

*I am God, and there is none like me;  
declaring the end from the beginning,  
and from ancient times things that are not yet done;  
saying, My counsel shall stand,  
and I will do all my pleasure;  
calling a ravenous bird from the east,  
the man of my counsel from a far country;  
yes, I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass;  
I have purposed, I will also do it.  
(Isaiah 46:9b-11)*

# 7

## **God's Omnipresence, Omniscience, Foreknowledge, Predestination A Reread**

### **Omnipresence**

God's abode is in heaven. And where is heaven? It is high above the earth (*Psalms 103:11*) and in the North (*Psalms 75:6*), in the "sides of the North" (*Psalms 48:2, Isaiah 14:13*).

In God's operation centre in the heaven where He resides, there is an administrative assembly of twenty-four elders (*book of Revelation chapters 4, 5, 11, 19*). There are also four beasts full of eyes which work non-stop day and night (*Rev 4:8*). These four beasts may well be very powerful living ambulatory satellites with eyes that are able to see far and wide. If man-made satellites sent up to space are able to see minute objects on earth, I believe these living satellites from heaven can do a more powerful job. There are also thousands upon thousands of angels at the service of God (*Rev 5:11, Psalms 68:17*). With these elders, beasts and angels, God in heaven monitors things and events everywhere.

For he has looked down from the height of his sanctuary. From heaven,  
Yahweh saw the earth;  
(*Psalms 102:19*)

Yahweh looks from heaven. He sees all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions all of their hearts; and he considers all of their works.  
(*Psalms 33:13-15*)

Yahweh looked down from heaven on the children of men, to see if there were any who did understand, who did seek after God.  
(*Psalms 14:2*)

God is also able to hear from heaven.

Listen to the petitions of your servant, and of your people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: yes, hear from your dwelling place, even from heaven; and when you hear, forgive.  
(*2Chron 6:21*)

If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.  
(*2Chron 7:14*)

But after they had rest, they did evil again before you; therefore left you them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried to you, you heard from heaven; and many times you delivered them according to your mercies.  
(*Neh 9:28*)

With the assistance of the heavenly administrative assembly, the four beasts and angels, God heard reports of earthly evil done by the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Yahweh said, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether their deeds are as bad as the reports which have come to me. If not, I will know."  
(*Gen 18:20-21*)

Those who suffered the evils done in those cities cried out to God. These cries were detected by God in heaven. God decided to come down from heaven and visit the cities to see and experience for Himself what He heard from reports, as the above verses indicate.

In an earlier chapter, it is seen that every living thing gives out a “death spasm” upon death. This death spasm must be easily detectable by the living computing satellites from heaven.

Some time after the great flood of Noah, people started to build the Tower of Babel. This event too was monitored by God from heaven. He did not like what He saw, and He decided to confuse the language of the people. He came down with some heavenly persons to do it.

Come, let's go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.” So Yahweh scattered them abroad from there on the surface of all the earth. They stopped building the city.  
(Gen 11:7-8)

God also speaks from heaven. In the Scripture, the atmosphere of the earth and outer space are called heaven, and God's throne area being the third heaven (Gen 1:8, Matt 24:29, 2Cor 12:2).

Yahweh said to Moses, “This is what you shall tell the children of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.’  
(Exodus 20:22)

Moses heard God's voice from Mount Sinai. Here, God must have come down from the third heaven to speak to Moses from the sky.

You came down also on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments.  
(Neh 9:13)

Prophet Nehemiah recalled the incident of God's giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses and the people of Israel.

Recalling another incident, Prophet Samuel says:

Yahweh thundered from heaven. The Most High uttered his voice.  
(2Sam 22:14)

There are other scriptures that speak of a voice coming from heaven or the sky.

While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from the sky, saying,  
O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom is departed from  
you:  
(Dan 4:31)

At the baptism of Jesus, a heavenly voice was also heard:

Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom  
I am well pleased."  
(Matt 3:17)

The apostle Paul saw a light from the sky surrounding him at Damascus.

As he traveled, it happened that he got close to Damascus, and suddenly a  
light from the sky shone around him.  
(Acts 9:3)

Recalling the incident later on, Paul says:

It happened that, as I made my journey, and came close to Damascus, about  
noon, suddenly there shone from the sky a great light around me.  
(Acts 22:6)

This special light was intense; even at noonday it was felt by Paul, and he was blinded  
for a time (Acts 13:11).

From the foregoing scriptures, it is evident that the person of God is not present as  
an individual being everywhere. He is dwelling in the third heaven now. He can see  
and hear from heaven, He can come down to earth and speak from the sky. He was  
not "omnipresent" in the sense that classical theology portrayed this so-called  
"attribute" of God.

However, there is a real sense that a vestige of God is present everywhere where things are. As arrived earlier, all things are created from the Spirit of God (God-substance) – that is, *ex-Deo*. All created things therefore carry with them a spark of the divine. Every living thing emanates waves of specific energies (e.g. from its thoughts and emotions), which are detectable by God from afar.

God may in this sense be considered “omnipresent,” i.e. present everywhere where things (or beings) are or where He placed them. By virtue of *ex-Deo*, the thoughts and actions of creatures give out signals that are communicable to God in heaven. These communicating signals are akin to electromagnetism or something intimately associated with it, as proposed in this thesis. Just like radio waves broadcasted from a radio station can be tuned in or received by a receiving radio, likewise God is in a position to know what is going on everywhere where things are (the entire universe). He has powerful living computers and satellites to interpret received signals accurately as they monitor things for Him.

He also knows or can know all the characteristics and attributes of His creation by virtue of *ex-Deo*; in this way, He has “omniscience.” He knows the hearts or core characteristics of His creatures. Indeed, as *Hebrews 4:13* says, “There is no creature that is hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” Yes, God sees to the heart of the matter – “the thoughts and intents of the heart” (*Heb 4:12*).

### **Recording spirit in man**

The spirit in man may be a “recording tape” as well as an active “volitioner” whilst in the living person. A person’s memories could be stored there, and God is able to read them. By this spirit in man, God is able to access a person’s thoughts and intentions. He is capable of being the “unseen guest at every meal” and also “the silent listener to every conversation.”

Upon the spirit’s return to God at death, its recorded history of “good and bad actions” is open to God. From the recorded memories, God is therefore able to judge and to reward.

