**Question:** "Does God change His mind?"

**Answer:** Malachi 3:6 declares, “I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.” Similarly, James 1:17 tells us, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” The meaning of Numbers 23:19 could not be more clear, “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfill?” No, God does not change His mind. These verses assert that God is unchanging, and unchangeable.

However, this appears to contradict what is taught in other verses, such as Genesis 6:6, “The LORD was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain.” Also, Jonah 3:10 which says, “When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened.” Similarly, Exodus 32:14 proclaims, “Then the LORD relented and did not bring on His people the disaster He had threatened.” These verses speak of the Lord “repenting” of something, and seem to be contrary to verses that teach that God is unchanging. However, close examination of these passages reveals that these are not truly indications that God is capable of changing. In the original language, the word that is translated as “repent,” or “relent,” is the Hebrew expression of “to be sorry for.” Being sorry for something does not mean that a change has occurred; it simply means that there is regret for something that has taken place.

Consider in Genesis 6:6 that “…The LORD was grieved that He had made man on the earth.” This verse even goes on to say “…His heart was filled with pain.” This verse declares that God had regret for creating man. However, obviously He did not reverse His decision. Instead, through Noah, He allowed man to continue to exist. The fact that we are alive today is living proof that God did not change His mind about creating man. Also, the context of this passage is a description of the sinful state man was living in, and it is man’s sinfulness that triggered God’s sorrow, not man’s existence. Consider what Jonah 3:10 says: “…He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened.” Again, the same Hebrew word is used here, which expresses “to be sorry for.” Why was God “sorry” for what He had planned for the Ninevites? Because they had a change in heart, and as a result, changed their ways from disobedience to obedience. God is entirely consistent. God was going to judge Nineveh because of its evil. However, Nineveh repented and changed its ways. As a result, God had mercy on Nineveh, which is entirely consistent with His character.

Romans 3:23 teaches us that all men sin, and fall short of God’s standard. Romans 6:23 states that the consequence for this is death (spiritual and physical). So, the people of Nineveh were deserving of punishment. All of us face this same situation, as it is man’s choice to sin that separates us all from God. Man cannot hold God responsible for his own predicament. So it would be contrary to the character of God to not punish the Ninevites as they continued in sin. However, the people of Nineveh turned to obedience, and for that the Lord chose not to punish them as He had originally intended. Did the change on the part of the Ninevites obligate God to do what He did? Absolutely not! God cannot be placed in a position of obligation to man. God is good and righteous, and chose not to punish the Ninevites as a result of their change of heart. If anything, what this passage does is point to the fact that God does not change, because had the Lord not preserved the Ninevites, this would be contrary to the character of God.
The Scriptures that describe God apparently “changing His mind” are human attempts to explain the actions of God. God was going to do something, but instead did something else. To us, that sounds like a change. But to God, who is omniscient and sovereign, it is not a change. God always knew what He was going to do. God also knew what He needed to do to cause humanity to do what He wanted them to do. God threatened Nineveh with destruction, knowing that it would cause Nineveh to repent. God threatened Israel with destruction, knowing that Moses would intercede. God does not regret His decisions, but is saddened by some of what humanity does in response to His decisions. God does not change His mind, but rather acts consistently to His Word in response to our actions.