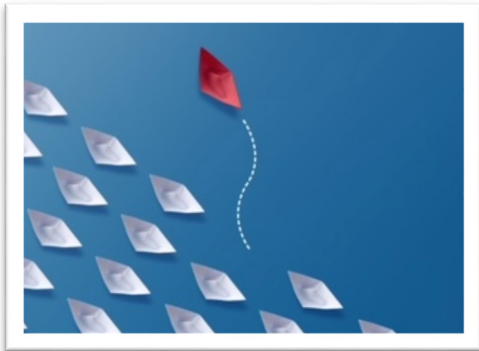


## Do We Really Have Free Will?

**Joshua 24:15: (NASB)** *If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*



Outside of some deeply philosophical debates, the idea of human beings having inherent freedom of choice seems to be a generally accepted premise. Free will makes us special. The capacity of conscious choice establishes humankind in a unique category in relation to the rest of life on our planet. When human beings interfere with the freedom of choice of other humans, the consequences are usually dark. We end up with things like oppression, slavery and dictatorships. Does God ever interfere with our freedom of choice? Does He ever override an individual's chosen pathway and force them onto another one? Some

scriptures seem to indicate that this is so, but is it? How do we understand the value and application of human choice in God's ultimate plan?

Let's begin by clarifying what makes having free will such a privilege:

(Source: Free Will and Neuroscience: From Explaining Freedom Away to New Ways of Operationalizing and Measuring It, Andrea Lavazza

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2016.00262/full>)

Free will can be defined by three conditions (Walter, 2001).



### FREE WILL

1. **The ability to do otherwise:** This is an intuitive concept: to be free, one has to have at least two alternatives or courses of action between which to choose.

We cannot have free will if we do not have a choice. We must have at least two options.



### FREE WILL

2. **Control over one's choices:** The person who acts must be the same who decides what to do. To be granted free will, one must be the author of one's choices, without the interference of people and of mechanisms outside of one's reach. This is what we call agency, that is, being and feeling like the "owner" of one's decisions and actions.

Own the choice! The ability to own our choices is to not have others tell us what to do.



### FREE WILL

3. **Responsiveness to reasons:** A decision can't be free if it is the effect of a random choice, but it must be rationally motivated. If I roll a dice to decide whom to marry, my choice cannot be said to be free, even though I will freely choose to say "I do" ...

The decision to marry or not may exist in this example, but the decision on whom to marry was made randomly. In order to have free will, we must to respond to reason and not to chance.



Based on these three criteria, **1) the ability to do otherwise, 2) control over one's choices and 3) responsiveness to reasons**, can we say that God has free will?

It may be a foolish exercise for us to determine whether God has “free will” as His nature, power and existence are so far beyond our comprehensive abilities. Let's determine what we know about God's will.

We will suggest three scripturally-supported points to define God's will and use them throughout the podcast to build a case for free will in humanity.



### **1. God's will is perfect.**

**It is both complete and flawless:**

James 1:17-18: (NASB) <sup>17</sup>Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. <sup>18</sup>In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

Another way to say it is, God is stable and dependable.



### **2. God's will is committed.**

**All of God's objectives are specific and harmonious, and He is dedicated to their fruition:**

Daniel 2:19-23: (NASB) <sup>19</sup>Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven; <sup>20</sup>Daniel said, Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. <sup>21</sup>It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding. <sup>22</sup>It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him. <sup>23</sup>To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for You have given me wisdom and power; even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, for You have made known to us the king's matter.

Here is one more condition about free will as it relates to God - He is not constrained by external limitations. He established the natural laws of nature and the concept of time, but we do not believe He is constrained by any of it. His choices are not controlled by anything or anyone other than what He Himself has determined, such as when He promised He will never lie in Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18 and other texts.

Because He has such power, it is a wonderful thing for His creatures that benevolence, grace and mercy drive Him. Having a vicious, sadistic, eternal overlord would be hopeless.



### **3. God's will is time-tested.**

**It has proven its unbreakable nature over all the history of humanity:**

James 3:17-18: (NASB) <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup>And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

We have the time-tested testimony that whatever pours out from God Almighty is always higher and better than anything we could ever fabricate or imagine in our own human minds.



## The time-tested quality of God's will was outlined in Scripture right from the start:

**Genesis 3:15:** (NASB) *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.*

God is warning Satan after Satan successfully tempted Adam and Eve. This is a wonderful foreshadowing of hope, because it indicates right in the beginning what would happen in God's plan for humanity: Eventually through the generations, from the seed of Eve would come the Messiah. While Satan would *bruise him on the heel*, meaning he would seem to have a temporary victory of crucifixion and removing Jesus off the scene, he, the resurrected Christ, would eventually bruise Satan on the head - a death blow. The Amplified Bible says: *And you shall only bruise his heel*. Sin enters with immediate consequences but also immediate, counteracting hope. The hope was not obvious at this time; it was well-hidden. This promise was only a hint of God's purpose.