## Omniscience

God can know every monitored movement, every scheme of men, if He wants to know them. He keeps in close touch with His creation. God can know and feel what we are thinking, planning and feeling now. No person could hide or conceal his present thoughts, plans and feelings from Him, no matter those are good or evil. He can know exactly what is happening everywhere *moment to moment*. This vestigial omnipresence leads to His “omniscience” i.e. *all-knowing of everything that is going on in every location where things are*. Our definition of omniscience does not involve His “knowing every true proposition.” His omniscience is ontological, not propositional.

Electromagnetic waves of energies are present across space being emanated from all things. These may be considered “ever present emanations” coming from ex-Deo’d things, and they are communication waves that can be picked up and interpreted, intuitively or otherwise, by receiving entities.

## Does God know the past and the future?

We can say with a strong affirmation that God knows the past because past events had happened and was recorded when they happened and they have become history. And God knows history. History of events on earth and in the heavens is written in God's memory or in a sort of heavenly record book or videotape. Does this videotape contain every movement of everything that has ever occurred in all their exact spatial relationships or every action and thought of every creature?

If so, then this videotape would have to be as big as the universe – an exact parallel duplicate universe (a “dupliverse”) that moves in tandem with the original one – so that it can as desired be rewound backwards to view what happened at certain points in history. I cannot imagine how this would be useful or needful to an efficient God as everything would be duplicated for the sake of sheer record keeping. What happens to the recording of events during the interval when this dupliverse is played backwards for God to check on something? There must be a second identical dupliverse to continue recording events as the first one is being played, else there would be a missing period of record during this interval of playback. So there

would be a need of two identical dupliverses if every tiny motion or thought is to be captured for record.

It would be more meaningful to assume that God does not need to know every run of the mill event, but only those that impact upon His plan and purposes. To record such key events and snapshot summaries, there are four living creatures “full of eyes before and behind” that could well do the job in a condensed or summary way. This scenario is a realistic view from what has been revealed in the book of Revelation.

Does God know the future? This question cannot be answered as simply as the other two without receiving antagonistic rebuttals in view of strongly held preconceived notions, as evidenced in the numerous debates that have taken place in history on the topics of *human freewill* and *determinism*. Some fundamental issues may have to be dealt with first.

### **Knowing all and perfect knowledge**

We say that God is “omniscient,” that is, “He knows all” – a phrase that is taken directly from *I John 3:20*. The context of this scripture indicates that He knows or understands all that are in our hearts *at any present moment*, all that we are thinking of or anxious about — whether thoughts *of* the past, *of* the present or *of* the future – all our current concerns, schemes and plans. This must also mean God knows “all” that is going on in the universe *from every present moment to each new moment*. And as moment to moment lapses into the past, therefore He knows also the past. He knows the past in so far as there is a record or memory of it. Such knowledge is adequate for Him to monitor and control all, for Him to be sovereign. We must however distinguish this scriptural “knowing all” from His “knowing the future,” as we term it. Many of our difficulties arise from the inaccurate concepts and definitions we have created in our weak and pious attempts to idealise Him, to make Him as perfect as we think a perfect God should be. We have a certain picture in our mind of what a perfect God should be. “We should view God as God,” we sometimes say. If we are not careful, this could lead to our creating of “idols of the mind.” Our idealisation of Him does not necessarily reflect what He really is. God’s knowledge and *awareness of everything that goes on anywhere in space* from moment to moment

is perfect or complete knowledge in the ontological sense. God can therefore be said to be “fully omniscience” in this true and real sense, and likewise in this sense He is also “free from ignorance.” It is better and more accurate to think of God as being unsurpassable by any other being rather than as perfect, as we have discussed in chapter 1. He is unsurpassable by any other being in knowledge, power and goodness.

Do you know the workings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge?

*(Job 37:16)*

The chapter in which this verse occurs speaks about God’s creation and how marvellous they are. The phrase “perfect in knowledge” refers to God’s intimate knowledge of the workings of His own creation. It does not hint at any exhaustive future knowledge of micro events by God. Such perfect knowledge (as the workings of the clouds) is now within the grasp and understanding of mortals in their sciences.

There are often claims that God is “fully omniscient” such that He “knows the past, present and future perfectly and infallibly, including what free creatures will do in the future.” These are obvious contradictions of terms, and are a result of a fundamental misunderstanding. God views His planned events (not all events, but those specific ones in His calendar) from His sure end for them such that in due time He as agent (not the as-yet-unfolded events) will bring them about. He will monitor and guide events to bring about the desired ones that will fulfil His purposes. He is the One who is in control of events, not the other way round. “Nothing slips between His fingers,” to borrow from a Chinese proverb. God can still easily maintain control without having to know what free creatures will do in future because God can easily read the thoughts of free creatures at any time and then influence a change in their thinking if necessary. He also knows the trends of events better than anyone of us do, as He has more knowledge and much greater resources than we do. He can intervene in and frustrate free creatures’ plans if He deems such actions on His part are necessary. He will not be caught off-guard. His knowledge of the past and present may be said to be “unchangeably perfect” only because these events have occurred and have been recorded (or memorised), and whatever has happened is therefore “eternally known to God” so to



speak. But our tomorrow's deeds, not yet known or decided upon by us, are also yet to be known to God by the very nature of reality – there being an open future. From the scriptural viewpoint, the existence of the administrative staff of heaven proves this.

Where God has something He planned for some of us to do tomorrow, then this something is known to God but unknown to us. Come tomorrow, God will initiate or influence us to do that something. We will know that it is from God if He has revealed it to us beforehand; otherwise we may think that we ourselves consciously on our own freewill do what “we intended” to do. Unconsciously, it is God who initiated what we do as He intended, according to an accurate interpretation of Benjamin Libet's research results described in chapter 4.

### **Pharaoh in the time of Moses (Book of Exodus)**

An illustrative example of how God predicted, moved and influenced events is seen in the famed story of Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses, a prophet of God. The Pharaoh of the time was told to release the Israelites whom he had taken captive as slaves. If Pharaoh refused, he and his people would be punished with afflictions in a spectacular manner. There were ten momentous incidents. Before each of them was to be made to occur, God told His servant Moses ahead of time what He intended to do and when He intended to do them. God did them; Moses and his assistant Aaron acted upon God's current instructions. At the end of those incidents, Pharaoh finally relented and let the Israelites leave Egypt. In the account of the events, Pharaoh is said to have “hardened his heart” on the one hand, and on the other, it is also stated that “Yahweh hardened the heart of Pharaoh.” Which is which, one might ask. It is quite obviously both. Ultimately, it was God who moved and influenced the events. The stated purpose of God was dual: That “you (Israelites) shall know that I am Yahweh your God, who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (*Exodus 6:7*) and that “The Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh, when I stretch forth my hand on Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them.” (*Exodus 7:5*)

God moved events according to His own counsel – He told His servants what He would do beforehand, He then acted, He intervened, He

orchestrated events, and He hardened Pharaoh's heart – repeatedly, so as to achieve His aims.

