

## *“Upon the Lampstand”*

**“After lighting a lamp there is not one person who conceals it with something or who puts it underneath a bed. Instead the person puts it upon a Lampstand so that those who come inside may see the light.”—*Jesus of Nazareth*, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke 8:16–17.**

**Question:** *Does God “know all things” that will occur, before they actually happen?*  
(February 7, 2007)

**Answer:** The biblical answer is that Jehovah knows what will happen either as a result of his choosing to know the will and intent of the creatures he created and designed, or by his own intervention into the affairs of others in order to bring about a specific and, thus, a determined outcome. The Bible teaches that creatures with a will of their own, such as humans, have their actions determined in one sense but left undetermined in another. Let me explain.

God created humans within a sphere of existence concerning which God knows and has determined all of the possible things humans can do. But Jehovah does not actually determine all of the things that they will do, leaving many of the possible outcomes, all of which are under his control and sovereignty, to them. For example, God commanded Adam not to eat the fruit of “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.” But Jehovah also knew that it was possible for Adam to disobey him and to eat from this tree in spite of his command, which is proven by the fact that that is ultimately what Adam chose to do. God let Adam eat from it, according to Adam’s own desire, in total defiance of God’s expressed will (Genesis 2:16–17; 3:6, 11–12, 17–19; compare James 1:14).

Consider also Adam’s naming of the animals (Genesis 2:19–20). Jehovah God created the animals, and he created man. Jehovah knew that at some point within the sphere of the earthly creation that man would name the animals, since that is one of the events that his design of man’s interaction with animals would entail. In fact, Jehovah chose not only to allow this to happen through the normal interaction of his creatures in the earthly realm, but he involved himself by “bringing them [the animals] to the man.” Clearly, he wanted “to see what he would call each one” (Genesis 2:19). No doubt he enjoyed watching such things occur!

Within Adam’s linguistically expressive capacity to utter words that would become the names of various things, such as animals or even “Woman” (Genesis 2:22–23), Jehovah God allowed Adam to determine their names. Jehovah gave Adam the defined capacity to name things, but within that defined capacity (= the totality of all possible names which he might utter) God allowed Adam to select which name would belong to which

animal based on his own reaction to and consideration of the animals as they were brought to him.

When we speak of the biblical concept of God ‘determining’ or decreeing something, therefore, it is important not to think of this as meaning that God decrees every single thing that is ever done. Rather, the Bible reveals that there are allowable outcomes that are all known to God, many or even most of which he delights in letting creatures determine within the confines of the greater, divinely-determined sphere of their existence. In association with this understanding of God’s determinism, it is equally important not to think of “non-determinism” (that is, things God does not decree or determine beforehand) as meaning that the things God lets others determine are beyond or out of God’s control. This is not ever the case, since all of the possible determinations that a creature with a will of its own can make were first determined by God. The creature who chooses one determination over another is still selecting from those things that God has allowed him or her to decide, all of which were permitted by God who is at the same time aware of and prepared for the consequences of any decision made within the determined sphere of existence (such as earthly life, as humans). Since God is the one who, by means of his being the Creator of all things, has determined what is possible for us to determine, nothing he allows us to determine and which we might determine can ever prevent his determination from being realized (Isaiah 42:5).

Jehovah’s sovereignty is so great that he even interacts with others within the sphere of his determined possible outcomes. This interaction itself reveals the non-determinism that exists within a determined sphere of existence. According to the Bible, Jehovah God even determines different outcomes respecting the same subjects, at different times, all of which are possible, for fully justified reasons that result in his glory. Consider the account in Exodus 6:6–8, where Jehovah says to Moses:

“Therefore say to the sons of Israel, ‘I am Jehovah, and I shall certainly bring YOU out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver YOU from their slavery, and I shall indeed reclaim YOU with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I shall certainly take YOU to me as a people, and I shall indeed prove to be God to YOU; and YOU will certainly know that I am Jehovah YOUR God who is bringing YOU out from under the burdens of Egypt. And I shall certainly bring YOU into the land that I raised my hand in oath to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and I shall indeed give it to YOU as something to possess. I am Jehovah’” [NWT].

Yet, after they were delivered from Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, these same people sinned against Jehovah. Thus, God said to Moses in Exodus 32:7–10:

Jehovah now said to Moses: “Go, descend, because your people whom you led up out of the land of Egypt have acted ruinously. They have turned aside in a hurry from the way I have commanded them to go. They have made a molten statue of

a calf for themselves and keep bowing down to it and sacrificing to it and saying, 'This is your God, O Israel, who led you up out of the land of Egypt.'" And Jehovah went on to say to Moses: "I have looked at this people and here it is a stiff-necked people. So now let me be, that my anger may blaze against them and I may exterminate them, and let me make you into a great nation" [NWT].

