



We're continuing in our series on perceived conflicts in the Bible. Today we're on number six: **The Bible states in some passages that God changes His mind, and yet in others, it states emphatically, that God never changes His mind.** This is another example of how the Bible is in conflict with itself.

So, does the Bible teach both? At least, by initial impression, it would certainly seem so. For example:

In **Gen 6:6**, God's sorry He created the earth. In **Jonah 3:10**, He changes His mind in destroying Nineveh. And in **Exodus 32**, Moses talks God out of destroying the Israelites.

Yet in **Malachi 3:6**, we're told God never changes His mind. **Numbers 23:20** tells us God's decisions can't be reversed. And in **James 1:17**, we're told, even His shadow doesn't change.

So is there a conflict, or are we just, missing something here?

But, before we launch into these passages; *let's call to mind, a particular facet of God's nature.*

**Deuteronomy 33**

**27.** The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms;

**God is eternal.** But, what exactly, does it mean to be "eternal?"

According to the dictionary:

1. Being without beginning or end; existing outside of time.
2. Continuing without interruption; perpetual.
3. Forever true or changeless:

God exists- outside of time. That's huge! And the New Testament agrees with the Old on this point.

**2 Peter 3:**

**8.** But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

The implication is this: God knows the beginning and the end at the same time. *He is like a person who has already seen the movie-* He knows how things will unfold for each character in the story. He is viewing from outside the time bubble of the story. With that in mind, consider the first passage:

**Gen 6: 6.** And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

7. So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

The analogy only stretches so far, but: Have you ever watched a dramatic movie for the second time? That powerful scene comes up and it gets you every time; even though you know it's going to happen. Even as temporal beings, we know the experience: **You don't have to be taken by surprise to feel sorrow.**

Last week we learned that **God knew the cost, and the outcome,** before the world was ever formed. He had a plan of rescue in place before the first step of creation. He knew the fall of human nature was eminent. And He also knew, He'd have a seed of righteousness with which to work with, in one of humanity's darkest times. And that's how we end up with the account of Noah.

**The fact that God is eternal lets us know two things with certainty:**

1. God is never taken by surprise.
2. It is very possible to feel sorrow; even when you know.

That might explain Genesis, but there are other verses where God changes His mind such as...

**Jonah 3**

**10.** Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

If God “relented”, doesn’t that mean He changed His mind? In the original Hebrew, the word is “*nacham*” meaning to repent. We’ve studied this word before and we know “repent” means to change one’s direction- mentally or physically

To put it in context; let’s quickly summarize Jonah’s story:

God sent Jonah to a wicked city to give them a message...

**Jonah 3:4.** And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "**Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!**"

In short; God was giving them forty days to clean up their act or they would be toast. They were given a warning. They were then given free will to choose the outcome.

Have you ever told your child, “If you do that again, you’re in for a spanking”? -And you mean it. Your plan is set: If they smarten up, all’s forgiven. If they don’t, they’re in for it. Your hands already up in the air, and you’ve got a big paddle! No matter which way it goes, it’s according to your plan.

Now imagine- you know what they’re going to do. You give them the choice, *but you already know*. That’s where God was. His hand was up in the air. He had a big paddle ready to come down. But when they obeyed, God “repented”. That was the plan- there was a change in direction, but not a change of mind.

Well, how about this? It’s perhaps, the most dramatic passage of all. Moses is pleading for the life of his people:

**Exodus 32**

**9.** And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people!

**10.** "Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

**11.** Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: "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?"

**12.** "Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, `He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people.

**13.** "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, `I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'"

**14.** So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

**15.** And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written.

It sure sounds like Moses did some fast talking and turned God’s thinking around ...But in consideration of what we know of God. ***Is that what really happened here?***

We know God is eternal, so ***He knew the situation would develop***; even before time began. And yet He still created the universe, and humanity, and those stiff-necked Hebrews anyway. So it doesn’t make sense that all of a sudden He was overwhelmed with frustration and discouragement and was compelled to destroy His own promise. So what’s going on?

In this scene, a number of things happen:

First, we, the readers- Jew and gentile, are ***brought face to face*** with ***why God didn’t destroy us***, even though He has every reason. -He remains faithful to His original promise. Isn’t it amazing that God ***uses the father of the Law to teach us, it is really all about mercy!***

A second thing is the use of a literary device called “***anthropomorphism***.” -“Anthro”- meaning man; “morph”- meaning, in the form of. Anthropomorphism is when a human characteristic is applied to what is non-human. In children’s stories, it may be talking animals.

By ***explaining God in human terms*** it allows the reader to more readily identify with Him. God operates outside the limits of time. We are creatures that creep along second by second. We need all the help we can get in relating to Him!

That is how we resolve the nature of God with passages like this:

**Malachi 3**

6. "For I am the Lord--***I do not change. That is why you are not already utterly destroyed*** [for my mercy endures forever].

7. "Though you have scorned my laws from earliest time, yet you may still return to me," says the Lord Almighty. "Come and I will forgive you. ...

**James 1**

17. But whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God, the Creator of all light, and he shines ***forever without change or shadow.***

**Numbers 23**

19. "***God is not a man***, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

20. Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and ***I cannot reverse it.***

Have you ever looked back at something that was a hard call and said to yourself, "*If I had to do it all over again, I'd do the same thing.*"

What are you saying is; "*I did it as near perfectly as I could.*"

Now, even knowing the end from the beginning- it would have to be the same decision again. In essence, that is what these passages are saying. God is saying, "*Every act was the perfect call- I can't change it because it is already perfect. And what is the proof that it's really the case? You are still here. There is still hope, that's how!*"

**Conclusion**

I don't mean to regress to a list of points; but here are some realities we need to remember when it comes to the mind of God:

- God exists beyond time, so He's never taken by surprise. And for that reason, He never ***has cause to change His mind.***
- From the very beginning, God knew what He was going to do and never had cause to ***change His plan.***
- Compelled by His own love; God ***does what He needs to do*** in order to fulfill His own perfect plan, perfectly.
- Part of His perfect plan is to allow us the power of ***free will.*** The fact that life unfolds as the consequence of our choice, flows from two great virtues of God: perfect love, and perfect justice.

So, in a practical sense; what does it mean to us that God never changes His mind?

It is a great incentive to invest your life in God. The longer one walks this earth, the more evident it becomes- there are very few, if any sure things. If there is a promise that will never ever fail, it is a priceless thing to grab hold of. If there is a personal savior who will never abandon or betray you, He is a priceless.

If God never changes His mind, it is also a great source of encouragement and security. Some people become discouraged because they've messed up beyond their own expectations. And yet others live in fear that they will mess up. And God will become so fed up with them, He'll just write them off.

***God is never taken by surprise.*** ***God knew*** long before you were even born. And He sacrificed Himself just the same- for all our wrongs. We may walk away from God, but He will never walk away from us.

Is it any wonder the Apostle Paul talks with this kind of certainty, even as he suffers imprisonment:

**Romans 8**

38. ***For I am persuaded*** that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

39. nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Maybe you've taken a chance on a number of things in your life. And those things have let you down. So, with good reason, you're a little skeptical. So what makes this idea of God any more trustworthy?

-6000 years of history, millions of changed lives that have never looked back; never regretted, and what can begin in you right now.  
***-If you will invest yourself in the certainties of God: His promise, His plan, His perfection, and His love for you.***