

Joel Lesson 17

Some Comments on the Handout for Lesson 17

Let's look at some fascinating statistics about the Holy Spirit in Scripture.

The book of Acts contains nearly 20% of all direct references to the Holy Spirit in the entire Bible. Think about that for a moment - one book contains one-fifth of all direct mentions of the Holy Spirit! And when we look at those words and phrases about the Holy Spirit that we saw in the Lesson 16 Handout, Acts contains nearly 25% of those as well.

But what about the books that never mention the Holy Spirit directly? While quite a few Old Testament books lack direct references (which I found quite surprising), only three New Testament books are silent on the Spirit: Philemon, 2 John, and 3 John. Of course, those are also the shortest books in the New Testament, so perhaps that's not too surprising.

Here's something that really caught my attention: 70% of those words and phrases about the Holy Spirit appear in only one passage in the entire Bible. Take words like "quench" or "glorify" - they appear in exactly one context when discussing the Spirit.

What does that tell us? I think it shows us that God rarely uses repetition when teaching us about the Holy Spirit. Instead, each passage seems to offer us a new way to look at the Holy Spirit's nature and work.

And what about the most common words used in relation to the Holy Spirit? The terms "speak," "spoke," "said," "says," and "saying" appear 19 times - but here's the fascinating part: every single one of these occurrences is in the New Testament, with Mark containing the first instance.

As we prepare to study Joel 2 and its connection to Acts 2, please continue studying the material on our Holy Spirit Handouts!

Joel 2:13b-14, Continued

Joel 2:13b-14 - And he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

Last week we started looking at that final statement in verse 13: "And he relents over disaster."

And we started with a tough question: Does God ever change his mind? We saw some verses that might suggest yes, and we saw some verses that might suggest no.

Related to whether God ever changes his mind, we looked at some other tough questions: Does anything happen by chance or is everything predetermined by God? Does God know all our thoughts and actions in advance? Do we have free will, and if so, how does that square with God's foreknowledge?

So what about free will? What is it? We said last week that free will requires at least two things: an absence of external compulsion and genuine alternatives from which to choose. Many verses show that God expects us to make real choices, which means that we must have free will. Our eternal destiny depends on our free will choices in this life.

We also looked at God's omniscience. To be omniscient means God knows everything that is knowable. So if future free will choices are inherently unknowable, then that would not negate God's omniscience. Evil and unknowable future events may be consequences of free will, just as broken bones are consequences of gravity.

Yes, God knows everything that is knowable, but what if God has created a universe for his free will creatures in which the future actions and future thoughts of those free will creatures are not knowable, or at least not always knowable, before they occur?

Do such events exist? Events that are unknowable before they actually occur? Is that what it means to have free will?

What does the Bible say?

In answering that question, we will find that there are two primary viewpoints about what the Bible teaches on the subject: the Closed View and the Open View.

Let's start with **the Closed View**.

The Closed View of the future says that the future consists exclusively of things that are settled.

Under the Closed View, the definiteness of every event - the fact that it will occur this way and not any other way - eternally precedes the actual occurrence of that event.

Under the Closed View, the future contains no possibilities but instead contains only certainties. It may look to us that the future contains possibilities, but that is only because of our limited knowledge.

Under the Closed View, God is unchanging in every respect. Not only his nature and his character, but also his will, his knowledge, and his experience - they are all unchanging. They are all what they are from all eternity, and so God's knowledge of the future is likewise unchanging - under the Closed View, God can learn nothing new because to do so would mean that God had changed.

Under the Closed View, whatever takes place in history, from events of great significance to the buzzing of a fly, must take place exactly as God eternally foreknew it would take place before the universe was ever created.

Under the Closed View, the reason we do not know the future is not that it cannot be known but rather only because we are not in a position to know it.

Here is how one author describes the Closed View:

"In **one unchangeable glance** God contemplates every being, every truth, every possible real object. This knowledge is an eternal intuition before which the past and the future are as real as the present, but each for that portion of time in which it really exists. God encompasses all time and therefore can know the future as infallibly as he knows the present."

And listen to what John Calvin wrote:

"We call predestination **God's eternal decree**, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death."

