

## WHAT DOES IT MATTER WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE DECREE?

**INTRODUCTION:** While systematic theologies devote little space to the subject, the material in scripture covering God's Decree is vast. Over two dozen different Hebrew and Greek words are used several hundred times in our Bible to discuss and define different aspects of that Decree. God obviously counts the subject to be of great importance. In the Upper Room discourse Jesus told His disciples that "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from My Father (Jo. 15:15)." The fact God has chosen to reveal some of His purpose to us indicates that He has a friendly disposition towards His children. We can then show a friendly disposition back to Him by taking an active interest in discovering what that purpose is and how we as New Testament believers can relate and respond to that purpose using the means He has graciously provided. We are no longer merely servants blindly obeying a set of rules cut in stone, but are Sons at the Father's right hand with the potential to actively participate in His Divine Nature and Purpose. While this paper merely scratches the surface of this fascinating and often controversial subject, my desire and intercession to God is that it may scratch deep enough to stimulate saints to further study to discover the equally vast array of practical benefits we have available from using the information God has provided us.

Misunderstandings regarding The Decree abound. The mere mention of words such as 'election', 'predestination', 'foreknowledge' and others are often enough to cause saints to bite and devour each other. Thus, it is often relegated to the status of "non essentials of the faith", whatever that means. Certainly it is not relevant to faith necessary for initial salvation. The gospel that saves is found in I Co. 15:3-5; "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared." After we are saved, though, what then? Do we just move on, content to be saved, and do nothing? Do we just walk blindly through life hoping we will by accident follow God's plan for us? Does He even have a plan for us? The writer of Hebrews stated, "let us go on to maturity (Heb. 6:1)." Augustus Strong, in his Systematic Theology writes, "This doctrine is one of those advanced teachings of Scripture which requires for its understanding a matured mind and a deep experience (pg. 368). After studying this topic at length I have come to quite a different conclusion. This doctrine requires for its understanding a spiritual mind (one capable of being taught by the Holy Spirit) and therefore capable of maturing. It promotes maturity. Therefore it is not for the carnally minded saint. There is huge potential for practical application of this information. This doctrine helps us mature when we understand how to cooperate with God in His Divine Plan and stop fighting against it; to lay aside our fruitless purposes and, as Son's, present our bodies as living sacrifices in voluntary service to the One Who Called us out of darkness into His marvelous Light (Ro. 12:1-3, I Pet. 2:9).

**I. THE DECREE DEFINED:** Defining The Decree may be a little confusing for some for a couple of reasons. First, the term as it pertains to God does not occur in our New Testament. It does occur and is used of God in our Old Testament in various forms (decree, decree's, decreed) but is the translation of a dozen or more different Hebrew words. In its most basic form, it refers to the edict or mandate of a king. In scripture it's the mandate of God. We don't really use these terms much in our society so we might refer to this as God's Plan. This brings us to another reason for confusion. Our plans aren't the same as God's. We make plans then change them for various reasons. God's Plan is set as it were in stone. It doesn't change Heb. 6:17 states, "...God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose..." God's Plan involves more than just a desire to do something. It involves purpose. Intent. Determination. The Decree is the unchangeable plan and purpose of God for His creation. It covers all things. Governments, the fall of man, the salvation of man, even the tiny details of our daily lives are covered in His Plan. Some of this plan is perhaps impossible for the human mind to understand since it's source is the infinite mind of God (Ro. 11:33-36). However, God has given us the capacity to understand some of that plan and there are practical benefits to doing so. The natural man (unsaved) can't receive, or welcome, any of the things God planned (I Co. 2:9-3:3) and view them as foolish or moronic. The carnal Christian, the one thinking like an unsaved man, is also unable to discern that Plan. This understanding hinges on a spiritual believer being taught by the Holy Spirit Who takes the things God knows, compares it with what our human spirit knows, and grants us understanding on that level (2:10-12). The spiritual believer is the one who is framing his/her mind on the elements of their heavenly position at the right hand of the Father not their present earthly state (Col.3:1-16, Phil.3:19,Ro.8:6.

Ephesians 1:8-11 is a great place to start when attempting to understand His Decree. In part that passage reads, "...according to the wealth of His grace that He lavished into us with all wisdom and insight having made experientially known to us the mystery of His desires according to the good pleasure that He purposed In Him into a dispensation of the Fullness of the Times, to head up all things by The Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, In Him; In Whom also we were made an inheritance, having been marked off with boundaries around us beforehand according to a Plan of the One working all things according to the Determinative Council that came from His desires." This somewhat expanded translation shows clearly that God made a single determination in a council that explored His various desires and with wisdom decided on one course of action. That is the Decree. One purpose. One plan that is the result of many desires God could have chosen and does not and will not change (Heb. 6:17, Ps. 33:11, Is. 14:24, 46:10 Pro. 19:21). Read these passages. His Plan is certain. It WILL come to pass (Acts 4:27-28). We can draw several conclusions from these verses. 1. God doesn't give Himself everything He desires. Out of all He desires, He chooses to do one thing. 2. If He has limited His action to one choice, He has, in essence, put Himself into a box in that area and we can expect Him to do what He says He will. This is an immensely practical benefit! He cannot lie (Titus 1:2 He. 6:18). This is a foundational aspect of His faithfulness and the truth that He is faithful, or reliable, permeates scripture. 3. If God is reliable, then we can genuinely believe (direct faith, part of the fruit from the Spirit Gal. 5:22-23) that He will keep all the promises He has made, whether to Israel as a