### **God's Knowledge in *Psalms 139***

*Psalms 139* is often taken as God knowing our every detailed move into the far future. Let us look at some of these verses to see if this is so.

Yahweh, you have searched me, and you know me. You know my sitting down and my rising up. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.  
(*Psalms 139:1-3*)

Here the Psalmist says that God has studied him, his regular behaviour or habits. God knows his thoughts from afar in heaven. In other words, God is familiar or acquainted with the Psalmist's personal character and ways from His earlier "searching" of him. Such an ability of God to know can be extended to everyone else obviously, but there is no hint in these verses that God knows all our future actions exhaustively from a remote point in time.

For there is not a word on my tongue, but, behold, Yahweh, you know it altogether.  
(*Psalms 139:4*)

From Professor Benjamin Libet's research mentioned in chapter 4, we know that the "unconscious self" or the spirit in man acted before man becomes conscious of his own decision to act (or think). It follows therefore that before the words we wish to speak reach our tongue and uttered, God knew what would be spoken – our unconscious thoughts were known to God a split second earlier.

You hem me in behind and before. You laid your hand on me. This knowledge is beyond me. It's lofty. I can't attain it.  
(*Psalms 139:5-6*)

The Psalmist felt that he was hemmed in by God – God surrounded him, behind and in front. This is ever so true in light of the fact that we are created *ex-Deo*. The divine spark still surrounds us. As

indicated earlier, we are emitters of electromagnetic energy (from our thoughts, from our hearts as well) and this is instantly detectible by God at any time.

Where could I go from your Spirit? Or where could I flee from your presence? If I ascend up into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there! If I take the wings of the dawn, and settle in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there your hand will lead me, and your right hand will hold me.

*(Psalms 139:7-10)*

God's presence is felt everywhere where things are. This is so, again because things are created *ex-Deo*. God can also guide and influence the Psalmist from wherever he might be; this is the intent of the above verses speaking about God's presence – His presence to lead and guide - not His bodily presence.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me; the light around me will be night;" even the darkness doesn't hide from you, but the night shines as the day. The darkness is like light to you.

*(Psalms 139:11-12)*

These verses indicate, among other things, that God is able to see in the dark. Man's instruments using infrared rays can help him see in the dark. God would have greater ability than man in this regard.

For you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. My soul knows that very well. My frame wasn't hidden from you, when I was made in secret, woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my body. In your book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them. *(Psalms 139:13-16)*

These verses refer clearly to the fetology of man. Hidden from man's view, the fetus is made in secret in the mother's womb likened to the depths of the earth. The gestation period of nine months is "written in God's book" so to speak, this being ordained in the zygote together with its formative template ("the book") that guides the formation

and development of the fetus in a predefined manner and a specific length of time. This particular knowledge (the fetological process) is obviously thoroughly familiar to God who created it, and hence it may in this sense be “exhaustive” to God during this period of time when the fetus cannot yet act independently of its mother.

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah was told (*Jer 1:5*):

Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.

Before Jeremiah was conceived in the womb, God knew him. God in His divine plan intended to have someone at that particular point of time in world history to come on the scene as His prophet to the nations. That someone was to be a person called Jeremiah; thus God knew him (in His plans). He arranged circumstances to bring about Jeremiah’s birth. It was in Jeremiah’s embryo stage, when Jeremiah then existed as an entity that can be called “him,” that God set him apart (sanctified him) for His purpose.

Likewise, the apostle Paul too was separated for God’s purpose from his mother’s womb (*Gal 1:15*). Isaiah too was called from the womb (*Isaiah 4:1, 5*). These are unique individuals called to serve certain key purposes of God.

### **God searches the heart of a person to know him**

The following scriptures confirm *Psalms 139:1-3* narrated earlier about God searching the hearts of men to know them.

You, Solomon my son, know the God of your father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind; for Yahweh searches all hearts, and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts...  
(*1Chron 28:9a*)

Yahweh administers judgment to the peoples. Judge me, Yahweh, according to my righteousness, and to my integrity that is in me. Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an

end, but establish the righteous; their minds and hearts are searched by the righteous God.  
(*Psalms 7:8-9*)

Search me, God, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.  
(*Psalms 139:23-24*)

I am he who searches the minds and hearts. I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.  
(*Rev 2:23b*)

We know from a man after God's heart, David the inspired Psalmist (*Psalms 1:23-24*, quoted above) that God searches to know, and observes to know, just like humans do, but with much greater ability and resources at His disposal (see *Rom 11:2-4*). Humans too may know God by searching Him out in genuine desire and observation of His works and His words.

But from there you shall seek Yahweh your God, and you shall find him, when you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.  
(*Deut 4:29*)

You shall seek me, and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart.  
(*Jer 29:13*)

I love those who love me. Those who seek me diligently will find me.  
(*Prov 8:17*)

Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you.  
(*Matt 7:7*)

### **Falling sparrow and the number of hairs on our head**

Since God is "omnipresent" in the sense we explained, He knows what is going on everywhere moment to moment. He knows when a

sparrow falls to the ground, and He knows the number of hairs now on our head (*Matt 10:29-30*). One may lose a few hairs tomorrow and He will know that too when these are lost. These two scriptural examples are illustrative definitions of God's moment-to-moment omniscience. God knows what is logically knowable. He does not know what are yet to be objects of knowledge. God does not know what a person would decide to do in a given situation before that person himself knows what he himself would decide to do. Until we decide, there are no such entities as our tomorrow's decisions or deeds. *Because of the degree of indeterminacy of future events, God does not know the future exactly.* There is no need for Him to do so. There is no need for Him to know "where every speck of dust will be."

In one of the accounts of God's deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh, God told Moses:

Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as has not been in Egypt since the day it was founded even until now. (*Exodus 9:18*)

Here was given an approximate time (not an exact one) for God's future action. And God then acted accordingly. Scripture does not support absolute determinism.