God's eternal decree? One unchangeable glance? That is how the Closed View is described.

And, yes, that was Calvin's view - but let's not taint it with that association, at least not yet. Maybe Calvin got something right!

Our question about the Closed View is this - does that view of God and the future agree with how God and the future are described in the Bible?

Do any scriptures support the Closed View?

Proponents of that view answer yes, and they point to verses such as these:

Isaiah 46:9-10 - Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'

Isaiah 48:3-5 - "The former things I declared of old; they went out from my mouth, and I announced them; then suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. ... I declared them to you from of old, before they came to pass I announced them to you...

Psalms 139:16 - Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Proponents of the Closed View also point to the many examples of God's foreknowledge in the Bible.

- Josiah and Cyrus were described and even named prior to their births (1 Kings 13:2-3; 2 Kings 22:1; 23:15-16; Isaiah 44:28).
- Peter was told that he would deny Christ three times, and he was also told how he would die (Matthew 26:34; John 21:18-19).
- Jesus knew from the first that Judas would betray him (John 6:64).
- Jeremiah and Paul were set apart prior to their births (Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15-16).
- Daniel includes remarkable detailed prophecies in Daniel 11 about what would occur in the six hundred years between his time and the first century.

And, of course, there are many other detailed prophecies in the Bible. But there is a logical problem with this argument. These verses are not sufficient to establish that the Closed View is the correct view.

Why not? Because if we reject the Closed View, then that does not mean we believe that nothing in history is foreknown by God. The Bible very clearly teaches just the opposite - we just listed some examples of God's foreknowledge of the future, and we could have listed many more.

But that does not mean the Closed View is the correct view. Why not? Because the Closed View goes far beyond just saying that God can foresee future events. Under the Closed View, it is not just that **some** future events are foreknown by God, but rather it is that **everything** that happens is foreknown by God. And, logically, that proposition cannot be established just by showing that **some** things are foreknown by God.

That passage from Isaiah 46 that we just quoted is a good example of the difference. Immediately after telling us in Isaiah 46:10 that he declares the end from the beginning, God tell us that he will accomplish his purposes.

One way that God knows that certain future events will occur is because God knows his purpose to bring those things about. Isaiah 46:11 (the very next verse, which I did not quote earlier) is even more emphatic: "I have spoken, and **I will bring it to pass**; I have purposed, and **I will do it**."

What these verses tell us is something we already knew - the future is settled to whatever extent God decides to settle it.

Romans 9:15-16 - For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

God is not at the mercy of random chance or free will. If God wants to step in and determine some future event, then that event will happen precisely as God has determined that it will happen.

But is that true of **every** future action? Is that true of everything I will ever do and everything I will ever think? Is that true of every choice I will ever make? Will they all happen precisely as God determined that they would happen before I was born? All pre-determined, pre-known, and pre-ordained by God?

The Closed View says yes, but the Open View says no.

Under the Open View, God pre-determines some, but not all, future events.

If God foreknows a future event (and there are many such examples in the Bible), then I think we can say that the event will come to pass either because God will step in and make that event come to pass or because that event is an inevitable result of prior events. Either way, that event can be foreseen by God and proclaimed in advance by the prophets of God.

And I think we have examples of each in the Bible.

The establishment of the kingdom of Christ in Acts 2 is an example of a future event that occurred because God stepped in and did it. God told us when it would happen (Daniel 2), where it would happen (Isaiah 2), and how it would happen (Joel 2). And that event happened in Acts 2 where, when, and how God had told us it would happen.

And I think we also have an example of an event that happened as an inevitable result of prior events.

Can anyone read the Old Testament and then come away surprised when the first century Jews rejected and killed Christ? Hadn't the Jews done the same thing to the prophets? Didn't they, in fact, admit that themselves?

Matthew 23:29-31 - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets."

Yes, it was certain that Jesus would be crucified (Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53), but we know that the Jews were not forced by God to do that. We know that they instead did that of their own free will.

And how do we know that? We know that because those who crucified Jesus were charged by Peter with that crime in Acts 2:36, and some of them repented for having done it.

It is a bit beyond our topic here to discuss whether God ever overrides our free will, but there is some evidence in the Bible that such might have occurred. But I think we can say that if God has ever done that, God would not then hold that person responsible for what God forced that person to do.