nation, whether to tribulation saints yet future, or to us, New Testament saints. 4. Since God is reliable, His plan will NEVER contradict His character. For instance, since God is righteous His plan will always be right. He cannot say 'no' to, or deny who and what He is (2 Tim. 2:13). This is where our theology comes in to help. What are the things about God's character that never changes? The things that are eternally true about how God acts are called His attributes. God always acts in Love, according to Truth, with all knowledge of both potential and actual things, and in goodness meaning He is happy. He has all power so He can accomplish the things He has chosen or determined to do. He is righteous so never desires or acts unjustly. And He is holy. He can never unite Himself to anything contrary to Himself or approve of anything that opposes these elements of His nature. Other things about God are eternal such as His wisdom, but that is not a separate attribute. Wisdom is a quality that characterizes all God's activities and relates to the attribute of knowledge. Wisdom harmonizes all God's attributes into an action that is the very best based upon what is true, right, holy, loving, good, etc. Omnipresence, or better, immensity, just states how big God is and doesn't describe what He does. Mercy, grace, patience, wrath etc do not describe attributes but rather describes activities and attitudes God is capable of because of His attributes.

We can see then that having a good understanding of other elements of God's word will help us understand this subject called The Decree. While God has many desires, He has determined one purpose and that purpose brings Him good pleasure (Eph. 1:9). That purpose WILL stand.

## II. DOES GOD EVER CHANGE HIS MIND?

We have seen that God will accomplish His purpose. This raises some questions. Is God ever sorry? Does He repent? Does He ever change His mind? Does He experience regrets? We change our minds for many reasons. We gain more information about something and based on that added information we change our minds. God knows all things so He can never gain information He didn't have before so He can't change His mind based upon that. We change our minds when we realize we are wrong about something and need to make it right. God is righteous so He can never change His mind due to an unrighteous thought or action. Often when we experience sorrow or regret over an action we decide to change what we're doing. Go a different direction. Change our minds. Does God ever experience sorrow or regret? Grief? Many Christians are taught that suffering is a clear sign that God is not blessing us. One of His attributes is goodness which means He is a happy God. Can one be happy and have sorrow? If God grieves does it mean He is withholding blessing from himself?

It is probably not possible for man to understand God's feelings completely though He is described as having feelings. In humans the feelings we understand best come from our soul which is the seat of our emotions (Luke 12:19-22, Rev. 18:12-14). The spirit has feelings also. God does not have a soul. He is simply spirit (Jo. 4:24). However, it is evident God does have feelings from such statements pertaining to Him such as "His good pleasure", "Pleased", "Merciful", "Kind", "Grief". "He cares for you (I Peter 5:7)." So does God ever grieve or feel sorry, experience regret?

In the past couple of decades the word 'sorry' has changed somewhat in meaning. There was a time when someone could express their grief over something and you could

say, "I'm sorry" meaning, "I recognize you're experiencing a difficult time right now and I am also grieving along with you. I have sorrow because you are sorrowful. I share your sorrow." This was one meaning. A second meaning meant, "I apologize. I did something that caused your grief and I'm sorry I did that." The first meaning has unfortunately been mostly lost in our society and the second holds sway. Yes, we should apologize if we have caused harm to someone somehow. But should we not also grieve when other's grieve? Nearly always now when someone expresses their sorrow and I say, "I'm sorry" they respond, "Why? It's not your fault". I wasn't claiming responsibility for their grief, merely that I could suffer on their behalf. People have become so cold and hardened toward others they often can no longer be touched by the grief of others. Now people rarely even apologize. They say, "Never apologize, it's a sign of weakness". Instead, it's "My Bad". We have moved away from any expression of sorrow on behalf of others. This ought not to be true of saints. Romans 12:15 reads, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." This is in the context of verse 9 that says, "Let love be genuine" and verse 10, "love one another with mutual affection" and the broader context which reminds us that we are together one body though many members verse 4, and to present our physical bodies (one of the members of that body) as a living sacrifice to God verse 1. When we fail to love other saints, God experiences grief. Eph. 4:30 states, "Stop grieving ( λυπέω, lupeo - to distress, grieve, to be sad, be in heaviness, be sorry - Strong) the Holy Spirit by whom you are sealed..." This is in the context of abusing other saints by either yielding to various Satanic attacks (lying vs. 25, stealing vs. 28, sarcastic talk vs. 29) or to our own sin nature's lusts (angry provocations vs. 26, 31). God is grieved when we fail to direct love to other saints yet He has nothing to apologize for because He is not responsible for the cause of that grief.