God knows the present intentions (which can involve future plans) and schemes of living beings. He knows His own plans, and He can direct events to fulfil His specific plans or to leave events to move on their own in accordance with the interactions of sub-events and the multitude of influences acting on them by living beings that are created with volitions of their own. We have unwittingly and over-generously extrapolated this intended meaning of "knowing all" ontologically to "knowing every future event in minute detail before they happen," – a proposition which cannot be so in the very nature of reality. Classical theology's usual definition of omniscience has gone beyond what the Scriptures actually intended; it is overstated, and assumed too much.

We often think that if God does not know every future event in minute detail, He is ignorant and imperfect. We think that an omnipotent and perfect God must be "free from error or ignorance" so to speak. This is a preconception we have unwittingly in our piety imposed on

God. Such thinking in my view is fallacious. Is not His knowledge of what is going on everywhere coupled with His ability to control, to create and de-create what made Him omnipotent and “perfect”? We think that events must be predetermined, and therefore logically there is no free choice or freewill, both for God and for men, if God is to know passively every future event in micro details. If events are not predetermined, how then is God to have foreknowledge of the future? We have explored some answers to this question. More answers can be found in Scriptures.

### **Foreknowledge associated with God’s actions**

God knows “what the future will be” because *He is actively working out His plan* for it! He can prophesy or predict certain specific future events precisely because He is *directing their outcome*! He has revealed and is revealing to His creatures some of His plans by giving a few predictions or prophecies of some future events that He desires to bring about. And He is powerful enough to bring about what is predicted or prophesied. Repeated unfailing predictions are not evidences of God’s infallible passive foreknowledge of the predicted events’ inevitable occurrence; they are rather evidences of His ability to actively move events and bring them about unthwarted, when God’s desired times come for them to be made to happen! Scripture abounds with examples that should lead us to this conclusion.

God is one “who opens and no one can shut, and who shuts and no one opens” (*Rev 3:7*).

Yes, from ancient days I am he [God]. No-one can deliver out of my hand.  
When I act, who can reverse it?  
(*Isaiah 43:13 NIV*)

I have declared the former things from of old; yes, they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them: suddenly I did them, and they happened.  
(*Isaiah 48:3*)

Note the word “suddenly” in the above verse. It points to an action that God decides to do at the time, whether pre-planned or ad hoc as circumstances called for.

I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him; I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous. (*Isaiah 48:15*)

God spoke, God called, God brought – these are actions initiated by God, not by any predetermined events.

God has declared the end from the beginning because He acts in the course of time to bring about the end that matches His plan. God has spoken and He will *also bring to pass*, He has purposed it, and He will also do it (*Isaiah 46:10-11*).

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; *I am* God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure; calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country; yes, I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed, I will also do it. (*Isaiah 46:9-11*)

The mover and leader is God, not the events. Rather than saying “God knows what the future will be,” it would rather be more accurate to say “God brings to pass what He has foreknown in His plans (counsel) in terms of certain desired future events;” – those events that He has planned in His mind to carry out. It is interesting to note, as a little digression here, that He has not revealed all the planned events to His believers, not even to His Own very intimate Son at all times! (*Mark 13:32*)

Note again the explicit parallel phrases used in the above quotation from Isaiah:

My counsel shall stand – *I will do all my pleasure*  
I have spoken – *I will also bring it to pass*  
I have purposed – *I will also do it*

The context of the above verses is most interesting (the earlier verses in *chapter 46 of Isaiah*):

To whom will you liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like? Some pour out gold from the bag, and weigh silver in the balance. They hire a goldsmith, and



he makes it a god. They fall down – yes, they worship. They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it, and set it in its place, and it stands, from its place it shall not move: yes, one may cry to it, yet it cannot answer, nor save him out of his trouble. Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it again to mind, you transgressors.

*(Isaiah 46:5-8)*

In contrast to the living God, a man-made idol is unable to answer to a person's cry to it for help; neither can it save him out of his troubles. Man-made idols are absolutely lifeless and static (much akin to the root meanings of the concepts of simplicity, timelessness, immutability and impassibility). And God cannot be compared to such idols, as the above verses indicate. Whenever Scripture asks "To whom do you liken God?" idols are always brought up for contrasting comparison. On top of that, God directs our attention to His handiwork in the heavens. Humans too are not able to do them. It requires a super powerful God to create and manage them.

All the nations are like nothing before him. They are regarded by him as less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to him? *(Isaiah 40:17-18)*

A workman has cast an image and the goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts silver chains for it. He who is too impoverished for such an offering chooses a tree that will not rot. He seeks a skillful workman to set up an engraved image for him that will not be moved.

*(Isaiah 40:19-20)*

Haven't you known? Haven't you heard, yet? Haven't you been told from the beginning? Haven't you understood from the foundations of the earth?

*(Isaiah 40:21)*

Barnes' commentary says of *verse 21*: "Has it not been communicated by tradition, from age to age, that there is one God, and that he is the Creator and upholder of all things? This was particularly the case with the Jews, who had had this knowledge from the very commencement of their history, and they were, therefore, entirely without excuse in their tendencies to idolatry."

It is he, who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing; who makes the judges of the earth like meaningless. They are planted scarcely. They are sown scarcely. Their stock has scarcely taken root in the ground. He merely blows on them, and they wither, and the whirlwind takes them away as stubble.

*(Isaiah 40:22-24)*

Barnes says: "The idea is that God is so exalted, that, as he looks down from that elevated station, all the inhabitants of the world appear to him as locusts - a busy, agitated, moving, impatient multitude, spread over the vast circle of the earth beneath him - as locusts spread in almost interminable bands over the plains in the East. What a striking illustration of the insignificance of man as he is viewed from the heavens! What an impressive description of the nothingness of his mighty plans, and of the vanity of his mightiest works!"

How realistic is the view given here. God is exalted but not "wholly other" or utterly beyond literal comparison.

"To whom then will you liken me? Who is my equal?" says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these, who brings out their army by number. He calls them all by name. By the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power, Not one is lacking.

*(Isaiah 40:25-26)*

Barnes says on the above verse: "And it may be remarked, that this argument is one that increases in strength, in the view of people, from age to age, just in proportion to the advances which are made in the science of astronomy. It is now far more striking than it was in the times of Isaiah; and, indeed, the discoveries in astronomical science in modern times have given a beauty and power to this argument which could have been but imperfectly understood in the times of the prophets. The argument is one that accumulates with every new discovery in astronomy."

