

The “Regret” of God (1 Samuel 15:11, 29, 35)

Verses 11, 29 and 35 will read in the English: “I am sorry,” “I repent,” or “I regret.” This verb occurs 29 times in the Old Testament and never loses its sense of emotion.

- Anthropomorphism (attributing human forms and characteristics to God)
- Anthropopathism (attributing human feelings or emotions to God)

1. God’s Revelation of Himself in Scripture

Providence: God’s most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing of all His creation, including all of their actions.

- A. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1)
- B. He owns everything (Lev. 25:23; 1 Chronicles 29:12; Psalm 24:1, 50:7-15, 104:24; Haggai 2:8)
- C. His providence is over nature (Gen. 1:1, 8:22; Ps. 65:9-11, 104:10-30, 107:23-32, 135:5-7, 145:15-16, 147:8-9, 15-18; Jer. 5:22, 10:13, 31:35)
- D. His providence is over individual life, lives and events (Psalm 139:13-16; Jer. 1:5; James 4:13-16)
- E. His providence is over individual decisions (Isa. 10:5-12, 14:24-27, 36:26)
 - The LORD raises the Assyrians to judge the northern kingdom. The Assyrians do not intend to do God’s bidding, yet in their own desire for power they attacked the northern tribes and are subsequently judged for their sins. In this same way, the Babylonians invaded the southern kingdom and led them into exile (Hab. 1:6-11). God also raises the Medes to destroy Babylon (Jer. 51:11) and then, under Cyrus, His people are sent back to the Promised Land (Isa. 44:28, 45:1-13).
 - Not only is the king’s heart directed by the LORD (Prov. 21:1) but so is everyone’s (Prov. 16:1, 9, 19:21).
 - Despite the intentions and actions of the hearts of men, God’s providence is in, over, and through them (Gen. 50:22).

God’s regret cannot be the result of:

- a lack of knowledge for both the present and the future. God has full knowledge of everything and everyone completely (Psalm 139:4; Isaiah 40:13).
- a deficiency of power (Psalm 115:6; Isa. 14:26-27, 41:1-4, 44:28, 46:5-11, 55:6-11; Dan. 4:35). God accomplishes all His purposes.
- a lack of foreordination and foreknowledge (Amos 3:2; Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29-30). While foreknowledge is often times used synonymously with predestination, there is an element of foreknowledge that is causative (bringing all things either primarily or secondarily to the intended purpose).
 - The LORD has changed the hearts and minds of people (Judg. 7:22; 2 Samuel 24; Ezra 6:22; Isaiah 6:9-10; Dan 1:9). While the LORD will change the hearts of men, He in no way releases them from liability.

2. God’s Call and Condition for Saul’s Kingdom and Kingship

God’s Call of Saul:

- Saul was already on the search for his fathers’ lost donkeys (9:1-10) at least one day prior to the elders demanding a human king (8:1-7). Before Saul and his servant arrive in Ramah, the LORD tells Samuel that He is sending him a man who is going to be a judge over the people, deliver His people from the Philistines, and restrain them (9:15-17).
- Saul is anointed with a flask of oil (10:1) prior to the people choosing their king.
- The people gather at Mizpah (10:17 where the lot fell on Saul. It was God, not the people, Who chose Saul (10:24).

God’s Condition for Saul’s Kingdom and Kingship

- After the limits (duties) of the king were written down at Mizpah (10:25), along with the renewal of the kingdom at Gilgal (10:14), the LORD warned the people and king about the consequences if they did not obey the LORD (12:13-15, 19-22, 24).
- Saul forfeited his future kingdom (heirs as King) after refusing to wait for Samuel at Gilgal (13:8). He has now forfeited his kingship (authority as king) for not devoting all to destruction. In both of these cases, Saul disobeyed Samuel.

3. God’s Providence and His Heart

God’s Providence:

- The LORD appointed Saul with full knowledge that he would forfeit the kingdom and kingship. Saul was chosen by the LORD to judge the people (8:5).
- The command for Saul to obey the LORD was not an issue of inability; it was one of unwillingness. Saul could have obeyed, but wouldn’t. As a result, he forfeited his kingdom and kingship. Even still, it was part of God’s plan.
- While David is alluded to immediately after Saul’s disobedience at Gilgal (13:13-14), there are “signs” that point not only to him, but also to the Greater David (Gen. 49:10; Matt. 1:1).

God’s Heart:

- God is grieved because of Saul’s disobedience, and the trouble Saul has brought on the nation. However, God does not regret like man does (11:29); the LORD does not go back on His word once He has purposed. God has remorse and regret over that which He has purposed and predetermined to take place. Samuel’s justification for why God does not have regret (11:29) only intensifies the paradox of God’s regretting His election of Saul (11:11, 35).
- There is a great movement in the heart of God; a suffering and emotional pain that is likened to human pain. His regret is in response to Saul’s sin.
- The LORD not only had full knowledge of all these contingencies, but even brought all these events to fruition, while still responding in an emotion that is likened to the regret of man. Unlike man’s regret however, the LORD would not have changed anything.