## Jesus proclaims his role as the key factor in fulfilling God's will over time:

**John 3:16-17:** (NASB) <sup>16</sup>*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.* <sup>17</sup>*For God did not send the son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*



God's plan here is unfolding. Jesus, himself, says: *I am not here to judge; I am here to save the world*. God's plan unfolded in the Garden of Eden with the hint of salvation from Satan and sin. Now we go a step further.

## Jesus also tells us of the coming results of God's will in action:

**John 12:31-32:** (NASB) <sup>31</sup>*Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.* <sup>32</sup>*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*

Jesus said, *now the ruler of this world will be cast out*. The next sentence talks about the crucifixion of Jesus. How can this be? How can Jesus cast out Satan if he has been crucified? The death of Jesus was the price that had to be paid to throw Satan out forever. **THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS WAS THE DEATHBLOW TO SATAN.**

## UNLOCKING THE VALUE OF FREE WILL:



It is profoundly encouraging to know that God's will as expressed to humanity through the Bible is rock-solid, dedicated and unwavering. Whether we argue for or against God having free will, we can all know that His will is unbreakably focused on giving and supporting life through justice, love and mercy.



What a great promise and comfort!

To review the power and direction of God's will is inspiring and helps us understand the reasons for His creations.

**With God's will in place to securely rely upon,  
what can we now uncover about humanity's free will?**

Seeing just a glimpse of the grandeur of God's will becomes a formidable foundation for comprehending the essence of our own human will. If we know who created us and why we were created, we can certainly begin to solve the question of free will. These big questions are plainly answered in Genesis.

**When it came time for humanity's creation, there are specific details and purposes revealed:**

Genesis 1:26: (NASB) *Then God said, Let Us make man in Our **image** <6754>, according to Our **likeness** <1823>; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.*

Who is God talking to when He says, *let US make man in OUR image and according to Our likeness?* This was Jesus in his pre-human existence as the Logos or Word. For more on how the nature of Jesus was changed from spirit to man to divine being, please listen to Episode 1100.



**Episode 1100:  
Do People Turn Into  
Angels When They Die?**

Establishing spiritual and human natures as separate and distinct

There are many meanings for the word translated into English as *image*, but let's look at the one that deals with this verse:

**Image:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #6754 *tselem*; resemblance; hence, a representative figure

**Likeness:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1823 *demuth*; from resemblance; concretely, model, shape; adverbially, like

When it says man was created in the image of God, it does not mean we were created to physically look like Him, but we were created to act like Him. (We are also created with the capacity to feel deep emotions, appreciate beauty like music and art, and to think and reason.) Humanity was created to be God's representatives on earth, to have His kind of authority and rule over the physical creation and planet - *Let them rule over* (have dominion over) ... *all the earth*. Humanity was given the responsibility of caring for and governing the earth as God does all of creation.



This is important in establishing humanity's free will. God introduced humanity to this responsibility in the environment of the Garden of Eden, conducive for them to see and maintain His way of doing things.



**This environment had everything they needed, and it was all presented in a perfect package:**

**Genesis 2:8-9:** (NASB) *<sup>8</sup>The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. <sup>9</sup>Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

This garden was the model of a perfect earth. If Adam and Eve worked with it and maintained it, they could expand it. They could take control and make the rest of the earth a garden. Whatever the tree of life was, it would have been wherever it was needed to maintain the billions of lives.

This was the picture-perfect approach. However, God's plan had other things that had to happen as well. But this was the capacity of what *could be* that was put before Adam and Eve. It was perfect and complete.

**Now the test of obedience was put in play. The rules were straightforward, and the consequences of obedience and disobedience were plainly disclosed:**

**Genesis 2:15-17:** (NASB) *<sup>15</sup>Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. <sup>16</sup>The LORD God commanded the man, saying, From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; <sup>17</sup>but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.*

External constraints were placed on Adam - humans would require food for life, and more specifically, access to those life-giving trees in the Garden. In contrast, God is what is called a divine being. He has life within Himself - He is not reliant upon anything or anyone for His existence.

Human free will would now be tested because there is suddenly a choice of behavior. God told Adam that they had everything they needed, but the one *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* was not to be eaten from. God told Adam he could eat from any tree he wanted, but... not that one. Inherently, it creates a choice. That "*but...*" makes man have to think about things he did not have to think about otherwise. And they probably never even noticed that tree until God said, *do not eat from that one!* Now, every time they walked by it, they thought, *WOW!* THAT would certainly be human nature!