If God can experience grief, can He experience regret? The short answer is no, He can't, but to really understand this we need to understand what God's Word says about the relationship grief and regret both share.

Numbers 23:19 states, "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent (Hebrew 'nahgham'). Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good (NASB)?" The Hebrew word 'repent' here is נָחַם [nāh-g'ham']. It is used over 100 times in the Old Testament and is translated as comfort, repent, regret, or grief in our English Bibles. We will find that there are several valid definitions for this word and the context must be read to understand which meaning to insert. Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies pg. 350 defines this word, "in regard to others, to pity, to have compassion; in regard to one's own doings, to lament, grieve; hence to repent, English, to rue ." Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon pg. 636-637 adds to that definition variously as, "breathe pantingly (of horses) be sorry, console oneself. 1. Be sorry, moved to pity, have compassion for others, 2. Be sorry, rue, suffer grief, repent of one's own doings, 3. Comfort oneself, be comforted . Gesenius's lexicon lists as it's primary meaning "to draw the breath forcibly, to pant, to groan". A horse snorts or blows when it is faced with surprise, disgust or danger. For some reason it is never translated groan , pant or snort in disgust in our English bibles. Normally it is translated "repent". Yet it is NOT repentance. The Hebrew word for repent is שׁוּב shooov and means to return. When Israel sinned by forsaking God's law by following after pagan deities God told them to repent, to return to Him. Return to His



Law. We don't get the idea of changing ones mind until we get to the New Testament term for repentance which is *μετανοια*, metanoia which means to have a new or changed mind. The New Testament saint repents by changing his mind about how he acts or thinks about something. The Old Testament saint repented by changing what direction he was moving regardless of what he thought about it. None of this is involved with our word in Numbers 23:19. What IS involved seems on the surface to be easy to understand until we look up other references this word is used in and discover a multitude of possibilities of meanings this word has, some of which are opposite each other. Look at I Sam. 15. Verse 11 reads, "I regret (nahgham) that I have made Saul king". Verse 29 says, "The Glory of Israel (God) will not...change His mind (nahgham)" and then repeats, "He is not a man that He should change His mind (nahgahm)." Finally, in verse 35, "And the Lord regretted (nahgahm) that He had made Saul king over Israel." Furthermore, in over 100 uses of this word in the Old Testament, two dozen times or more it is used in this seemingly contradictory way of God. He does or will repent. He doesn't or won't repent. (You can do this study on your own by looking up Strong's Hebrew Number 5162 either online or in a Strong's Concordance). Perhaps the following chart will help to clarify how this word is used. We've already seen that the word repent is not an accurate definition of this word and is not included in the lexicon definitions. We will use the lexicon definitions from now on in quoting these passages and will look to the Hebrew verb tenses used to help clarify what is actually being said. Only two Hebrew verb tenses are shown in this chart since they are the two forms used in the verses we will be looking at in this paper, though there are other tenses used with this word elsewhere in Scripture. This is to help avoid further unnecessary confusion.

## ‘NAHGHAM’

TO SNORT IN DISGUST  
TO GRIEVE  
TO REGRET  
TO COMFORT  
TO GROAN

### NIPHAL

### HITHPAEL

Reflexive

Passive

Intense Reflexive

I caused my grief

You caused my grief

I caused intense grief to  
the point that I regret it.

The Hithpael or, intense reflective tense, is only used with this word seven times in the Old Testament and then only four times of God. Ezek. 5:11-13 states, "So as I live, declares the Lord God, surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your

detestable idols and with all your abominations, therefore I will also withdraw, and My eye shall have no pity and I will not spare. One third of you will die by plague or be consumed by famine among you, one third will fall by the sword around you, and one third I will scatter to every wind, and I will unsheathe a sword behind them. Thus My anger will be spent, and I will satisfy My wrath on them, and I shall be appeased (nahgham); then they will know that I the Lord have spoken in My zeal when I have spent My wrath upon them.” Here we see God as portrayed as being uncomfortable because of His wrath towards the unrighteousness of His people Israel. No one can comfort God but God Himself and to attain that comfort He pours out His wrath on the objects of that wrath. Because the Hithpael tense is used God will be completely comforted or appeased.