Why do you say, Jacob, and speak, Israel, "My way is hidden from Yahweh, and the justice due me is disregarded by my

God?" Haven't you known? Haven't you heard? The everlasting God, Yahweh, The Creator of the ends of the earth, doesn't faint. He isn't weary. His understanding is unsearchable. (*Isaiah 40:27-28*)

Again from Barnes: "The argument here is, that God who has made all things, must be intimately acquainted with the needs of his people. They had, therefore, no reason to complain that their way was hidden from the Lord, and their cause passed over by him. Perhaps, also, it is implied, that as his understanding was vast, they ought not to expect to be able to comprehend the reason of all his doings; but should expect that there would be much that was mysterious and unsearchable. The reasons of his doings are often hid from his people; and their consolation is to be found in the assurance that he is infinitely wise, and that he who rules over the universe must know what is best, and cannot err."

He gives power to the weak. He increases the strength of him who has no might. Even the youths faint and get weary, and the young men utterly fall; But those who wait for Yahweh will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run, and not be weary. They will walk, and not faint.

(*Isaiah 40:29-31*)

Barnes again on these verses: "The design of this verse is to give consolation to the afflicted and down-trodden people in Babylon, by recalling to their minds the truth that it was one of the characteristics of God that he ministered strength to those who were conscious of their own feebleness, and who looked to him for support."

### **The Exodus reviewed**

Recalling some of the remarkable events in Moses' time, God acted these things (*Exodus chapters 5-14*):

a) On God's instructions, Aaron, the assistant of Moses, cast down his rod before Pharaoh and it turned into a serpent. Quite surprisingly, the magicians of Egypt could duplicate the feat. But then, Aaron's rod swallowed up the magician's rods, showing the comparatively greater ability of God.

b) Aaron struck a river with his rod and it turned into blood. Likewise, the magicians were able to duplicate this feat also.

c) There was also pestilence inflicted on livestock, and boils on men and beasts. There is no record of the magicians' ability to duplicate this feat and subsequent ones. Perhaps God outsmarted them; if they were to attempt duplication of the feats, they would be doing harm to themselves.

d) The elements were used by God to display His power. Hail rained from the sky, probably almost like those during the time of Sodom and Gomorrah.

e) Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and frogs in abundance came up, and covered the land of Egypt. In another incident of a similar nature, swarms of flies invaded Pharaoh's household and those of his servants. Yet another similar incident, locusts in numbers were called up over all the land of Egypt "and they ate every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left."

f) There was also darkness imposed by God over a wide area of Egypt for three days, except the area occupied by the Israelites.

g) Angelic messengers are frequently used by God in protecting the people (Israelites).

h) Guiding the people in their sojourn out of Egypt, there was also a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. "Yahweh went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them on their way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, that they might go by day and by night." (*Exodus 13:21*)

i) When Pharaoh pursued the Israelites, God (or an angel representing Him as Yahweh) peeked out of the pillar of cloud and fire and confused Pharaoh's pursuing army. "It happened in the morning watch, that Yahweh looked out on the Egyptian army through the pillar of fire and of cloud, and confused the Egyptian army." (*Exodus 14:19, 24*)

The events in the book of Exodus illustrate the active involvement of God in the affairs of those coming within His plans at a particular

time in history. God is always an active agent in the affairs of humans, guided by knowledge of His own future plans. In this way, there will not be any mis-predictions by God. God's plans per se have no causal properties.

### **The Script not mightier than the Scriptwriter**

The word "foreknowledge" seems to give us the impression that events are moving deterministically forward all the way on their own and these cannot be avoided even by God. God merely knows or foreknows them. God becomes a passive observer (as in *deism*) or at least He has no choice but to act strictly and exactly according to the script that He has prepared and set in motion at the beginning of creation for every event in every tiny detail – He has no option to change these events. What will be, will be; *que serra, serra!* The script, in this view, becomes more powerful than the Scriptwriter! In this view also is present a depressive aura of karmic necessity, a sense of helplessness for both the created and the creator, a sense of despair and fatality for the created (at least). One might ask: is God a Cosmic Tyrant or a Deistic Spectator or a Prisoner to His own mightier script? Receiving no help from the intramural debates of believers, non-theistic science has gone another step further in theorising that all that there is in existence evolved deterministically from a set of laws from the beginning of the Big Bang without even the need for an overseeing active and supervisory creator God. To this, deterministic theology seems to concur!

Determinism, in the view of the author, does away with a loving and powerful God. All God's living creatures become automatons, easy to control and their future actions easily predicted. To the author, the future is not stored up in any super heavenly videotape; otherwise whatever happens now is just virtual reality being replayed for God's viewing, refreshing His memory of past situations, some of which embraced His own actions; the actual reality having already acted out a long time ago! In this way, God need not have to, in fact He could not, "adjust His plans continually" – as His plans are no longer plans but history. In reality, God is assuredly aware, not ignorant, of His own future plans for mankind and He is guided by them in *creating* the actual future, not living in history. The future is history in the making, not history in the completely done.

“Foreknowledge,” even at the level of the Deity, must at the very least be understood to mean that He knows beforehand what He wants or plans to do at particular points in time. God obviously has *pre*-knowledge of His own counsels. He has planned to carry out the key events in the cosmic story according to His calendar. Being the most efficient Cosmic Operator that He is, He does not need to move every little event. He has delegated some duties to His administrators in heaven. He employs angelic messengers, even dreams and the elements. And various material substances have been assigned with their own peculiar properties which hardly require intervention. These entities are given self-organising abilities, and they cohere or interconnect one with another through the medium of the “life fields” (as discovered in natural science) and sustained by God. If all those things that were created in Christ do not cohere (that is, cluster together with dynamic properties as designed for them to function on their own, each with their own unique characteristics, and in subtle and almost imperceptible connection or influence through the life-fields with one another), then all would be chaos!