And so, was Judas forced to betray Christ? Was Peter forced to betray Christ? Were the Jews forced to crucify Christ? I don't see how if Judas, Peter, and the Jews were charged with those sins. And we know that some of them repented - why repent for something you were forced to do?

That they were charged with sin and repented of sin tells us that what they did was a voluntary action on their part. And yet that voluntary action was pre-known and pre-determined by God.

But if God did not force them to crucify Christ, then how could that event have been pre-known and pre-determined? I think it was because that event was an inevitable result of prior events.

We need to remember that God made us. God knows us better than we know us. God knows every thought we have ever had and every action we have ever done. And I don't think we are that hard to predict! And especially so when we work as a group. Do we think there ever was any doubt or uncertainty about how the Pharisees as a group would respond to Christ?

And so, let's say it again, if God foreknows a future event, then I think that occurs either because God has determined that the event will happen in a certain way or because that event is an inevitable result of prior events.

Either way, I think we can say that the future is settled when it comes to such events. But again, we are back to our earlier question - does every future event fall into one of those categories? Is every future event settled? Not just as to what the Pharisees as a group would think and do, but as to what each particular Pharisee would think and do? What I will think and do? What you will think and do? Was that all settled before creation?

The Closed View says yes. The Open View says no.

The Open View says that the future consists of both unsettled possibilities and settled certainties.

Under this view, if God does not know our future free actions, then it is not because God's knowledge of the future is in some way incomplete, but rather it is because there is nothing definite yet for God to know. It is because those future free actions are not yet knowable.

The central thesis of the Open View is that God experiences some events of the world that he created as those events happen rather than all at once in some sort of timeless, eternal perception.

Under the Open View, our future actions and thoughts are at present not knowable (even though as an individual I may be quite predictable, and as a group we may be perfectly predictable).

Otherwise, the Open View says, the idea of free will is meaningless. It doesn't exist, and so we don't have it. We are instead effectively just acting out a script that was written by God long ago.

That is what the Open View says, but what does the Bible say?

Does God know my thoughts **before** I think them? Or does God know my thoughts **when** I think them?

Luke 5:21-22 - And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" **When Jesus perceived their thoughts**, he answered them, "Why do you question in your hearts?"

Mark 2:8 - And immediately Jesus, **perceiving in his spirit** that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts?"

What do those verses tell us? That Jesus know their thoughts **before** they had them? Or that Jesus knew their thoughts **when** they had them? I think it is the latter. Luke tell us that Jesus **perceived** their thoughts.

That tells us that Jesus knew what they were thinking as soon as they starting thinking it - even before those thoughts reached their lips (Psalm 139:4). Jesus was able to look into their minds and perceive their thoughts. We can't do that, but Jesus could do that.

But if Jesus already knew those thoughts, then why do those verses use the word "perceive"? I may think that I know the sun has risen today, but the only way I can perceive the rising of the sun is by looking at its light or by feeling its heat. That is was it means to perceive something.

And what about all of those conditional prophesies and promises in the Bible?

Under the Closed View, there could never be a truly conditional prophecy because God must have known at the time of every conditional prophecy which path would be taken.

Under the Closed View, for example, God knew all along that Nineveh would repent when Jonah came and preached to them.

But is that what the Bible says? Is that how the Bible describes what happened? In a word, no. It is not.

Jonah 3:10 - When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of

the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

Did you catch it? "When God **saw**." When God perceived! God changed his mind about Nineveh **when** he **saw** what they did. Is there any other way to read Jonah 3:10?

But, some might say, that is just how the Bible uses our own experience and understanding to try and explain to use the mysterious working of God. He doesn't really see anything or change his mind about anything, but the Bible uses language like that because we cannot understand how God really operates.

I have two responses to that objection.

First, we can understand anything about God that is revealed to us in the word of God. Yes, there are some thing about God that I cannot understand or know, but I can both understand and know everything revealed to us in the Bible about God. And Jonah 3:10 is a verse in that Bible.