*...from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.*

Human free will would be tested. The END RESULT of God's plan was to have human free will work within the same parameters as God's own will, for we are created in HIS image. God put humanity in charge of the earth. We are to strive for the same qualities in our own human will.



Let's define God's will again and see how it applies to human will:

**1. God's will is perfect.**

God's plan is for the human will to learn perfection.



**2. God's will is committed.**

God's plan is for the human will to learn true godly commitment.

**3. God's will is time-tested.**

God's plan is for the human will to be provable and faithful over time.

While God's will is perfect, committed and time-tested, the human will had to be developed to be like God's will. This is why obedience had to come into play. Free will had to be tested, and it cannot be tested without choices.

**Next, the use of free will became evident:**

Genesis 3:1-6: (NASB) <sup>1</sup>Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, Indeed, has God said, You shall not eat from any tree of the garden? <sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; <sup>3</sup>but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.

When speaking to Lucifer in the guise of a serpent, Eve understood the rules and the consequences. We know this because she recites them back to him.



**Satan introduced a second choice and suggested an alternative ending (all of which was a lie):**

<sup>4</sup>The serpent said to the woman, you surely will not die! <sup>5</sup>For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Interestingly, this corresponds to the three elements we discussed from the article *Free Will and Neuroscience: From Explaining Freedom Away to New Ways of Operationalizing and Measuring It*:



## FREE WILL

1. The ability to do otherwise
2. Control over one's choices
3. Responsiveness to reasons

**"The ability to do otherwise"**

<sup>6</sup>When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise,

Satan suggested to her this ability to do otherwise, to disobey. The ability was there all along, but when Satan introduced this alternative ending, she thought about it and it grew to become foremost in Eve's mind.

Often, when people try to make hard decisions, they put the pros and cons in columns. This is what she is doing: *It looks like it is good food, it certainly is beautiful, it is going to make me wise, let me just write these down...*

This is an exaggeration, of course, but on the other side of the ledger, she had the simple fact that God said NO. She had all her conclusions with Satan's hissing voice telling her it would be better. She follows the emotion of the suggestion and the alternative ending.



### “Control over one’s choices”

*she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.*

She responded to all of this, she ate, then she gave the fruit also to Adam. He made a choice and ate.

### “Responsiveness to reasons”

Eve and now Adam clearly had a choice. They weighed their options from their own perspective and reasoning and they decided.

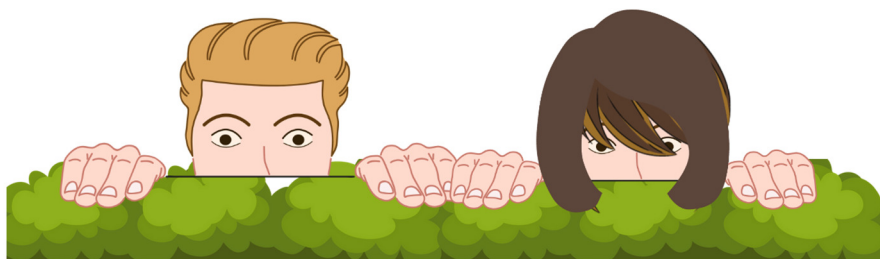
How much experience did Eve or Adam have? Not much - but Lucifer, he is another story. This is an important point. Lucifer had eons of time to develop this thought of leading astray the human creation in his mind. He states his evil thought, this choice of his own, when he says in Isaiah 14:12-14, *I will be like the Most High*. Here he is attempting to subvert God’s authority by asserting his own. He knew very well what he was doing, and he did it deliberately.

Eve did not have experience; she had been told what God had said by Adam - she had not heard God herself. But she did know what the rule was, and she still made the choice and exercised her free will.

All free will has results or consequences. When our free will is exercised and we have ultimately made a good choice, the results will be in harmony with that ultimate good and its source, even though it may result in hardship. The choice might be difficult in the beginning, but choosing the side of ultimate good results in ultimate blessing.

**When our free will is exercised and we have chosen AGAINST ultimate good, the results will put us out of harmony with God, and we will seek to be hidden from Him:**

Genesis 3:8-11: (NASB) <sup>8</sup>*They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, Where are you? <sup>10</sup>He said, I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself. <sup>11</sup>And He said, Who told you that you were naked...*



*The man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*

**How DID they know they were naked?**

*...Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?*

Once they ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil they would see the world differently. That is so sad, as their innocence was gone. They are starting to experience the immediate consequences of their disobedience.