We look at a few more scriptures that speak of God first declaring an intention, then He acts to bring about the intention. Predicted events do not move themselves or passively unfold from God’s prior plans without God’s active involvement in them. Scripture seems to place careful emphasis on this point by many illustrative events and statements so that the living God is differentiated from lifeless hand-carved idols.

therefore I have declared it to you from of old; before it came to pass I showed it to you; lest you should say, ‘My idol has done them, and my engraved image, and my molten image, has commanded them.’  
(*Isaiah 48:5*)

You have heard it; see all this; and you, will you not declare it? I have shown you new things from this time, even hidden things, which you have not known. They are created now, and not from of old; and before this day you didn’t hear them; lest you should say, ‘Behold, I knew them.’  
(*Isaiah 48:6-7*)

They didn't thirst when he led them through the deserts; he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them; he split the rock also, and the waters gushed out.

*(Isaiah 48:21)*

Thus says Yahweh, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am Yahweh your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way that you should go.

*(Isaiah 48:17)*

These scriptures show the active involvement of God in prophecies, contrasting a living active God with lifeless idols.

I am Yahweh. That is my name. I will not give my glory to another, nor my praise to engraved images. Behold, the former things have happened, and I declare new things. I tell you about them before they come up.

*(Isaiah 42:8-9)*

### **Carry a Sword (*Luke 22*)**

In the fulfilment of a prophecy that "Christ must be numbered among transgressors," Christ Himself, being aware of it, arranged to fulfil it in a simple way; He instructed his disciples to acquire some swords for a time, in addition to carrying wallets, which they were not doing previously. Two swords were made available. With these items, the disciples appeared to be like robbers – with swords and wallets in display. This incident was initiated by Christ "so that Scriptures might be fulfilled." This clearly illustrates that prophecies refer to signposts placed by God in His plans for Him to eventually act to fulfil.

### **Testing of Abraham (*Genesis 22*)**

Abraham and his wife were infertile when God promised them that they would have many descendants. By divine intervention, to them was born a son Isaac. God's earlier promise of progeny to the couple now seemed a reality. But God wanted to test Abraham's faith. So He told Abraham to sacrifice his son. And Abraham went about to do as instructed. He travelled with his son to Mt. Moriah.

They came to the place which God had told him of. Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, on the wood. Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to kill his son. The angel of Yahweh called to him out of the sky, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" He said, "Here I am." He said, "Don't lay your hand on the boy, neither do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."  
(Gen 22:9-12)

From some scriptures we have seen earlier, God would have searched out Abraham's heart and knew his character in theory. Now He wanted to experience and to see it in display. "Now I know" in the last sentence of the above verses quite clearly means "now I experience by observation of your real action." In later scriptures, we know that God uses this faith of Abraham as a motif of salvation.

### **Peter's three denials (*Matt 26, Mark 14, Luke 22*)**

On the eve of Christ's crucifixion, the impulsive Peter said that he would be faithful to Christ even to death. But Christ who knew Peter's personality for more than three years told him: "Peter, the rooster will by no means crow today until you deny that you know me three times." That evening, God influenced three persons on different scenes to point out Peter's association with Christ, but each time Peter denied that he knew Christ. Then God influenced a rooster to crow. Peter then recalled Christ's prophecy and he wept bitterly. By these incidents, Christ intended to strengthen Peter's faith, and Peter to strengthen his other brethren subsequently. A human person could predict what a familiar friend would act in a certain situation. Jesus Christ, being the son of God, could predict in a similar way but with more accuracy.

### **Predestination: Paul's religious usage of words**

God takes special care of the saints whom He calls under the "Secret" revealed to Paul. God is the saviour of all mankind – and *especially of believers (1Tim 4:9-10)*. He works in the believers not only to will and to do but also (note this emphasis which is quite often glossed



over) of his good pleasure (Phil 2:13), that is, *whenever* He is *delighted* to do so! All the believers' actions are not necessarily predetermined by God. As far as first-fruit salvation is concerned, God has "sealed" these saints with His Spirit, which gently guides them in whatever they may choose to do. And whatever they choose to do, they being quite free, are being gently guided, moderated – "intercession of groaning" – by the earnest of the Spirit within them (Rom 8:26). We can truly appreciate the care and love that God places on His saints. Yet, even such a one who has been called (as in the Corinthian example) may choose to persist in his particular sin to an extent that Paul feared the worst that could possibly happen to him! And the worst that can possibly happen to a believer in the exercise of freedom is the total "destruction of the flesh," (no difference here between a believer and a non-believer as far as the flesh is concerned) but *the spirit in the believer* will enable him to be saved (1Cor 5:5). We know later that this individual repented (2Cor 2:7)

Human nature can easily and freely act in many ways but much of these ways move in the direction away from the nature of the Divine Spirit because it has been "locked up" in tendencies towards stubbornness or unbelief (Rom 11:32). It is created that way. And stubbornness is not helped by enforced rituals, which tend to make characters even more rigid.

We must distinguish between the workings of the processes of inanimate things, and the workings of higher levels of living things, intelligent minds with volitions (will, purpose, intention). These are no doubt interconnected in some way; they respond to proximate stimuli as well as to remote ones. All things are in motion, whether spirit or matter. Hence these are able to act and interact one with another, each within their bounds and spheres of influence. Such are the basic laws of nature or being.

### **God's right of calling what is not as if it were**

Being able to "vivify the dead," and to bring to pass what He has declared, *God has in regard to His plans every right to "call what is not as if it were"* (Rom 4:17). In this sense, it can be said that God foreknows an event that He wants happen. More so, it can be said that He foreknows the believers because the very earnest of the Spirit, the spiritual allotment that is in them was in or with Christ before

the disruption\*<sup>1</sup> of the world and intimately known to the Father. It is without contradiction therefore that Paul says God has chosen the believers in Christ “before the disruption of the world” as the believers are those who have been given the *truly foreknown* earnest of the Spirit upon believing, being given the faith to believe when they heard the gospel being preached (*Eph 1:4, 13*). The calling of believers before the disruption of the world is not a result of some inscrutable deterministic selection device that lurks behind human history. The presence of the allotment in the believers gives God the leeway in speaking from His viewpoint ontologically.

### **Motivational view, not inscrutable predestination process**

I see Paul as saying to me: Hey, Tony, you have the earnest of the Spirit (an allotment) given to you on believing. How privileged you are. Do you know what that means? You and other believers are as good as having been chosen from before the disruption of the world! – Because the allotment that is now in you was there before the disruption of the world! And God speaks to you from that point of view! Wow, how motivational a perspective! How uplifting to be among the children of God!