We see a similar idea in Deut. 32:36 which reads, “For the Lord will vindicate His people and will have compassion (nahgham) on His servants; when He sees that their strength is gone and there is none remaining bond or free.” Just as we saw that God demands to be comforted regarding His wrath and none can do that but God Himself, so also His people need comforting and no one can provide his own comfort. Only God Himself can provide the comfort His people need that are suffering on account of sin and that comfort lacks in nothing. It is complete comfort. Remember that His plan involves the manifestation of His attributes so He will judge righteously those who abuse His people and He will judge righteously His own people. This paper will not explore the free agency of man and how a righteous God can allow sin. But we can clearly see that Within God’s righteous plan that He will indeed deal with sin. He is a God of mercy and within His plan He will display that mercy on His objects of mercy. Is this not practical for us?

Psalm 135 is a tremendous decree Psalm, and in verse 14 we find again that God will, from Himself (Hithpael tense) absolutely have compassion (nahgahm) on His people. Why? Because He has chosen (decree word) Jacob for Himself...for His own possession verse 4. He causes (decree word) the vapors to ascend and the lightnings, rain, and wind respond as He wills verse 7. The Psalm ends with three exhortations for Israel to “bless” (Hebrew barak, to bend the knee, a sign of adoration or worship) the Lord verse 19, 20, and 21. Certainly not because the Lord regretted or changed His mind about comforting His people, but because He certainly WILL comfort them. Our God in His plan has allowed tremendous difficulty and pain, yet He is also a God Who has provided for the comfort of His people when they do suffer...in this case, Israel. This knowledge is practical. Israel can look at all their failures and still “praise the Lord, for the Lord is good” verse 3. Because His lovingkindness is everlasting Ps. 136:18.

The fourth Hithpael tense used of God with this word is where we started in Numbers 23:19 which remember reads, “God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should regret (nahgham); has He spoken and will He not make it good?” We’ve already seen that this word is not ‘repent’ so it is not saying God doesn’t return, though we should know that God has promised us that He never WILL leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5) so He has no need to return because He has never left in the first place. But though God is said to grieve, the use of this Hebrew tense of the verb shows us that He never grieves to the point that He regrets, that He wishes He’d never done something. His plan is right and He absolutely does not and cannot regret anything within His plan or wish that it was better. More right if you will. This agrees with James 1:17 that says that

with God there is no variation or even a hint of turning (used of the planets and stars turning in their orbits). So He never has need to apologize. Consider God's servant Job as an illustration of this. Job lost his children, his wealth, his prestige, and finally his health, all so God could display certain things about His plan, His sovereignty and Satan's methodology. God's response to Job after all this? "Gird up your loins like a man (Job 38:3)." No apology, no commiseration. It nowhere states in the context that God grieved for Job. God didn't say, "Man, Job, I'm really sorry you went through all this!" Does that mean that God didn't grieve? No, but we aren't given the account so we will feel sorry for Job. It's recorded for us so we may know that God's people can indeed suffer and be righteous at the same time. Job is called righteous at least three times in scripture: Job 1:1, Ezek. 14:14, 20. It means that God's plan includes suffering for His people but that IF we suffer, it should be for righteousness sake as Job, not for unrighteousness sake (I Pet. 3:17). Christ was righteous and He suffered, so arm yourselves also with the same mindset (I Pet. 4:1). Because it IS God's will (decree word) that His people suffer at times even for righteousness sakes (I Pet. 4:19). Why? Because it is only through suffering that some aspects of God's character can be understood and experienced by us and God has provided in His plan that we be adorned with the beauty of His character (I Peter 3:8) for this is why we were called (decree word - I Pet. 3:9). One last illustration before we move on. Consider Lot. He is another who is said to be righteous three times. 2 Peter 2:7-9 states that because he was righteous his soul was "vexed", or, "oppressed". This word means to wear down by toil, perhaps to despair. It is used in Matt. 8:6 of a man's child suffering of incurable paralysis and despaired for there seemed no hope man could cure him. It is used of the demons in Matt. 8:29 who will be cast into the place of final torment where there is no escape and thus despair. It is more than just weariness from toil. Why didn't Lot just leave Sodom and Gomorrah? Because he despaired! His wife and kids were there and the Bible strongly hints that she at least did not want to go. It was not a culture that lent itself to moving on a whim like we may choose to do. He was getting on in years and it gets more difficult to make monumental efforts like that as you age. So how did God deal with him? Sorry dude, you got yourself into that mess now deal with it? NO! God has been seen to be a God who will comfort His people. He restored Job when He despaired of life. Lot was too worn down to do anything for himself also. He was in so deep he couldn't find a way out. Have you ever been there? I have. I understand when things seem hopeless and dark. God rescued righteous Lot when He *couldn't* rescue himself. "The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation (2 Pet. 2:7-9)!" In eternity future God's people will never again personally experience suffering (Rev. 7:17, 21:4). Now is the time for us to learn things about our Great God He will never again reveal about Himself. He will never again have the opportunity to show how caring and merciful He is because we will never suffer for sin again. We can learn that now. By suffering for ourselves and for others and by being comforted by the God of all comfort (2 Co 1:3). So far we have seen how to look at four passages using an intense reflective form of the Hebrew verb nahgham. Now let's look at the Niphal form.