### Now to the blame game:

**Genesis 3:12-13:** (NASB) <sup>12</sup>*The man said, the woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.* <sup>13</sup>*Then the LORD God said to the woman, what is this you have done? And the woman said, the serpent deceived me, and I ate.*

This part is so tragic that it is funny. Adam is really in a bad place and instead of taking responsibility, He blames God; after all, HE gave Adam *the woman*. Definitely not the best response. It is a good lesson for us, though.

When the exercise of our free will results in an ungodly outcome, we often try and seek cover in deflecting the blame away from our choice and towards the influences we chose to heed. We do not want it on us, so we point to outside influences.

Regardless of where they pointed their fingers, they made the choice to listen to something other than God's will. We can run but cannot hide because God can always find us.

In this exercise in Genesis, we see the development and use of free will. It did not come out with a great result, but we see the lessons God put in place on purpose so that humanity would eventually learn the value of their free will, having been created in God's image.

### UNLOCKING THE VALUE OF FREE WILL:

Humanity was created in God's image. Our mental framework was designed to have dominion as God does and to also have an unbreakable righteous will as He does. God created us with free will. Ultimately, this will result in the development of an unwavering righteousness where the will of mankind will be aligned with the will of God by their own choice. The commitment of this will needs to be proclaimed, and it needs to stand the test of time so that we can ultimately live in the image of God as we were meant to do.

God's plan from the very start was built entirely around free will.

**Has God ever taken anyone's free will away from them for the purpose of God's will being done?**

This is a big question and there are several scriptures that seem to indicate this did happen. What we need to do with a question like this is to first rely on the importance of our human free will that God himself established right from the start. We need to remember, unequivocally, that God gave humanity free will for a reason - for testing and so obedience to be more like God could be learned. In this section, we will look at whether God ever took that free will away from anyone.



**Did God "harden Pharaoh's heart" and thereby take his free will away? No!**

**Exodus 7:12-14:** (KJV) <sup>12</sup>*For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.* <sup>13</sup>*And he*





**hardened <2388>** *Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.*  
*<sup>14</sup>And the LORD said unto Moses, Pharaoh's heart is hardened, he refuseth to let the people go.*

**Hardened:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2388 *chazaq*; a primitive root;  
 to fasten upon; to seize, be strong

Though the King James Version here says God *hardened Pharaoh's heart*, other translations say Pharaoh hardened his own heart. In fact, there are 19 Old Testament scriptures that talk about Pharaoh's heart and that he hardened his own heart, or God hardened it, or some give no cause at all. **See Bonus Material for more.** Even the Apostle Paul refers to this famous heart in Romans 9:17,18.

There was a stubborn pattern established with Pharaoh and his responses. It repeats many times between him and Moses with each passing plague.

**Pharaoh continually hardened his own heart, but here is one of the many texts that says God did so as well:**

Exodus 9:12: (NASB) *And the LORD **hardened <2388>** Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.*

(Source: Marginal comment from the Revised Version Improved and Corrected [2000] translation) *When the Lord creates circumstances in which Pharaoh jumps at the temptation, Hebrew expression can say the Lord did it, even though the guilt lay with Pharaoh."*



#### **Observations:**

- Pharaoh was naturally inclined to be stubborn and proud. He had been raised to think of himself as a god from earliest childhood.
- God put him in the right place at the right time to accomplish His purposes, using Pharaoh's free will decision to obstruct the Jews leaving Egypt.
- God certainly allowed the circumstances that forced Pharaoh into making a decision. In that sense, we could say God "hardened" his heart.
- God took Pharaoh's natural propensity and used it as a tool. God can advance His plan according to the characters people already possess.
- Pharaoh may have thought he was the supreme ruler in Egypt, but God positioned Pharaoh into his position and used him as only one of the many tools for the ultimate working of God's plan. God's plan will ultimately work out for the good of everyone.
- Because Pharaoh saw himself as above everyone else, he was not going to take the word, will, threat or suggestion of a lowly human. God used that trait to glorify His own name.



It is interesting how it seems as though the ten plagues specifically take aim at the many gods of Egypt. Each plague corresponds to a specific Egyptian god.



**Exodus 7:14-24: water turned to blood**  
**HAPI – EGYPTIAN GOD OF THE NILE, A WATER BEARER**



**Exodus 7:25-8:15: frogs coming from the Nile**  
**HEKET – EGYPTIAN GODDESS OF FERTILITY WITH THE HEAD OF A FROG**



**Exodus 8:16-19: lice from the dust of the earth**  
**GEB – EGYPTIAN GOD OF THE EARTH**



**Exodus 8:20-32: swarms of flies**  
**KHEPRI – EGYPTIAN GOD OF CREATION AND REBIRTH WITH THE HEAD OF A FLY**



**Exodus 9:1-7: death of cattle and livestock**  
**HATHOR – EGYPTIAN GODDESS OF LOVE AND PROTECTION WITH THE HEAD OF A COW**