Furthermore, I am told: I am already considered seated in the celestial sphere at this time! (*Eph 2:6*). All because I have my allotment which is connected to Christ in heaven! And I don’t earn it as something that I worked for. It was given freely to me and as a result I show forth fruits that befits my allotment. God’s plan to save me and everyone was there before He created the universe. Like everyone else, I was born into the world without my consent. What is there then for me to boast? None. And if I boast, I should boast in the triumph of the cross of Christ which makes it possible for me to have the allotment in the first place.

Yes, God foreknew He wanted an initial group of children to be conformed to the image of His Son. He then works towards this end, and in due time, He started calling them one by one according to the circumstances of the time and more importantly according to His good pleasure (His wishes), that is, His choice – whenever He likes. The characters of those whom He calls will no doubt have some

desirable characteristics in God's eyes. I believe God does not act arbitrarily or whimsically.

Two specific scriptures, *Romans 4:17* and *Isaiah 46:10-11* referred to earlier, are companion keys to our understanding of what divine foreknowledge really means. God speaks from His superlative end-view. God knows what events He has set as goalposts in fulfilling His Cosmic Plan. He has set these events in His Mind or a heavenly record. He does not cause them to happen before their "due times." If God does not act to bring to pass what He has planned, the "planned events" remain just that – "non-events." Neither will these "non-events" come to pass on their own. God-the-mover will cause these events to come to pass in their due times. Before God brings these events to pass in their due times, He is said to foreknow (be intimately aware that He has planned to initiate) these events. "Foreknowing" is God's eye view. Foreknowing of an event by God entails a future action on His part in bringing about that event. He calls what is not as if it were because He sees them in His Mind's Eye (His plans). He "knows" the end from the beginning because the end is in His plans, which He will perform and no one is able to thwart Him.

### **Humans too are able to foreknow!**

There is a close similarity between this "foreknowing" by God and the "foreknowing" by humans. The New Testament Greek word for foreknow is *proginosko* and this same word is used of both God and man (*Acts 26:5; 2Pet 3:17; Rom 8:29, 11:2; 1Pet 1:20*)! Bible translators could not believe their eyes when they translated this word, so it seems to me. When it comes to humans, they translated the word as "know before" or "know from the beginning" and, on the other hand when it comes to God, they translated it as "foreknow." To foreknow something is to know its past or its future. Foreknowledge is God's or man's knowing of his respective plans (or some other particular knowledge) before he decides to act to bring the plans to fruition.

The Jews *foreknew* (were acquainted in the past with) Paul's character and his upbringing (*Acts 26:4-5*). On the other hand, Peter told his believers that they *foreknew* what events would certainly come about in the near future as informed to them by inspired Peter (*2Pet 3:17*). God *foreknew* Christ's crucifixion before the disruption of the world (*1Pet 1:19-20*).

God *foreknows* those already believing Him at a certain point in time (*Rom 11:2-5*). Foreknowledge can indicate knowledge of the past, the present or the future. As indicated by scriptures quoted the earlier part of this chapter, God searches the hearts of people to know them, thus then foreknowing (having acquired knowledge of) them.

God foreknows His plans or some other knowledge; man also foreknows his own plans or some other knowledge. The dissimilarity lies in God's super power and the true nature of His monitoring omnipresence or influence. What a man foreknows (plans that he has scheduled to be carried out) he may not be able to bring to pass because of possible extraneous circumstances unknown to him and acting beyond his control. What God foreknows, He will be *able* to bring to pass because there is no one person or circumstance which is able to thwart Him. A man does not foreknow what another man plans to do unless such plans are revealed (confided) to him by that particular person himself or by a confidante. God foreknows what the other man (and every man) plans to do *because of His ability to eavesdrop or read the thoughts of each one or be reported to Him by His powerful messengers monitoring world affairs*.

Contrary to our common perception, there is no need for God to know future events right down to every detail in order "for God to be truly God." This is our own misconception. That He is sovereign is the key attribute that is accepted by every believer. But sovereignty does not imply exhaustive foreknowledge of micro events in the future. It is when we try to go into the micro level dynamics of what "foreknowledge" entails that our unrecognised presuppositions comes into play and bring about confusion to our thoughts.

### **The Golden Chain**

Now let us take a look at *Rom 8:28-30 (CLNT)*:

Now we are aware that God is working all together for the good of those who are loving God, who are called according to the purpose that, whom He foreknew, He designates beforehand, also, to be conformed to the image of

His Son, for Him to be Firstborn among many brethren. Now whom He designates beforehand, these He calls also, and whom He calls, these He justifies also; now whom He justifies, these He glorifies also.

Note the order of events. God wanted a group of individuals to be conformed to the image of His Son (to be brethren of Christ). The fact that God knows He wanted a group of such individuals simply means He foreknew (planned to have) them in an overall sense. He knew He wanted a certain number of such individuals; that is, these numbers are “designated beforehand” (counted or marked out). God has set aside (counted and marked out) a certain number of portions of His Spirit, (and kept them in his pocket, if I may so speak) ready to be distributed for this purpose. Then He calls diverse individuals, one by one, from time to time over the years in this age, as and when He pleases according to His own choice – *by some selection criteria best known to Him. By His searching the hearts over a period of time, He thus then foreknows them or their character.* Out of the abundance of a person’s heart the mouth speaks and fitting actions follow (Luke 6:45). A believer confesses his faith, the genuineness of which is known to God. Thereupon God grants an allotment to him, thus “dwelling in him” and the believer thereupon belongs to Christ (Rom 8:9).

Once these individuals in this age received the portions of the Spirit on believing (or on being led to believe) and confessing their faith (Rom 10:10 & 13), they are being “justified” so to speak for salvation - justified because of the presence of these spiritual allotments in them. Later on, after their sojourn on earth, these individuals are glorified when they are resurrected to be with God. Such are the ones who are “predestined,” so to speak, from God’s sure perspective, a guaranteed outcome. When God speaks from His future end-view, He is entitled to call what is not yet as though it was (Rom 4:17), because what He calls will be, and what He calls not is left to be.

The biblical order of the golden chain is: search, foreknow, predestinate, call, justify and glorify. Searching the heart of a person leads to getting to know him more and more. The intent of searching is fulfilled after a time when the person is then foreknown. The higher intent is to bring him into the group of “predestinated” individuals (the out-called ones). The next stage is the process of

calling, which leads to the called person confessing his faith from the heart. An allotment is then unreservedly granted, thereupon the person is deemed justified – and, at a future time, he will be glorified. These are the identifiable steps in the salvation of the “early birds.” The presence of the spiritual allotment links the believer to an early point in time. From God’s view, he is “chosen before the disruption of the world” (Eph 1:4).