The Niphal verb tense can either be reflective (I did this to myself) or passive (someone or something did this to me). Back in our passage in I Samuel 15 that used this word four times in three verses only the Niphal tense is used. There are slightly different

uses of the Niphal here such as preterite, infinitive, and future sense, but we'll not explore those here. They don't change the overall meaning of the text for our purpose. We have seen so far that God absolutely does not regret His purpose from Numbers 23:19, so that interpretation is out. What are our other choices? After all, God chooses the words and the grammar of His Word so we can't rightly just change words or word usage around to serve our whims. We can't change meanings to serve our opinions. We must use the words God chose, the context they're used in and the grammar ascribed to them to discover which meaning to place on a particular word...IF that word has more than one meaning. That meaning must harmonize with the rest of God's Word. So, using what we've learned about how this word relates to God we can translate I Sam. 15 twice using passives and twice using reflective tenses. So in verse 29 I would translate that with Niphal reflectives, "And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or grieve because of anything He has done; for He is not a man that He should grieve on account of His own actions". Then verses 11 and 35 would be translated with Niphal passives. "I have been caused to grieve (by Saul's unrighteousness) because I have made Saul king *for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands* (emphasis mine)." And verse 35, "And the Lord was caused to grieve because He had made Saul king." Saul caused the grief, God didn't grieve due to any insufficiency in His Plan. God didn't cause the grief. We must know that failure WITHIN God's Plan is not failure OF God's plan! He planned for these failures according to His Divine purpose yet did not cause them. As further evidence that God's grief is not the same as man's is found in the next chapter in I Sam. 16:1 where the Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve (lit. mourn) over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel?"

Using grief to translate this word nahgham in these passages is the easiest way to deal with it, but there is another legitimate way to translate these last 2 verses and that is by using the "snort with disgust" definition. While that may seem odd at first, it is quite possibly the better translation when we look at God's response to unrighteousness in the person of Jesus Christ. In John 11:32-44 we have the account of the resurrection of Lazarus and a fantastic display of both the humanity and Deity of our Savior. In verse 35 it says that Jesus wept. God has no tear ducts as He has no physical body. God has no soul so He doesn't grieve the same way we do. God is not a man that He should lie or regret...not the same way we do. His grief seems to be rather complex and we'll see that is even more true in our next section. God is Spirit Jo. 4:24. However, in the person of Jesus Christ we have a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. 4:15) and Who grieves the same way we do when we suffer. A savior who can shed tears. A savior with an unfallen soul that feels the same way we do. We also have a High Priest Who is completely God, Who can grieve the same way God does. One who can relate the way we grieve to God the way He grieves. In verse 33 it states that Jesus was "greatly disturbed" or, "deeply moved". This word in the Greek means, "to snort with anger, as of horses (Vines Expository Dictionary pg. 182)". This disgust is emphasized because the same word is repeated in verse 38. Jesus was REALLY disgusted and snorted in disgust twice! In the realm of His Deity He was angry at their unbelief and snorted with disgust or indignation within Himself. This is perfectly in keeping with our word nahgham in the Old Testament. Did God grieve over Saul's unrighteousness? Quite possibly. Did He snort with anger? Quite probably. Do



Christians think that God is so lop sided in His love for us that He just overlooks our unrighteousness? Think again. He snorts with anger. Yet, He holds out a long time before chastening. Don't count that as God blindly allowing sin to go on. Count it as the longsuffering of God working out our salvation (2 Pet. 3:15). "It was fitting that God for Whom and through Whom all things exist (because of His Plan), in bringing many mature sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation mature (or complete) through sufferings (Heb. 2:10)." The bruising of our Savior is an extremely important part of the Decree with a very long list of practical benefits but that is another chapter for another book.

We must conclude that God does not change His mind because of regret because He has no regret. His sorrow is not like man's sorrow so that is impossible for us to define. So is there anything else that could cause God to change His mind?