**Exodus 9:8-12: ashes turned to boils and sores**  
**ISIS – EGYPTIAN GODDESS OF MEDICINE AND PEACE**



**Exodus 9:13-35: hail**  
**NUT – EGYPTIAN GODDESS OF THE SKY**



**Exodus 10:1-20: locusts**  
**SETH – EGYPTIAN GOD OF STORMS AND DISORDER**



**Exodus 10:21-29: 3 days of complete darkness**  
**RA – EGYPTIAN GOD OF THE SUN**



**Exodus 11:1- 12:33: death of the firstborn**  
**PHARAOH – EGYPTIAN GOD WITH ULTIMATE POWER**

God is working on Pharaoh because He knows who he is - therefore, challenging him all along the way. He is letting Pharaoh know that he, Pharaoh, is not all powerful and that God is the Almighty God. In other words: *I know who you are. I know how you think, and I can use that because My plan is THE plan.*

If God had violated Pharaoh's free will, He would have just forced him to let the people go. Why go through all the drama and angst of the plagues? It was Pharaoh who chose to resist the will of God and not allow the Israelites to leave Egypt. Had Pharaoh obeyed, it would have indicated a heart that could be influenced for good. When God sent the plagues to force him to let Israel leave, God created the circumstances that led to Pharaoh's reaction. But it was Pharaoh who refused God's will and chose to respond with a hard heart.



This is also true for you and me. When we experience hard trials, we may react with bitterness and anger. If we persist in that response, we too can develop a "Pharaoh" heart that stubbornly refuses to learn from our experiences and becomes bitter.

In summary, God did not harden Pharaoh's heart but set him in the circumstances where he knew Pharaoh would be likely to respond to God's challenges by digging in his heels and resisting, again and again. Regardless of God knowing this outcome, it was Pharaoh's choice all along. He had free will and God did not tamper with it; He just used the propensity to act predictably to further His plan.



**A tender heart does not respond to anger but contemplates things more deeply and chooses to trust in God.**



Our next example is about King Saul in the Old Testament.

We drop in at the time when the prophet Samuel anoints young David as the prospective king of Israel. It would be many more years before King Saul's rule would come to an end and David would actually be the king.



Check out our CQ Kids videos:

WHO WAS KING SAUL?  
PARTS 1 & 2

[christianquestions.com/youtube](http://christianquestions.com/youtube)



Did God angrily send an evil spirit to King Saul? Did God interfere with Saul's ability to think, choose and act for himself?

**We will start to find the answer by reading the account:**

**1 Samuel 16:13-15:** (NASB) <sup>13</sup>Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. <sup>14</sup>Now the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil **spirit <7307>** from the LORD terrorized him. <sup>15</sup>Saul's servants then said to him, Behold now, an evil **spirit <7307>** from God is terrorizing you.

Did God really send a demon to possess Saul and force him to try to kill David?

There is no Hebrew word in the Old Testament that means what we would think of in English as a demon inhabiting a human body. From false religions that surrounded them, mythological creatures and false gods were common knowledge. But the Hebrew word for "spirit" here (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #7307) includes the thought of breath, wind or spirit (as that which breathes quickly in animation or agitation); in the case of temper, anger, animation, troubled, bitter, discontented; spirit as in seat of emotion - sorrowful, troubled spirit, having a temper.

This is not demon possession, but more of a mental condition. Did God give Saul mental illness? This is a legitimate question by the way the scripture is written - *an evil spirit from God terrorized him*. It sounds like God is sending him off-kilter, messing with Saul's brain.



**To understand this, we need to first understand what God did for Saul to prepare him to be king:**

**1 Samuel 10:9:** (NASB) *then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day.*

God changed his heart - originally in a positive way. Why did God do this?

We need to go back almost 40 years. God first changed Saul's heart when he was young, at the beginning of his kingship. He helped Saul to focus on what was needed of a king rather than of a farmer, which he had been. He enabled him to become a statesman, a good king. Samuel, as God's prophet at the time, became Saul's mentor, helping him to develop into a king who would take responsibility for the good of Israel. Some 40 years later, we see King Saul descending into disobedience and a feeling that he did not need to heed God's orders (through Samuel the prophet).



King Saul was instructed VERY SPECIFICALLY to slay all of the Amalekites, even their animals. But in 1 Samuel 15, in a triumphant procession, Saul comes back into the city and the prophet Samuel asks why he is hearing sounds of sheep and cattle and seeing Amalekite slaves - even the Amalekite King Agag himself is still alive! There are resulting generations of hatred between the two peoples and 1,000 years later, as a result of this disobedience by King Saul, a descendant named Haman tried to have all of the Jews killed as told in the book of Esther. This was a BIG error.

