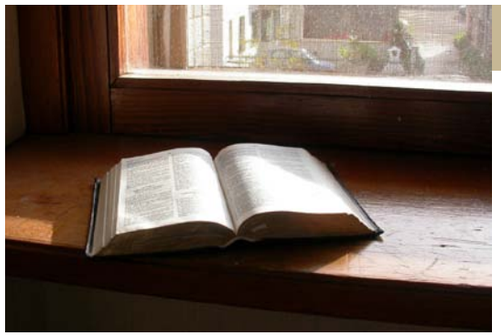


words, He knows what He will ultimately do, and does not change. Undoubtedly, when an infinite God communicates to finite creatures many things about His revelations are dependant upon whether they are seen from a divine or human perspective.

Clearly, there have been times when the prayers of men have been able to change God's mind to some extent. When Israel sinned and God was ready to destroy the Israelites, Moses's appeal to Him resulted in the fact that the, **"LORD changed His mind** (*nacham*) **about the harm which He said He would do to His people"** (Exod. 32:14, NASB). This doesn't mean that God didn't know what He would do all along, but sometimes the opportunities He offers to people to interact with Him in repentance and prayer are described in terms we can understand. Sometimes this appears to be a way of providing man the chance to change, or appreciate God's mercy. The sorrow God felt over the wickedness of the world in the days of Noah, or the sinfulness of Saul was not something that caught Him by surprise. Rather, in revealing that these things brought Him sorrow it shows the pain that a loving God can feel when His creation rejects Him. Those who are His people should be moved by this and diligently seek to serve Him faithfully lest we **"grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption"** (Eph. 4:30; cf. Isa. 63:10).

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF THE OLSEN PARK CHURCH OF CHRIST

Services
Sunday: 9:00 AM
10:00 AM
11:00 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:
Pat Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Justin Smiley
Kevin Wise
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:
Kyle Pope

God's Regret and Foreknowledge

By Kyle Pope

Although God chose Saul to be the first king over the nation of Israel, after he disobeyed the Lord's command to destroy Amalek, the Holy Spirit records God's declaration to 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"** (1 Sam. 15:11a, NKJV). This is restated, after Samuel told Saul that God had rejected him as king. The text records, **"And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel"** (1 Sam. 15:35). This reveals a challenging issue concerning the nature of God. Scripture makes it clear that God **"knows all things"** (1 John 3:20), and is fully aware of all things that will happen in the future. David reveals that God knew the words he would speak before he said them (Ps. 139:4). Daniel said that God knows **"what shall come to pass"** (Dan. 2:29, KJV). God tells Isaiah that only He can **"make known the end from the beginning"** (Isa. 46:10, NIV). How then can it be that the actions of Saul caused God to feel **"regret"** (1 Sam.15:11, 35)?

The word used in 1 Samuel 15:11 and 35 is the Hebrew verb *nacham*. It means "*to be sorry, console oneself, repent, regret, comfort, be comforted*" (Brown, Drivers, Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament,* 636-637). The context determines when it has the positive sense of comfort and when it has the negative sense

of sorrow or regret. For example, when Noah was born his father Lamech said, **"This one will comfort** (*nacham*) **us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed"** (Gen. 5:29, NKJV). When Isaac married Rebekah, Scripture tells us that in his marriage **"Isaac was comforted** (*nacham*) **after his mother's death"** (Gen. 24:67). In other contexts, however, it can refer to the sorrow that leads to a change in behavior. For example, God, referring to the northern kingdom of Israel as "Ephraim," the name of one of its most prominent tribes, quotes her to say, **"Surely, after my turning, I repented** (*nacham*)**; and after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, because I bore the reproach of my youth"** (Jer. 31:18-19).

This is the same word that is used in Genesis 6:6-7 concerning God's anger over the wickedness of the world before the flood. Scripture declares, **"the LORD was sorry** (*nacham*) **that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart"** (Gen. 6:6). This is restated after declaring His intention to flood the earth. The Lord said, **"I am sorry** (*nacham*) **that I have made them"** (Gen. 6:7b). Older translations put it that **"it repented"** God that He had done this (KJV, ASV). This, however, reflects a now archaic use of the word *repent* that does not involve wrongdoing. The *New Oxford American Dictionary* now defines the word *repent* to mean, "feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin." God cannot commit sin, and therefore cannot *repent* in that sense of the word.

A similar misunderstanding can arise from modern translations that render this word *regret* when applied to God. To say that God **"regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel"** (1 Sam. 15:35, NKJV, NASB, ESV), leaves the impression that God did not know what Saul would do. This is not the idea. James declared, **"known to God from eternity are all His works"** (Acts 15:18). The *regret* that God felt over Saul's actions or the sinfulness of world before the flood was not the result of ignorance or surprise. He knows what all men will do before they do it.

So how are we to understand God's attitude toward Saul and the world before the flood? The key may rest in some parallel wording in each of these passages. Notice that in the text in Genesis while it first says that God was **"sorry** (*nacham*)**"** it restates this in slightly different wording by adding that, **"He was grieved in His heart"** (Gen. 6:6b). This may be a type of Hebrew parallelism, by which the same idea is expressed in two similar ways for emphasis. If so, this would clarify that *nacham* when applied to God is not talking about repentance from wrongdoing, or regret over something God did not know, but sadness, sorrow, and grief over man's actions. When one *grieves* it is not always over wrongdoing, or even something he did not know would happen. To grieve is to feel the pain caused by an action that takes place.

In the account of Saul's sin we see a similar parallel construction. God was said to **"regret"** (NKJV, NASB) or be **"grieved"** (NIV) that He made Saul king, and Samuel is said to be **"grieved"** (NKJV, KJV), **"distressed"** (NASB), or **"troubled"** (NIV) by God's decision to remove Saul (1 Sam. 15:11; cf. 15:35). Here the parallel is not two statements about God, but a statement about Samuel and God. Now, some translations make this seem as if Samuel's attitude is that he **"was angry"** (RSV, NRSV) or **"was wroth"** (ASV) with God, but the same word for Samuel's attitude is used in verse 35, again in parallel with God's attitude and virtually all translations take it to refer to Samuel's grief, sorrow, or sadness—not anger at God. If this is a type of parallelism, this paints a different picture. It is not that God did not know what would happen. Instead, it simply shows the emotion that He felt when it actually happened. God's foreknowledge did not take away the sorrow He felt when sin and rebellion happened in time.

In First Samuel there is another interesting use of this word in the same context. In verses 11 and 35 *nacham* is used of God's sorrow over Saul's action, but in verse 29 it is used twice of God's unchangeable will. When Saul tried to argue with Samuel rather than simply acknowledge his sin, Samuel said of God, **"the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent** (*nacham*)**. For He is not a man, that He should relent** (*nacham*)**"** (NKJV). This is actually a paraphrase of a passage from the Law of Moses. God led Balaam to declare, **"God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent** (*nacham*)**; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"** (Num. 23:19). Both prophetic declarations reveal that when God has decided something, man cannot change His will. Is this a contradiction? In the same passage, is God at one point said to do something that a few verses later He is said not to do? Old Testament commentators Keil and Delitzsch suggest that these passages are approached from different perspectives. In First Samuel verses 11 and 35 they claim that God is speaking "anthropomorphically," that is, as things appear to man (2.158). In other words, in human interaction with God something might appear to reflect a change, even though God knew all along what He would do. Keil and Deilitzsch go on to suggest that in verse 29, Samuel describes God "theomorphically," that is, as things appear to God (ibid.). In other

