

# The Sovereignty of God and Prayer

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Is God really in control of all things? If so, then how can we say that we have free will? What about prayer? If God really knows all things that are going to happen in the future, then isn't it pointless to pray?

## God is Sovereign

God is in complete control of all things and strategically causes (with pleasure) or allows (with pleasure or displeasure) all events to reach his ultimate purpose and design for human history.

Biblically, God has a plan which is all-inclusive (Eph. 1:11), which he controls (Ps. 135:6), which includes but does not involve him in evil (Prov. 16:4), and which ultimately is for the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:14).

## How does God institute His plan? God's strategies

### God's Decretive Will

- Formal and Informal Decrees (Unconditional) – God makes a decree that is set and unchangeable (ie. Gen. 8:21; 15:4; 2 Sam. 7:14)
- Statements of Intention (Conditional) – God makes a statement of intent that can be changed (Abraham: Gen. 22:2,12; Moses: Ex. 32:9-14; Jonah; Hezekiah's prayer: Is. 38)

### God's Permissive Will (Conditional)

- God permits free will to include the possibility of evil behavior but limits it according to his purpose (ie. Job; 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Sam. 23; Luke 22).

### God's Preceptive Will (Conditional)

- God declares the precepts that are holy and good but leaves man to carry them out according to his will (ie. The Law of Moses).

## God Knows All Things (Exhaustive Foreknowledge)

God possesses not only complete knowledge of all future events and freewill actions, but also every possible future event and freewill action (Matt. 6:8; 11:21; 1 Sam. 23).

## **Does God change his mind?**

God does not change his mind in the area of his decretive will (ie. Formal divine decrees). When God makes a formal or marked decree that he will never destroy the earth as in the flood again (Gen. 8:21), or that he will give Abraham a son (Gen. 15:4), or that Messiah will rule on David's throne (2 Sam.7:14) that decree will not change. However, in the area of God's intentional will, there is room for contingencies and change, particularly if the intention is conditional. Jonah's announcement of the destruction of Nineveh was God's declared intentional will (Jonah 3:4) yet, when the Ninevites repented, God "changed his mind" and relented from destroying them. In God's declared intention to allow Israel to possess the promise land under the Mosaic Covenant, the actual blessing is contingent upon their obedience (Deut. 11:8-9). So depending upon the type of declaration that God makes (whether decretive or intentional), his will is either unbending or it can be altered.

## **Does prayer change God's mind?**

While no human agent can alter God's decretive will, prayer can bring about effectual change in the realm of his intentional will that otherwise might have remained unaltered. "God has chosen to work powerfully and effectively in the world for good through the prayers of righteous people (James 5:16)."<sup>1</sup> Our prayers are not demands but requests of a sovereign God who chooses to act in accordance to our prayer as it aligns with the good intention of his will and divine purpose. Scriptural precedent is clearly given to show that God can grant the requests of his people (1 Sam. 1; 1 Ki. 17:1; 2 Ki. 19:20), he can decline the requests of his people (2 Sam. 12:22-23; Heb.12:16-17), and he may even grant something greater than the request (1 Ki. 3:7-13).

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis & Demarest, "Integrative Theology, Vol. II", p.105