

QUESTION:

Praise the Lord, servant of God. I've been reading the Bible and came across two verses that seem to contradict each other. One says God doesn't change His mind or regret, and another says He does:

- Numbers 23:19 -
"God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"
- 1 Samuel 15:11 -
"I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions."

How can both of these be true? Does God regret or not?

ANSWER:

Great question—and one that has deep theological significance. The short answer is this: God does not regret in the human sense, but He does express sorrow or grief in ways we can understand.

1. God's Nature Is Immutable (Unchanging)

In Numbers 23:19, we learn that God is not like us. He doesn't lie or change His mind impulsively. This affirms His immutability, a core attribute of God meaning He does not change in His nature, character, or eternal purposes.

Malachi 3:6 confirms this:

"I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed."

This means when God makes a decision, it's never out of ignorance or misjudgment. He sees the beginning and the end of every matter (Isaiah 46:10).

2. Anthropopathism: God Speaks in Human Terms

When the Bible says in 1 Samuel 15:11 that God "regretted" making Saul king, it is using anthropopathism—a literary device where human emotions are attributed to God so we can understand His actions.

God doesn't regret the way people do (out of mistake or

unforeseen consequences). Instead, it's an expression of His grief over Saul's rebellion. This is similar to a parent who knows their child will make a mistake but still feels real sadness when it happens.

Later in the same chapter, it clarifies:

- 1 Samuel 15:29 –
“He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.”

This shows that God's regret isn't about changing His eternal plan, but expressing divine sorrow over human sin.

3. Foreknowledge Doesn't Eliminate Emotion

God's foreknowledge—His ability to know everything before it happens—doesn't make Him emotionless. He knew Saul would fail, but that doesn't stop Him from expressing sorrow when it actually happens.

Similarly, in Genesis 6:6, it says:

“The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.”

Again, this doesn't mean God made a mistake, but it shows His heartache over humanity's corruption.

4. God's Interactions Are Relational, Not Mechanical

God often relates to humanity within time and experience to teach, test, or grow us. In Exodus 32:14, when Moses pleads with God not to destroy Israel, the text says:

“Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.”

This was not because God changed His eternal plan, but because He wanted Moses to intercede, displaying leadership and mercy.

5. Spiritual Gifts Are Not Proof of Salvation

The presence of anointing, gifts, or calling does not guarantee one's salvation. Saul was chosen, anointed, and empowered—but he disobeyed and was rejected.

Jesus warns in Matthew 7:21-23:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven... Many will say... ‘Did we not prophesy... and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

This shows that obedience and relationship with Christ are what truly matter—not gifts or titles.

6. Callings Can Be Revoked

While Romans 11:29 says “*God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable,*” this refers to God’s covenant promises (e.g., to Israel). On a personal level, if someone lives in persistent disobedience, God may withdraw His hand or favor.

Saul's story is a warning: a good beginning doesn't guarantee a good ending (1 Samuel 13-15).

CONCLUSION:

God does not regret like humans, nor does He make mistakes. When the Bible says He regrets or relents, it's expressing His heart in ways we can understand. He grieves over sin and disobedience—not because He didn't foresee them, but because He is a personal, relational God who cares deeply.

The Bigger Question:

Are you walking in true obedience to Christ? Have you surrendered your life to Him completely? Remember, gifts and calling without holiness will not save us. We must remain faithful to the end.

“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!” - 1 Corinthians 10:12 (NIV)

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