And second, if the Closed View is correct, then it is very difficult for me to understand how or why Jonah 3:10 would have been written that way in an attempt to explain the Closed View to us. Why? Because the language in Jonah 3:10 is the opposite of the Closed View!

The Closed View tells us that God never learns anything, but Jonah 3:10 tells us that he does.

The Closed View tells us that God never changes his mind about anything, but Jonah 3:10 tells us that he does.

If the intent of Jonah 3:10 was to explain the mysterious working of a God who never learns anything and never changes his mind, why would the verse do that by showing us a God who sometimes learns things and sometimes changes his mind?

Under the Open View, the difference between the past and the future is that, while the past is entirely definite, the future is only partially definite. The future is partially open and partially closed. The closed part is definite and knowable, but the open part is not.

And, as for the closed part of the future, God, of course, knows all there is to know about it. God knows all that is knowable about the past and about the future. But while everything about the past is knowable, that is not true about everything in the future. Our thoughts, for example, are not knowable before we have them.

And, again, that is a consequence of God's creation of free will just as much as broken bones are a consequence of God's creation of gravity.

And we should emphasize that the word "unknowable" is important here.

The Open View is not saying that God could know the future actions and thoughts of his free will creatures, but that instead God has chosen to remain ignorant of certain future events. That view would contradict the omniscience of God. For God to be all-knowing, God must know all that is knowable, and any idea of selective divine ignorance would mean that God does not know all that is knowable.

We have looked at Jonah, but now let's expand our scope a bit. What else does the Bible say? What does the Bible tell us about how God views and experiences the future?

The Bible tells us that sometimes God regrets how things turn out.

In Genesis 6:5-6, we see that God once regretted that he made man at all.

Genesis 6:5 - The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

Doesn't the fact that God regretted the way things turned out - even to the point of starting over - suggest that it was not a foregone conclusion at the time of creation that man would fall into such a terrible state of wickedness?

Isn't that what it means to regret an earlier decision? If we regret an earlier choice then doesn't that mean that things turned out different from what we had expected or hoped?

And look at the end of Genesis 6:6 - "it grieved him to his heart." Was that true or not? Was God really grieved to his his heart by how things had turned out?

Why do I ask? I ask because I don't see how the Closed View could ever be reconciled with that statement about God! How could God ever grieve about anything under the Closed View? He wrote the script! He planned every detail long before any of it ever occurred! How can he grieve about it?

If God never wanted to experience regret or grief, then he could have created programmed robots without free will, but that is not what God did. Instead, God created free will beings, and in doing so God, as a consequence of his creation, gave up some control.

Yes, I know that we sometimes sing a song entitled "Lord, Take Control," but we shouldn't sing it. Why not? Because when we sing that song we are asking God to take back his great gift of free will.

Listen to the words: "My heart, my mind, my body, my soul, I give to you, take control. I give my body, a living sacrifice. Lord, take control, take control." Is that really our prayer to God? Please make me a robot? Jesus, take the wheel?

Yes, 2 Corinthians 5:14 says that the love of Christ controls us, but that is better translated "compels us" or "presses us," but however it is translated being motivated by the love of Christ is very different from asking God to take control.

In fact, when we search the Bible for the word "control," we find that word used 23 times in the New Testament to describe our own self-control. We are commanded to control ourselves. So why then are we asking God by that song to control us?

And why is it that we are able to control ourselves? Free will. That's why. That's how. We have been given free will by God. Let's not ask God to take it back! Instead, let's use our free will to control ourselves and make the choices that God wants us to make.

The Bible tells us that God sometimes asks questions about the future.

In Numbers 14:11, God asks Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?"

In 1 Kings 22:20, God asks, "Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?"

Some suggest that these questions are just rhetorical, and perhaps they are. But is that true of all of God's questions? Or does God sometimes wonder about the future actions of his free will creatures?

Under the Open View, it is possible for God to genuinely wonder and ask about how things will turn out - as evidenced by numerous questions in the Bible where he appears to do exactly that.

The Bible tells us that God sometimes confronts the unexpected.

In Isaiah 5:1-5, we read that God once planted a vineyard and was surprised to find that wild grapes had grown up inside it.

