

What does it mean “God is immutable?”

Where did the idea that God doesn't change come from? What does not change? Why is this concept about God so important?

1. Examine Numbers 23:19. What aspect of God seems unchangeable?

Balaam, a well known pagan diviner, is summoned by the Moabite king Balak to curse the Israelites. In this second oracle, Balaam conveys God's message to Balak that, in contrast to man, God is immutable. This message is in the context of the Abrahamic Covenant (see www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/1God/CovenantAbrahamic.aspx) which God unconditionally promised Abraham and his descendants “all of the land of Canaan.” God keeps His promises.

It is interesting to note that it was Balaam who instigated Israel's apostasy by encouraging Moabite and Midianite women to entice Hebrew men with sexual immorality and Caananite worship of Baal (Num 25:1-18; 31:1-18).

And it was after this part of the Conquest that God made the unconditional Land Covenant (see www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/1God/CovenantLand.aspx) which expands on the land portion of the Abrahamic Covenant (Deut 29:1-30:10). Another interesting fact is that the Conquest, not only was a fulfillment of a promise, but was an administration of judgment (Deut 9:1-6).

2. Examine Psalm 102:25-27, Hebrews 1:10-12 and 13:8. What aspect of God seems unchangeable?

In his prayer for help (Psalm 102), the psalmist praises God by contrasting Him with what humans perceive as the timeless essence of earth and heaven, but yet are not everlasting. Both heaven and earth will perish and can be easily changed anytime by God, but God Himself does not change. Despite his lament, the psalmist is confident of God's unchangeable nature to love man and provide physical and spiritual salvation.

Whereas the psalmist was referring to the God the Father, the verses of Psalm 102:25-27 are found in Hebrews 1:10-12 where the reference is to the Son of God Jesus Christ. Here in Hebrews, the deity of Jesus Christ is confirmed by associating Him with God the Father, as the Creator of the world and as the eternal One. And because of Jesus Christ, human beings have the means for spiritual salvation.

Hebrews 13 reiterates the unchangeable nature of the grace of Jesus Christ. While former leaders, who preached and lived faithfully, are no longer present, the gospel message remains the same that Jesus Christ is God, He died for the sins of man, and salvation is available for all who believe.

3. Examine 1 Samuel 15:29 and its context. What aspect of God seems unchangeable?

As the people's choice of king over the nation of Israel (1 Sam 8:1-22), Saul was instructed on how he was to attack the Amalekites; but, he disobeyed by only obeying a part of God's command. After the confrontation of his sin by Samuel, Saul attempts to repent (disingenuously by blaming the people as the ones who wanted the spoils of war) with the hopes that God would forgive him and not punish him.

However, the appointment of the people's choice in Saul as king was a conditional (Deut 17:14-20, 1 Sam 12:12-15). Samuel's mention of God's unchanging character is in reference to the certainty of God keeping His commitment of promise and justice without exception. Implied in this is the immutability of that standard of justice.

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4. Examine Malachi 3:6 and the background to the book of Malachi. What aspect of God seems unchangeable?

Written shortly after Ezra and Nehemiah to the Jews (or their descendants) who returned from the exile, the book of Malachi addressed several problems occurring during that time within the nation of Israel such as malpractice of the temple priests, intermarriage with Gentiles and oppression of the poor.

In Malachi 3:1, the Hebrew term for “My messenger” is usually used for a prophet or priest, and in this context is in reference to John the Baptist. The “Messenger of the covenant” is in reference to Jesus Christ who is the mediator of the new covenant (Heb 9:15, Luke 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25) (see www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/1God/CovenantNew.aspx).

Malachi 3:2-5 is in reference to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ where the day of the Lord will be a day of judgment on the whole world (Isa 2:12; Joel 3:11-16; Amos 5:18-21; Zech 1:14-18).

While the nation of Israel has been unfaithful, God will remain faithful to His covenant. Malachi 3:6 speaks of God’s immutability towards His promises and justice. The nation of Israel will be made pure with the elimination of the wicked (Mal 4:1).

5. Examine James 1:17. What aspect of God seems unchangeable?

The book of James is intended to exhort Christians towards spiritual maturity and personal holiness. On the topic of trials, a complaining attitude and self pity looks at life in a selfish manner. The right attitude towards life produces wisdom and enduring faith.

In this context, James implores Believers not to deceive themselves by blaming other causes for their sin; the temptation to sin is born from a person’s own evil desire.

God’s immutability is grounded in objective truth:

Every good and perfect gift is from heaven such as Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Through Jesus Christ, the Word of truth, human beings can be regenerated (John 1:1).

Temptations can be avoided by being faithful to Jesus Christ and His teachings.

In contrast, deceit is subjectively changing the meaning of an objective truth.

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Immutability provides assurance and removes any uncertainty for a Christian’s faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ does save and God will fulfill His promise for all those who place their trust in Him. Despite the sinful nature of human beings, God will not divorce Himself from Believers.

Immutability removes any need for revenge or fear of wickedness. Just as God will fulfill His promises of blessings, He will also administer His standard of justice and punish those justly for their sins and wickedness.

Immutability is the reason why the Bible is timeless and relevant today regardless of how human society and culture evolves. God’s promises and standard of justice are the same today as they were since the beginning of Creation in the Old Testament.

Immutability is elegant in its logic. Something as perfect and holy as God has no need to change; it is sinful human beings who have the need to change and even then by the grace and provision by God who does not wish human beings be destroyed.

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