

Does God Change His Mind?

Deep Dive 2026

Tim Patrick, 25 June 2026

NB. Potentially a big and hard question, with complex considerations, but a short-ish answer...

Of course he does! The Bible says so.

eg. Genesis 6:5–7; Exodus 32:11–14; 1 Samuel 15:11, 35; 2 Kings 20:1–6; Jonah 3:6–10.

This is **good**, because it means that our concerns and prayers make a real difference.

But maybe also **bad** because it could mean that we can't trust what God says, and that we can't be too confident about our security in him.

But the Bible also says that he doesn't...

eg. Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17.

This is **good** because it means that we can trust God and his word as being fixed and unchanging, and so we can have confidence in his dependency.

But it's **bad** because it could mean that our prayers don't make any difference.

It might also lead us to being passive, fatalistic, and disinterested in things of the Kingdom.

The theological problem

If God changes his mind, that means that he is mutable, or changeable, and change implies –

- Imperfection
- Ignorance
- Capriciousness
- Contingency

We only change our minds in response to new information, changed circumstances, further reflection, change of mood...

Think of a recent time when you changed your mind. What caused you to do so?

If God were mutable, what would be the implications for us?

Possible Solutions

1. The doctrine of the Immutability of God.

God does not change in his –

- Essence
- Character
- Purpose
- Promise

But could he still change his mind?

2. Response-in-relation / Change of context.

God + context = God's will

As God relates to changing contexts, his different-but-unchanging wills become active.

- ie. God's mind never changes, if understood as his-mind-in-this-exact-situation.

What is helpful and what is unhelpful about this solution?

3. Anthropomorphism / Condescension

The language of God changing his mind is used in parts of the Bible, because this is understandable to humans, even if not precisely what is happening.

The Bible often refers to God and his ways anthropomorphically... or does it... ?!

4. The 'two wills' of God (But which two? There are many 'two wills' of God... !)

- Secret vs revealed
- Decretive vs Preceptive
- Efficacious vs Permissive
- Sovereign vs Moral
- Decretive vs Dispositional

But even these distinctions talk about God having two wills operative at the one time, not God having a will or mind that changes over time.

Carson, D.A., *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 213–214.

Some distinguish between God's revealed will and his hidden or secret will (cf. Deut. 29.29); others, between God's prescriptive will and his determinative will; others, between his permissive will and his decretive will; still others, between his antecedent will and his consequent will. All of these paired 'wills' suffer from serious shortcomings. For example, although the greatest part of the divine will must surely remain 'hidden' (i.e. unknown to men [*sic passim*]), and although any increase in the knowledge of that will is due to revelation of that hidden but already operative will, nevertheless this model is inadequate as a total explanation of the relation between divine will and reality, because in too many instances the hidden will appears to make a mockery of the revealed will. Since the hidden will is always effective, it appears to be the actual will of God; while the revealed will is little more than precept. In that case, man does not know anything of God's actual will, except by what actually happens; and conversely, everything that happens is exactly what God really wills to happen.

...

At the same time, we cannot do without some distinctions concerning the 'will(s)' of God. Both in the Old Testament and in the fourth Gospel, not to say elsewhere, God is sometimes presented as the one who seeks men out, loves a lost world, declares his hearing for their repentance, and the like. This 'will' of God is his disposition; it is not necessarily his decree. But precisely how both operate in one sovereign God is extremely difficult to understand.

Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.18.3.

He makes no pretence of not willing what he wills, but while in himself the will is one and undivided, to us it appears manifold, because, from the feebleness of our intellect, we cannot comprehend how, though after a different manner, he wills and wills not the very same thing. ... when we cannot comprehend how God can will that to be done which he forbids us to do, let us call to mind our imbecility, and remember that the light in which he dwells is not without cause termed inaccessible (1 Tim. vi. 16), because shrouded in darkness.

The short answer

We simply don't know how the two threads of the Bible's teaching fit together.

Perhaps the best we can say is that God wants us to think about this differently in different contexts, just as the Bible seems to show.

This takes a trust, maturity, and discernment that goes beyond the solutions to logic problems.

The pastoral dimension

Where the rubber hits.

What would you say to a believer who fears God might abandon them? Why?

Which Bible passages would you refer them to?

What would you say to a believer who didn't think it was worth praying because God's will is fixed? Why?

Which Bible passages would you refer them to?