Isaiah 5:1-5 - Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? **When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?** And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

Did God look for that vineyard to yield good grapes or wild grapes? Listen to it again: "When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?" How could God ever have looked for it to yield good grapes if he knew before he even planted the vineyard that it would yield wild grapes?

Don't we see surprise? Don't we see something unexpected? God planted one thing, but got something else. And God wonders why. "When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?"

Don't those verses tell us that the sad state of Israel at that time was not a preordained certainty, but instead was a possibility that did not become a certainty until the free will decisions of Israel made it so?

And if the future is entirely in the mind of God in every respect, then wouldn't it follow that God made a mistake when he expected things to occur other than how they actually occurred? If God knew the vineyard would yield wild grapes, then how could God ever have expected or even hoped that it would do otherwise?

The Bible tells us that men sometimes did things that had never even entered the mind of God.

Yes, I gave you free will, but I never thought you would do that! In fact, it never even entered my mind that anyone would ever do that!

Does God ever think that way about us? The Bible says that he does.

Jeremiah 7:31 - And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, **nor did it come into my mind.**

Jeremiah 19:5 - And have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, **nor did it come into my mind.**

Jeremiah 32:35 - They built the high places of Baal in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, **nor did it enter into my mind,** that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

How are we to understand those verses?

Are they simply idioms of some sort intended to show us the terrible extent of man's depravity, or did the depths of man's depravity in sacrificing their own children by burning them alive truly not enter God's mind when he made mankind?

Look at those verses again. Don't we see shock and surprise by God at what people would do? "Nor did it come into my mind."

Yes, I created you with free will - but it never entered my mind that you would choose to murder your own children! That you would burn them alive as a sacrifice to a false god! I never thought that you would do such a thing!

How can those verses possibly be reconciled with the Closed View of the future? How can something not have entered the mind of God if it was, in fact, in the mind of God from all eternity?

The Bible tells us that God sometimes gets frustrated.

In Exodus 4:10-15, Moses tells God that he cannot go to Egypt and do what God wants because he is slow of speech. And, in verse 14, we see where the anger of God was kindled against Moses.

Did God know beforehand how Moses would respond? If so, wouldn't God's anger have also occurred beforehand? In fact, if Moses' response had been known to God prior to the creation of the world (and, in particular, prior to the creation of Moses), then why was God angry at all in Exodus 4?

In Ezekiel 22, we read where God sought for a man to stand in the gap, and yet could find no such

person.

Ezekiel 22:30 - And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.

God says that he "sought for a man among them." Could God have sincerely sought for someone to stand in the gap if he already knew that none would be found? Why look for something that you already know is not there?

And, if God already knew that such a person did not exist, then why not just say that? What not say, "I know that there is no such person among you who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land." Why instead say, "I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land."

I mean, if the Closed View is the correct view, then why does God explain things in the way that he does? Why look for people? Why get angry after they say something? Why say that what they did never entered his mind? Why say that he has changed his mind and will not do what he earlier said he would do?

Under the Closed View, all of that is just God's way of telling us that he knew all of those things all along. But then why not say that? Is that so hard to understand that we need some obscure anthropomorphisms to understand it? Why not just tell us that he had known it all along and so was not really surprised or angry when it happened?

The Bible tells us that God sometimes speaks in terms of what may be or may not be.

In Exodus 4:1-9, God told Moses that the Egyptians might listen to him.

Exodus 4:8-9 - "If they will not believe you," God said, "or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. **If** they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

Notice that God twice says "**if** they will not believe you." Under the Closed View of the future, shouldn't God have said "**when** they will not believe you"? How can there ever be any "if" in the mind of God under the Closed View? And yet God sometimes says "if" in the Bible.

The Bible sometimes shows God speaking about the future in conditional terms.

In Exodus 13, God chose a certain route for the exodus because of what the Israelites might have done otherwise.

Exodus 13:17 - When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, "**Lest the people change their minds** when they see war and return to Egypt."

Don't we see God in that verse considering the **possibility** - but not the **certainty** - that the Israelites would change their minds if they faced battle?

God made similar statements to both Ezekiel and Jeremiah.

Ezekiel 12:3 - As for you, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight. You shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight.
Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house.