God gives us motivation and encouragement in our sojourn amidst all the trials we face. The allotments given to believers ensure that God will achieve His end, no matter how hard we fall or how much or little we try. But keep trying, we must. We are His workmanship or achievement so to speak, and rightly so, as we were freely given our allotments; we did not earn them. These are given “in grace,” so to speak, in spiritual terminology; that is, despite our human weaknesses. This is why the spirit pleads or intercedes for us, nudging us to be conformed to the attitude and image of Christ.

When God speaks to His dear children, He speaks extravagantly and often in hyperbole. And why not, since His transcendent allotments (portions of His own spirit) are in them! The minute the believers are given their spiritual portions, they are spoken of as having been predestined from before the disruption of the world – because these portions were there with Christ before the disruption of the world! Predestination of a believer is based on God’s spiritual substance being in him.

There is another scripture which speaks from a similar God’s eye view. It is *2Cor 5:14*: “if one (Christ) died for all, then were all dead.” If Christ died for all, then *all are considered as good as dead, even though many are still alive*.

This God’s eye end-view is again seen in another corollary scripture. *1Cor15:12-19 KJV* (note particularly *verses 13 and 16*):

<sup>12</sup> Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> *But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:* <sup>14</sup> And if Christ be not risen, then [is] our preaching vain, and your faith [is] also vain. <sup>15</sup> Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the

dead rise not. <sup>16</sup> *For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:* <sup>17</sup> And if Christ be not raised, your faith [is] vain; ye are yet in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. <sup>19</sup> If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

In our usual manner of speaking, we would say that if Christ was not raised [in the past], there would be no resurrection of the dead [in the future]. Here, divine view moves forward to the future in God's end-plan and looks back. It says that if there is no resurrection of the dead [in the future to us], then Christ was not raised [in the past]! If the intended later event did not come to pass, then an earlier event upon which the later event is contingent upon likewise did not come to pass. However, Paul knew (was certain) that Christ was raised; therefore He was confident that there would be resurrection of the dead. Paul speaks from the divine end-view that is certain to be brought to pass. Herein lays real faith in divine declaration – a faith that sees God's end view as certainty, not mere possibility.

### **Constancy in God's character and His repentance**

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.  
(James 1:17KJV)

This verse indicates that God's character is constant; there is no fickleness in Him.

House of Israel, can't I do with you as this potter? says Yahweh. Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy it; if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do to them. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if they do that which is evil in my sight, that they not obey my voice, then I will repent of the good, with which I said I would benefit them.  
(Jer 18:6-10)

In God's dealings with the Israelites of old, He has made known to them a principle of justice and mercy by which God would respond to the actions of the people. They would be rewarded or punished according to their deeds. If God had forewarned them of punishment to be meted out for their wrong doings and these people repented, then God Himself would also repent (change His mind) about punishing them. If God had foretold to reward them for their obedience but they disobeyed instead, then God Himself would also repent (change His mind) about rewarding them but would punish them instead for their deeds. Such "repenting" or changing of mind by God is not fickleness but constancy and mercy in rendering justice; the people had been foretold of this principle.

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word from the LORD, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Stand in the court of the LORD'S house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD'S house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word: If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings.

*(Jer 26:1-3 KJV)*

Here was God telling Jeremiah to speak to the people of Judah, and He was hoping that the people would change from their evil ways so that He too would change His mind from punishing them. The message is clear: God would punish or reward according to the people's deeds; their choice of actions would determine the choice of God's decision, a constancy known to the people.

God is not a man, that he should lie, nor the 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?

*(Num 23:19)*

This verse again shows that God is not fickle, like fickleness found in man. He is constant and definite in His judgment. These words were spoken by a pagan prophet Balaam who was sent by a Pagan king to curse the Israelites whom God was blessing. He was prevented from doing so by God.



And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he *is* not a man, that he should repent.  
(1Sam 15:29)

This is another verse telling of God's constancy in judgment. These words were spoken by Prophet Samuel to King Saul notifying him that he would die for disobeying God's commandments in a particular matter. Saul's appeal for pardon (*verses 30-35*) was rejected because he was apparently not sincere or had not shown abhorrence of his sin (see commentaries by Barnes and by Gill on this verse).

### **Character building, an outcome of difficulties**

Actions that are done obviously cannot be undone. What is past is past. A past action could not have been otherwise. But future actions are fluid; choices exist for them. Because of the huge number and variety of interactions between people, forces and events, there are many options for exercising choices along life's way and these are generally not predetermined; if they are, it will only be loosely so. There are ample opportunities for one, be he a believer or otherwise, to be caught in trials and tribulations, notwithstanding these may not be directly of his own making, and to learn lessons from them. To the saints (believers), God will not allow the trials or temptations to be more severe than they are able to bear. He closely watches over them and works out for them in each difficult situation *a way out* of it (1Cor 10:13). The Greek word '*ekbasis*' is also translated as "outcome" (accurately) in the NIV.

After each crisis in life, we invariably return with a sigh of relief to our normal way of life, now having learned some new lessons and gained valuable experience from the crisis, perhaps having incurred some scars, physical or psychological. Such lessons and experiences gained are internalised into character formation. The sequel to all the continuing and varied trials faced by believers (much like pruning and other similar stresses placed on plants to induce blooms and fruits) are the intended emergence of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) in their lives, thus forging in them a stronger spiritual character. This together with devoutness also leads to the bringing into captivity every thought or apprehension to the obedience of Christ (2Cor 10:5).

Under varied circumstances and events, there are adequate opportunities for difficulties and trials to come about (although more could be intentionally added by God), for prayers to be offered and answered genuinely, and opportunities for praises to be sung from the heart. To those who could with their internal strength bear with their trials and see their hope ahead, God works all things together for good to them who love Him (*Rom 8:28*) and they realise that these trials produce tested-ness (testing and strengthening of spiritual character) in their faithfulness as they bear forth the fruits of the spirit in their lives, in their attitudes. Such is the grooming and moulding of the clay. It is never an easy task, as any good parent could testify. Yet God's spirit is gentle.

#### Footnote

\*1. See *Appendix on the Gap Theory*.