The Israelites and those with them "turned aside" from 'the way Jehovah commanded them to go,' showing that they were ignoring God's will. Jehovah then decreed to Moses that he would "exterminate them" and 'make Moses into a great nation.' This was a change from his decree in Exodus 6:6-8, but within the determined sphere of his purpose for man and a fully justified re-determination of what would become of these specific people according to his own laws under the circumstances. Moses then presented a possible outcome of Jehovah's justified re-determination, an outcome that was possible within the determined sphere of possible outcomes that God sovereignly allowed to result from the free will thinking of the people of the nations of the earth at that time. Consider Exodus 32:11-14:

And Moses proceeded to soften the face of Jehovah his God and to say: "Why, O Jehovah, should your anger blaze against your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a strong hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent he brought them out in order to kill them among the mountains and to exterminate them from the surface of the ground'? Turn from your burning anger and feel regret over the evil against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel your servants, to whom you swore by yourself, in that you said to them, 'I shall multiply YOUR seed like the stars of the heavens, and all this land that I have designated I shall give to YOUR seed, that they may indeed take possession of it to time indefinite.'" And Jehovah began to feel regret over the evil that he had spoken of doing to his people [NWT].

Jehovah was righteous in deciding to adjust his will from Exodus 6:6-8 and to destroy those who now rebelled against him in this way. Had Jehovah followed through on his decree to Moses to do just that (that is, to destroy them), this would not have left his determined will undone. He was merely prepared to act in another way in order to produce the same outcome but with people different from those who were a part of his original purpose. The determined outcome of having a nation of people through which the promised "seed" (Genesis 3:15; 22:18) would come would without fail still come true. But the non-determined (or not absolutely fixed) individuals who would make up this nation could change according to God's desire. *That* is the absolute freedom and sovereignty of the biblical God!

Those who today force upon others a view of God whereby he *must* determine all things beforehand without being able re-determine or to adjust his will for his glory and purpose in order to truly be God, offer God no real freedom at all (see my ["OASIS," IN MEDIO, February 1, 2007](#), under "The Potter's *True* Freedom!"). They fail to see that God has adjusted his will and purpose, without ultimately changing it, and that such a God is

absolutely worthy of our worship and praise, more so in my opinion than one whose decrees are fixed “from all eternity.” More importantly, such persons fail to accept what the Bible teaches concerning God’s adjustment of his original purpose, for the purpose of realizing it, ultimately.

For another example, consider God’s decree for Adam to ‘cultivate the garden of Eden and to take care of it’ (Genesis 2:15). Compare this with his adjustment after Adam sinned by ‘posting the cherubs’ to block the way to the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24). The first decree was not realized in full by Adam, but it will be realized ultimately through Jesus Christ, the “Last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45), and by his kingdom (Isaiah 11:6–9; 51:3; Revelation 2:7; 21:1–4; 22:1–2). This does not make God a failure. Instead it shows his supremacy and unmatched goodness (compare Mark 10:18); it shows he decrees what is best for us, without forcing us to accept what he says; it shows that even in allowing us to decide what to do it is not possible to keep what he purposes from coming to be, for it will happen with or without us individually. God sovereignly allows us to accept or to reject him.

Again, God is sovereign over all things, in that all the things he creates are made within a determined sphere of possible outcomes that he allows, which outcomes are dependent in part on the choices humans and angels make within that determined sphere. All of the possible outcomes within the created spheres of existence are always, ultimately, subject to the will of God. Jehovah has decided to let others make choices while he himself decides whether to allow the consequences of their choices, or to change the outcome in spite of our choices, or to influence the course of events in a variety of ways that might lead to still other choices and other possible outcomes and ultimately to the fulfillment of his purpose. Though Jehovah allows others to make certain choices, he will always accomplish his will in the end in spite of the choices we make (as he has done in spite of, for example, the choices of Adam, Satan, and others like them).

Therefore, I do believe the Bible teaches that God can know in an absolute way all that will happen within the created spheres of existence concerning which he defined beforehand the choices that can be made by those whom he creates. However, since his sovereignty and freedom allows for the choices of others to determine things he has chosen not to fix outside of determining the possible range of choices themselves (and the ultimate realization of his will), his absolute knowledge of things is perfect in his knowing absolutely all of the possible outcomes that can result within a particular sphere of existence. Knowing all of the possible outcomes, and knowing that regardless of which undetermined selections of determined choices are made by others that his determined purpose will without fail come true, allows for us to rightly say that God knows absolutely what will happen, based on his knowing the full range of possible outcomes that regardless of which might occur he is able to use and to govern them toward the realization of his will.

In other words, Jehovah knows all that can happen, and can know all that will happen, but he allows all that will happen to happen to the point where he is able to still use what he allows to happen to bring about what he wants to happen, without forcing everyone to do only what he wants to happen. God learns on his own about things that occur within the sphere of what he determined can occur, without anyone having to 'teach him' anything (compare Isaiah 43:10). Jehovah allows a measure of freedom for those made in his image to decide what will occur, outside of those things he causes to occur, within the sphere of what he has decreed can occur.

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