([Jn 6:37,44,65](#); [Ac 13:48](#); [16:14-15](#); [18:27](#); [Eph 2:4-10](#); [2Tm 1:9](#)) and repentance ([Zch 12:10](#); [Ac 5:31](#); [11:18](#)). So human freedom is not indeterminate as open theists maintain. We are free in that we do what we want to do, but behind our plans and desires are those of God ([Jms 4:13-16](#)).

In general, God “works out everything in agreement with the decision of his will” ([Eph 1:11](#); see [Lm 3:37-38](#); [Rm 8:28](#); [11:33-36](#)). And God cannot fail at anything he seeks to do ([Ps 33:11](#); [115:3](#); [135:6](#); [Pr 21:30](#); [Is 14:27](#); [43:13](#); [46:10](#); [55:11](#); [Dn 4:35](#); [Rv 3:7](#)).

Since God controls everything, he knows everything, including the future. Knowing the future is a test of a true prophet ([Dt 18:22](#)) and indeed of a true God ([Is 41:21-23](#); [42:9](#); [43:9-12](#); [44:7](#); [48:3-7](#)). Through his prophets God often predicts the future centuries in advance ([Gn 9:26-27](#)). Contrary to the open theists, who think God cannot anticipate human free decisions, he often predicts human behavior in detail ([1Sm 10:1-7](#); [Jr 37:6-10](#); [Mt 26:34](#)). He predicts the behavior and character of human beings in the distant future ([1Kg 13:1-4](#); [Is 44:28–45:13](#)).

How, then, should we understand God's "relenting"? For one thing, God states as a general policy in [Jeremiah 18:5-10](#) that if he announces judgment and people repent, he will relent; he will do the same if he pronounces blessing and people do evil. In other words, relenting is part of God's unchanging plan, not a change forced on him by his ignorance. Further, God is not only transcendent (beyond our experience) but also immanent (involved in our experience). He has dwelled on earth in the tabernacle and temple, in Christ, and in his general omnipresence ([Ps 139:7-12](#)). When God interacts with people in time, he does one thing, then another. He curses, then he blesses. His actions are in temporal sequence and are therefore, in one sense, changing. But these changes are the outworking of God's eternal plan, which does not change.

It is important, then, to see God as working from both above and below, in eternity and in time, and not only within time, as open theists propose.

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## Commentary from ASB

**32:14** If God never sins, why do some Bible versions translate this verse to indicate that God planned to do evil and then repented? This verse takes its place among a series of passages in the OT that seem to indicate that God does evil ([2Sm 24:16](#); [1Ch 21:15](#); [Is 45:7](#); [Jr 18:8](#); [26:13,19](#); [Jl 2:13](#); [Jnh 3:10](#); [4:2](#)). However, the Bible affirms that God is completely righteous ([Ps 119:137](#); [Jr 12:1](#); [Jn 17:25](#); [Rv 16:5](#)) and does not repent ([Nm 23:19](#); [1Sm 15:29](#)). The contradiction is only apparent and can be resolved by examining the relevant words in the Hebrew language.

The Hebrew word *ra'ah*, translated in some Bible versions as "evil," actually possesses a broad spectrum of meanings ranging from moral wickedness to "trouble" without any reference to morality. Applied to the result of God's action, the term refers to affliction. God will never behave immorally, but he will bring affliction upon those who live in defiance of his will.

Similarly, the Hebrew term *nacham* is translated in some versions as "repent," as though one is turning away from a sinful action. It is more accurately translated as "relent," to decide to pursue a different course of action. As people change their actions and wills, God changes his response to them ([Jr 18:8](#); [Jnh 3:10](#)). Although he is prepared to bring affliction (*ra'ah*) upon people because of their sins, he is prepared to relent (*nacham*) as they repent.