Next we need to understand the depth of Saul's rebellion and the consequence of God abandoning him.

**Saul had blatantly disobeyed a command of God and then told Samuel the people were at fault:**

1 Samuel 15:20-23: (NASB) <sup>20</sup>Then Saul said to Samuel, I did obey the voice of the LORD, and went on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. <sup>21</sup>But the people took some of the spoils, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things designated for destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal.

**Samuel sees right through this argument. Let's pay close attention to what Samuel says and compare it to what happened previously:**

<sup>22</sup>Samuel said, Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. <sup>23</sup>For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king.

Free will always has consequences. Saul had *rejected the word of the LORD*. The consequence: *God has also rejected you from being king*. Saul had worked his way up to this rebellion. This was a deep and serious disregard of God's instruction through Samuel. Samuel called him out with no measure of forgiveness. Saul was told by Samuel that he had not just made a mistake, but that this was the last straw, bringing rejection from God.

*God ceased to keep Saul's heart intact*. Remember, God changed (or touched) his heart back in 1 Samuel 10:9. God had prepared him and given him His grace and support, so that Saul could rule well as king. Now, God allowed Saul's rebellion to bring upon him the results of divination (Saul would even consult a witch!) - the sadness and emptiness of godlessness.



**Putting this all together, what does it mean that an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized Saul?**

1 Samuel 16:14-15: (NASB) <sup>14</sup>Now the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him. <sup>15</sup>Saul's servants then said to him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you.

God withdrew His favor, His overseeing of Saul's reign, His support, as well as Samuel's mentoring who never saw Saul again after this day. Without God's protection, the darkness that arose from Saul's natural personality began to flood in. *Spirit* can be translated as "an influence" or "unseen power." The unseen power of Saul's own heart needed God's grace to be an honorable king. When God's grace was removed, Saul's own natural propensities returned in





full. They had been overridden by God's grace and provision for many years at this point; this was just the final incident. Saul went mad all on his own. God only removed the dam that held the water back. God had been suppressing Saul's natural propensities.

1 Samuel 16:14-15: (this time from YLT) <sup>14</sup>*And the spirit of Jehovah turned aside from Saul, and a spirit of sadness from Jehovah terrified him;* <sup>15</sup>*and the servants of Saul say unto him, 'Lo, we pray thee, a spirit of sadness from God is terrifying thee.*

We make ourselves vulnerable when we step outside the protection of God.



Let's move on to our next situation. Did God MAKE Herod and Pilate set up Jesus to be crucified and thereby mess with their free will?



In the book of Acts, Peter and John were arrested for preaching about the resurrection of Jesus. After being released, they lifted up their

voices in prayer in front of a group of believers. We are dropping in on that prayer right after they quote Old Testament prophecies about the crucifixion of Jesus.

Acts 4:27-28: (NASB) <sup>27</sup>*For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,* <sup>28</sup>*to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.*

Were Herod and Pilate just puppets in all of this? Clearly the prophecy had to come true, so did God force it to come true, thereby violating their free will?

It certainly sounds like Herod and Pilate had no choice. But when we look closer, this is describing the fulfillment of prophecy and not any *personal* predestination. One specific principle of prophecy shows us that the actions of the people, whomever is on the scene, will be in accordance with the unfolding of God's will at that time. What do we mean by this?

**Let's look at another example of fulfilled prophecy:**

Luke 19:37-40: (NASB) <sup>37</sup>*As soon as he was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen,* <sup>38</sup>*shouting: Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!* <sup>39</sup>*Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, Teacher, rebuke your disciples.* <sup>40</sup>*But Jesus answered, I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!*



Jesus is not saying the stones would develop mouths to cry out (!); he is saying it had to be this way - this would happen no matter what. The people did what they were moved to do by the circumstances. God knew the time for that to happen was then, and this is the way prophecy unfolds. He uses the free will of mankind to accomplish His purposes. He knew the people and that the example of Jesus for the three-and-a-half years of his ministry was coming to a culmination. He knew they were ecstatic over the miracles they had seen.



He knew they would cry out - God did not manipulate the crowd, or manipulate Herod or Pilate. He used who they were to accomplish His will. He knew the reaction of the Pharisees to this open display of the adoration from the people would pressure Herod and Pilate into their roles and He used it.

### UNLOCKING THE VALUE OF FREE WILL:



God's endowment of free will upon humanity is a sacred gift. This does not keep God from reading a heart and using its intentions and desires as tools in His plan. God has done this right from the start – even with the devious heart of Satan!

God even took Satan's devious nature and wove it into the accomplishment of His will. God does not interfere, but He uses wherever that free will leads us to bring His plan to fruition. This is inspiring! It is fascinating to see how deeply our free will affects the big picture of life and how God so carefully protects it.