### III. DOES GOD EVER RELENT?

There is another way our word nahgham is used, and that is with a potential action. The NASB uses the word 'relent' in some of these passages. For instance in Jeremiah 18:8,10 we have two potentials: "If that nation against which I have spoken turns (shoov, proper Hebrew word for 'repents' - see pg. 3) from its evil, I will relent (nahgham) concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it" vs. 8, and, "If it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better (nahgham) of the good with which I had promised to bless it" vs. 10. Here is another example that shows that God need not repent. He doesn't need to return. He went nowhere. The nations have strayed from Him and need to return. The nations need to repent. If they do, God states that He will relent or think better of them. Does that mean that God's Decree is not set in stone after all? That man can do something to change God's mind and thwart His plan, or that the Plan He carved in stone at some point before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4, 2 Tim. 1:9) can be changed now? Do we just toss everything God has shown us so far in this study? Is God inconsistent? No, of course not. God has set boundaries within His set purpose that cannot be moved. God set boundaries around His physical creation. "Who enclosed the sea with doors...and I placed boundaries on it and I set a bolt and doors, and I said, 'Thus far you shall come, but no farther' (Job 38:10). God has set boundaries around individuals. "Then Satan answered the Lord, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has on every side' (Job 1:9-10)". God set boundaries around even the nations. "And He made from one every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined (decree word) their appointed (decree word) times and the boundaries of their habitation (Acts 17:26)." There are other boundaries. All this merely means that in God's Plan there are movements permitted within the boundaries He has set. Room for men to move in righteousness or unrighteousness. Again, the free agency of man comes into play. See chart #2 for perhaps an overly simplistic illustration of this. Back to Jeremiah 18 and the potential for God to relent. Because there is room within the boundaries God has set for both righteousness and unrighteousness, there is also room for God to reward or to punish or discipline. If God didn't allow for this we could never know about His ability to respond to unrighteousness or what His holiness involved. With these potentials we could use two of our definitions simultaneously. While this makes the translation rather

ponderous I believe it is accurate. For instance, we might translate verse 8 thus: "If that nation against which I have spoken repents from its evil, I will no longer 'be caused (passive) to grieve so am now free to provide comfort' (nahgham) instead of the calamity I planned to bring on it." Verse 10, then, would read, "If it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will again be caused (passive) to grieve (nahgham) so will not provide the comfort or good with which I had promised to bless it." Here it clearly shows that Israel is not the only nation included in God's Plan. There are other nations, other kingdoms, other 'clay pots' verses 1-11. Within the boundaries God has set for them there is the potential to act in righteousness or unrighteousness. They will ALWAYS choose unrighteousness. "But they will say 'It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart (verse 12). Job felt hopeless. Lot felt helpless. The nations despair. Is everything out of control and are we merely left to face our self destruction and doom with no hope? No, because, at least from our perspective God appears to have left some wiggle room for men to respond to His plea to act rightly so He has some room to relent if He chooses. But He in no way changes the overall boundaries he has set. As far as His Plan is concerned, though, even the little choices we make are part of the Decree but that also is for a future study. This delves into the realm of what we have previously called man's free will but also includes fatalism which is another important aspect of The Decree that we have no time or space for in this present discussion.

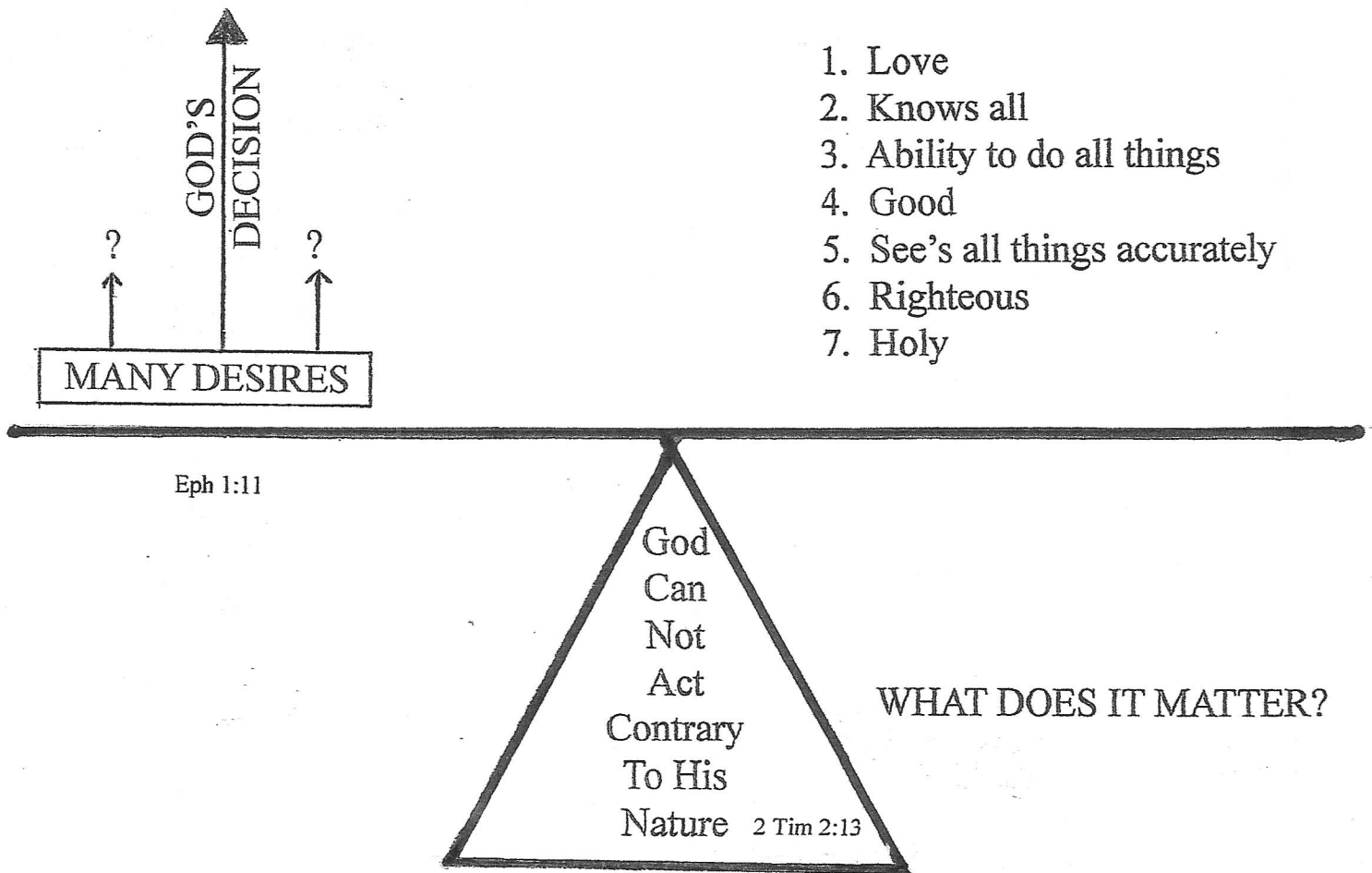
### CONCLUSION: WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