Jeremiah 26:3 - **It may be they will listen**, and every one turn from his evil way, that I may relent of the disaster that I intend to do to them because of their evil deeds.

When God gave Jeremiah and Ezekiel their assignments, doesn't it seem from those verses that there was at least a **possibility** that the people would heed their warnings? If not, then how do we explain these statements by God to the contrary?

"Perhaps they will understand." "It may be they will listen." Are those statements true or not? Perhaps they will understand? They may listen?

Under the Closed View, whether or not they would listen or understand was pre-determined by God and known by God before the world was created - how then could God say "they may listen" if in fact he already knew that they would not listen?

Did God tell the prophets these things just so that they would not be discouraged? "Ezekiel, go preach even though no will understand you." "Jeremiah, go prophecy even though no one will listen to you." Did God give them a glimmer of hope even though he already knew how their message would be received?

That seems to be the only option under the Closed View, but I think that option runs afoul of something else we know about God - "it is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18).

The Bible tells us that God does not want anyone to perish - and yet many will perish.

2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God is "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

How can God wish for something to be one way if God has known for all eternity that it will be some other way? How can God's will be my salvation if my damnation has been known to him from before the dawn of time?

Why, as Paul writes in Romans 10:21, does God ever say, "all day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people"? Why is God holding out his hands to people whom he has predestined to Hell?

The Bible also suggests in Revelation 3:5 that some will have their names blotted out of the book of life.

How can the book of life ever be changed if the Closed View of the future is the correct view? Under the Closed View, isn't the book of life written with indelible ink? And weren't those names written in that book long before the creation of the world? How that can book be changed under the Closed View?

The Bible tells us that God sometimes changes his mind or at least considers changing his mind.

This is the question that got us started, and I think we now know the answer to it. Yes, God sometimes change his mind. And how do we know that? We know because God tells us. And we know that because we can see examples of it in the Bible.

In 2 Kings 20:1-6, God told Hezekiah that he would not recover from his illness but that he would instead die. Hezekiah pleaded with God, and God changed his mind and added 15 years to Hezekiah's life.

2 Kings 20:1-6 - In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order, **for you shall die; you shall not recover.**'" Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and

prayed to the LORD, saying, "Now, O LORD, please remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: "Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: **I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you.** On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD, and **I will add fifteen years to your life.** I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake."

Jeremiah later encouraged the fatalistic Israelites by reminding them of this very event.

Jeremiah 26:19 - Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and did not the LORD relent of the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster upon ourselves.

If God cannot change his mind, then how can we possibly explain these verses?

Was God not sincere when he told Hezekiah in verse 1 that he would die soon. Look again at what God said to him: "Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover."

You shall die. You shall not recover. Was that God's will in verse 1 or was it not? And, if it was, then didn't God change his will in response to Hezekiah's prayer? God told Hezekiah that he would not recover, and yet Hezekiah recovered. God told Hezekiah that he would die, and yet he did not die at that time.

How else can we explain that?

Some might say that verse 1 was a conditional statement - you will die unless you ask me to save your life. But where is that in verse 1? "You shall die; you shall not recover."

And if God always knew that Hezekiah would live another 15 years, then how could God tell Isaiah in verse 6 that he would **ADD** 15 years to Hezekiah's life? Doesn't that word "add" tell us that the day of Hezekiah's death had been determined by God in verse 1? And that God then **added** 15 years to that date?

And there are many other examples:

1 Chronicles 21:15 - And God sent the angel to Jerusalem to destroy it, but as he was about to destroy it, the LORD saw, and he **relented** from the calamity.

Exodus 32:14 - And the LORD **relented** from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

Jeremiah 26:2-3 - Thus says the LORD: Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to worship in the house of the LORD all the words that I command you to speak to them; do not hold back a word. It may be they will listen, and every one turn from his evil way, that I may **relent** of the disaster that I intend to do to them because of their evil deeds.

And we looked at the example in Jonah earlier.

Jonah 3:10 - When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God **relented** of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

And we could point to many other examples.

- In Ezekiel 4:9-15, God changes his mind with regard to a source of fuel in response to a request from Ezekiel.
- In Amos 7:1-6, God changes his mind with regard to judgments against Israel in response to a request from Amos.

#JOEL