**Doesn't humanity being born into the inherited sin of Adam undermine any free will we could have?**

Philosophical arguments against human free will stand on a concept called "determinism," which we define in a moment. The bottom-line question is simple: If humanity does not have a choice but to be born sinful, has God's plan doomed them to choices that lead to failure?

In other words, what good is our supposed "free will" since no matter what we do, we die anyway?

(Source: Free Will and Neuroscience: From Explaining Freedom Away to New Ways of Operationalizing and Measuring It) The main challenge to free will has been determinism: the view that everything that happens (human decisions and actions included) is the consequence of sufficient conditions for its occurrence (Berofsky, 2011). More specifically, "It is the argument that all mental phenomena and actions are also, directly or indirectly, causally produced—according to the laws of nature (such as those of physics and neurobiology)—by previous events that lie beyond the control of the agents" (Lavazza and Inglese, 2015).

Determinism says all behavior has a predictable cause. There are internal and external forces over which we have no control. No matter what one does, the situation was always going to end up like it did, so there really is no choice. A classic example is that children with violent parents will, in turn, become violent parents through observation and imitation. It is all predetermined, therefore free will is just an illusion.



**Before the Flood, God saw that the human race was corrupted by fallen angels. He also saw that the human race had made clear choices as to what they were going to follow:**

**Genesis 6:5, 8-9:** (NASB) <sup>5</sup>*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...* <sup>8</sup>*But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.* <sup>9</sup>*...Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.*

**God gave them opportunity to repent, and they did not:**

**2 Peter 2:5:** (NASB) *and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly.*

Noah proved there was a way to live above the fray - just like we have choices today to try to live righteously.

*A preacher of righteousness* - Noah spoke out, giving the people another perspective, another choice. They chose not to listen.

Let's go back to those three conditions of free will we quoted from *Free Will and Neuroscience: From Explaining Freedom Away to New Ways of Operationalizing and Measuring It*.



## FREE WILL

1. The ability to do otherwise
2. Control over one's choices
3. Responsiveness to reasons

Noah demonstrated these conditions to everyone around him. He was the example of a way to live righteously in an evil environment and was clear on why he was doing what he was doing.



**Even though choice existed, does it seem fair?**

**After all, all of humanity is wired to sin:**

**Psalms 51:5:** (NASB) *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.*

How is it fair if we have no choice but to be sinful? We will answer this soon.

Let's look closer at our theme text.



Joshua recounts God's grace to Israel and their inheritance of the Promised Land. He is old and will soon die, and he realizes the power the people have to make choices.

**He explains to them their choices:**

**Joshua 24:14-15:** (NASB) <sup>14</sup>*Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.* <sup>15</sup>*If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*



# FREE WILL

1. The ability to do otherwise
2. Control over one's choices
3. Responsiveness to reasons

The people had free will and initially responded that *yes, they would serve the Lord*. Both free will and choice were present.

Going back to determinism - where no matter what we do, the end result will be the same - is this not in some sense true since the Bible tells us the end of the story? Eventually, paradise lost will be paradise found and all that mankind lost in the Garden will be restored in the kingdom. "God's will" WILL be done, and no person or even evil entity like Satan can stop that. It is already as good as done. Now we are just playing it out in real time.



Do we really have a choice?

Yes, we do. It is true that "God's will" WILL be done, that the plan of God is perfect and prophecy shows us what will happen. However, each individual can choose to be a part of that plan or not. People can currently choose to do good and that will help them to do better things later in the kingdom. It will be more difficult in the future if we now choose to follow our own way. Each of us has free will to decide where we will fit into God's pre-determined plan. Conversely, (after resurrection) we can choose that we do not want to be a part of it.

Even though the Bible does not teach eternal torment, we know that in the resurrection the decisions people make today still have consequences. It will be harder to make amends and be rehabilitated for those who follow a degrading path of sin and evil.



Do mental illnesses appear to undermine the concept of freewill?  
For example, people experiencing depression lose control over their emotions.

Inevitably, unless it is incredibly severe, people suffering from trauma and mental illness still have choices. People with anxiety, depression, bipolar, post-traumatic stress and other conditions can choose to attack the issue even though it is not easy.

**Let's look at the choice that leads to eternal life:**

**Ephesians 2:1-2,4-6:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. <sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,





## FREE WILL

1. The ability to do otherwise
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*You were dead in your trespasses and sins - God called you, and you decided to look at the choice to either stay where you were or to rise up to a higher level in sacrifice. You responded to the understanding of the sacrifice of Jesus. We elevate ourselves by our choices, through God's grace.*

Noah's day had fallen angels that corrupted everyone except Noah and his family. In Joshua's day, there was just one chosen nation of Israel, and everyone else was toast. Now during this age of the gospel message we are living in, a call goes out...but not to everyone. Jesus spoke in parables so that people would not understand. How unfair is that?