In this study we have seen that out of the things God desires He has determined a set course for His creation that includes many things, some of which will bring Him grief and will bring us grief. We have seen that the grief of man is not the same as the grief of God. We have already discussed many reasons why it matters to us. Most importantly, we need to know that God has set limits and that there are consequences for testing those limits. When God grieves He will not ignore that grief forever. Sometimes He will grieve to the point of wrath and that wrath WILL be poured out eventually (Rev. 15:1,7, 16:1). A little bit of that wrath is even being dribbled out at this present time (Ro. 1:18). This does not touch the believer, though. We don't have an appointment to experience that (I Th. 1:10, 5:9). However, there is still consequences to our actions whether we are right or wrong. If we desire to live Godly we shall suffer (2 Tim. 3:12). Perhaps not as Job or as Lot. But we can and will suffer for righteousness sake. We need not despair as they did, though, because within God's plan He has provided something better for us than for them. We can find comfort in knowing that it is right to suffer in some instances and even God Himself experiences grief. And we have a great High Priest who intercedes on our behalf Who also grieves along with us in a similar way because He is both completely God and completely Man. We can learn about God the Father's character and God the Son's present glorified humanity and worship more effectively. We can learn to face grief patiently as Job did (Jas. 5:11) and mature rather than always trying to run away from it as immature children. We can face it patiently knowing that God knows how to deliver the godly from temptation (II Pet. 2:9) as he did with Lot and that He will. When the going gets tough God's mature ones stand steadfast.

We can also suffer for unrighteousness. God is grieved when we move against what He has planned. There are spatial limits to how *far* God will let us go against Him and time limits to how *long* He will allow it to go on. Remember Jonah the great feeder of fish. He died. God brought him back. Remember Ananias and Sapphira. They died. God didn't bring them back. We are told that MANY suffered weakness, illness and some died for taking the Lord's table unworthily (I Co. 11:30). If we have no understanding of God's Plan how will we know why we are suffering? How will we know if we need to repent (change our minds about an unrighteous activity) or remain steadfast and suffer in righteousness? How can I have the same confidence Paul had that "the One Who began a good work in YOU will bring it to completion"? Because God has a Plan carved in stone for His sons. And that Plan is to bring many mature sons to His opinion of what we should be (Heb. 2:10). A great God! A great Plan!

DECREE

ETERNAL ATTRIBUTES:



1. Love
2. Knows all
3. Ability to do all things
4. Good
5. See's all things accurately
6. Righteous
7. Holy

1. Show His Mercy Ro 9:18

2. Harden Some Ro 9:18

3. Display His Wrath Ro 9:22

4. Display His Control Ro 9:22

5. We Experience His Power Ro 9:22

6. We Experience His Opinion Ro 9:23

1. Worship

2. God's Will

3. At ease in spite of evil around me

4. Use my salvation the way God intended



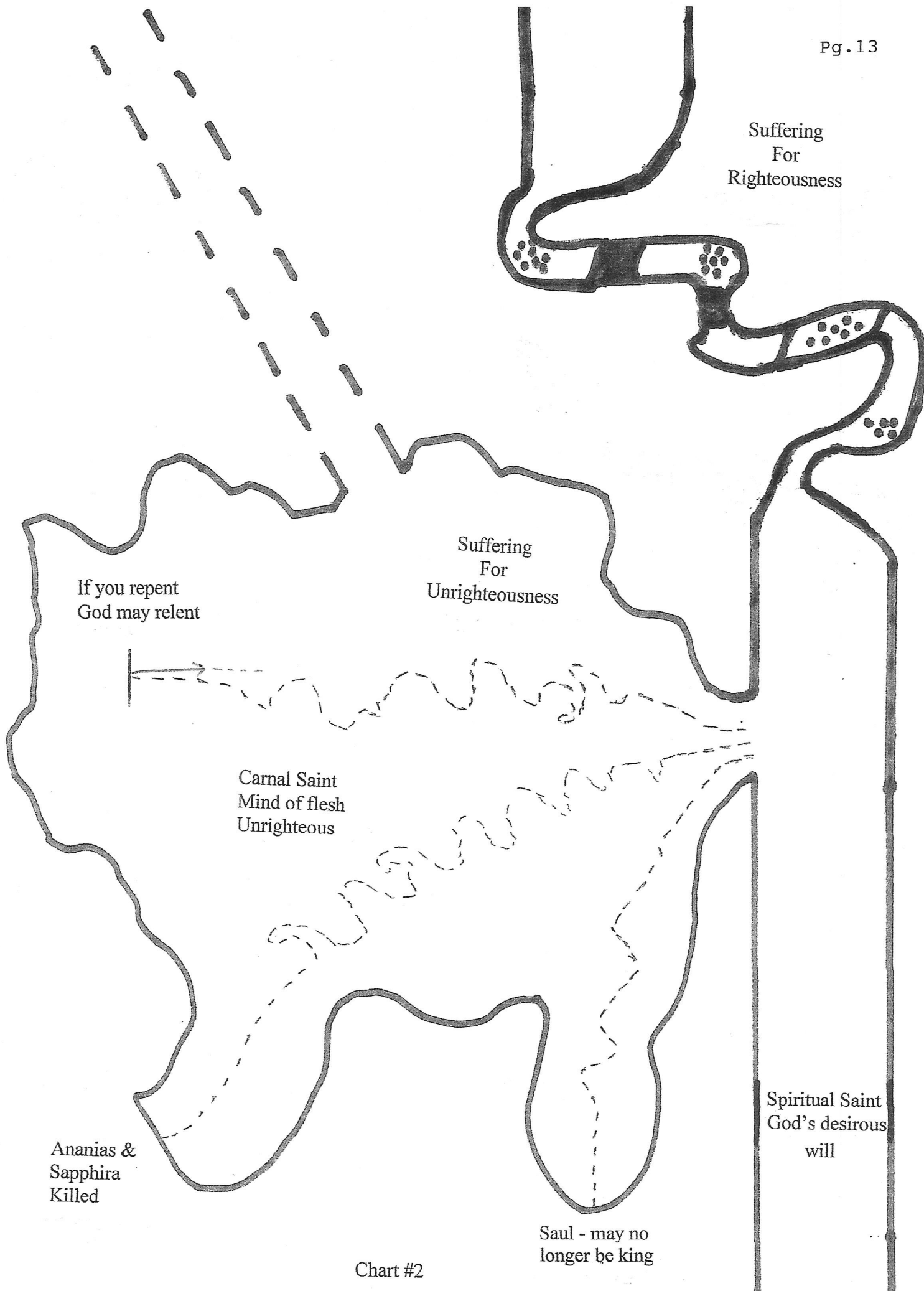


Chart #2

## ADDENDUM TO UNDERSTANDING CHART #2:

I call this my spiritual aneurism chart. It is intended to show that a believer can and will suffer for both righteousness and unrighteousness. An aneurism is an extremely unhealthy medical condition that often results in the patients death (if it ruptures). It demonstrates the carnal mind of a believer and the carnally minded one is about to die Ro. 8:6. When a believer pushes against the limit set by God (demonstrated by the heavy black boundary line around the aneurism) it is like sticking a needle into a balloon and it will rupture causing us severe consequences and sometimes death.

The spiritual believer's road often becomes narrow and tight with seemingly insurmountable difficulties to test our character. The spiritual saint should use joy in these time and develop patience James 1:2-4. But often we try to circumvent these tests God has for us and move into the realm of an unrighteous mindset doing our own thing. That is what Saul did. Jonah did. Ananias and Sapphira did. We will suffer for that choice because God will discipline us for that (Heb. 12:7-11).

One dotted line shows the potential described in our text of Jer. 18:8,10 that shows the potential for God to relent if we repent. For Israel that meant returning to the place they left God and returning to the Law of God. For the New testament saint, if we change our minds about an unrighteous act and say the same thing about it as God does (confess) and don't reach the limit set by God, then He may relent of the punishment planned for that action.

The dotted path heading up to the left demonstrates that sometimes we can never again get back on the path we were on previously but God will, in His Plan, always provide another direction for His child to go that can again bring Him glory. However, that will never be by allowing the believer to remain in that spiritual aneurism, or state of unrighteousness. There are always consequences to the choices we make. God NEVER changes the limits He has set In His Decree.