Hold that thought! We are putting together the big picture for the "Aha!" moment.

**God's will and plan brings a SECOND opportunity for choosing godly righteousness to all sinners:** (The first opportunity is in the Ephesians scripture we just read - to choose to follow Jesus at the present time.)

**Romans 5:18:** (NASB) *So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.*

Here is where one CAN say we have no choice. We have no choice to be born and no choice of whether or not we want to come back in the resurrection. God's plan predetermined that all of humanity will have a legitimate opportunity to see righteousness for what it really is.

Because Jesus died for Adam and his progeny, we have no choice but to accept the grace of God's gift of resurrection from death. What a beautiful "non-choice" this is! We were stuck in sin, and now we will be "stuck" with the results of the righteousness of Jesus. The gift is free to everyone, but what each person does with this gift becomes their choice, as they will have to choose righteousness in order to maintain life in the future kingdom.

**1 Peter 2:12:** (NASB) *Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

Interestingly, those who were against our Christian walk (the Gentiles or non-believers) in the past are now praising God in the future kingdom. Obviously, they are not burning in hell because they are glorifying God. Also, in the future kingdom most will want to obey God based on a comparison with their past experience with sin and death. They will obey because they want to, not because they have to.

Remember when we talked about God creating man in His image and having dominion over the earth? Humankind now has the experience of evil, darkness and making wrong choices. Now all of that is in our memory banks to be used when making future decisions. When given the choice in the kingdom, it is thought the majority will choose righteousness. Godliness is the only way.



We want to align our human free will with God's will:



**1. God's Will is Perfect.**

God's plan is for the human will to learn perfection.

**2. God's Will is Committed.**

God's plan is for the human will to learn true godly commitment.

**3. God's Will is Time-Tested.**

God's plan is for the human will to be provable and faithful over time.



Going back to our previous question, even though choice existed, does it seem fair since we are all sinful?

God's fairness is shown in the broad perspective of our plan. God's plan will bring righteousness to every human being on an equal basis so they can then choose appropriately. God is more than fair because it is His grace, love, and wisdom that brings us to this righteous life. We see the purpose of free will is to learn from the bad and honor the good for all of eternity and be like God as He intended us to be. He gave us free will so that we would learn from this life and choose His way in the future. How much better to be able to choose righteousness rather than to be forced into it!

### UNLOCKING THE VALUE OF FREE WILL:



The free will that humanity now has is a gift from God. It now teaches the sinful world the power of choice and the harsh consequences of sin. Because Jesus ransomed everyone from Adam's sin, all of humankind will be resurrected. They will learn how this power of choice can bring the eternal results of godly righteousness. Humanity's free will brings God glory!

When we talk about human free will, we get stuck when talking about it in terms of the sinfulness of today and the unfairness of this world. Be assured that God's plan gives us this as an experience so that later on - and for eternity - we can reflect on this short period of time and say: "I remember that and now I can choose in a godly way to praise and honor God my Creator." We will have free will to serve our God who loves us and Jesus who died for us, thereby giving us that choice. Free will is a gift.



Join us next week for our podcast on December 20, 2021  
Ep. 1209: How Do We Keep Christmas About Jesus?

*So, do I really have free will?  
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.

### Bonus Material and Study Questions

#### God hardened Pharaoh's heart:

Exodus 7:3: (NASB) *But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.*

Exodus 9:12: (NASB) *And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.*

Exodus 10:1: (NASB) *Then the Lord said to Moses, Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, so that I may perform these signs of Mine among them*

Exodus 10:20: (NASB) *But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go.*

Exodus 10:27: (NASB) *But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go.*

Exodus 11:10: (NASB) *So Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh; yet the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go out of his land.*

Exodus 14:4: (NASB) *And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord. And they did so.*

Exodus 14:8: (NASB) *So the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly.*

#### God hardened the hearts of the Egyptians:

Exodus 14:17: (NASB) *And as for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen.*



### **Pharaoh hardened his own heart:**

**Exodus 8:15:** (NASB) *But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.*

**Exodus 8:32:** (NASB) *But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go.*

**Exodus 9:34:** (NASB) *But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had stopped, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.*

**Exodus 10:3:** (NASB) *So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews says: How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, so that they may serve Me.*

### **He was stubborn:**

**Exodus 13:15:** (NASB) *And it came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD put to death every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from human firstborns to animal firstborns. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, every firstborn of a womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.*

### **No source given of the reason for the hardened heart:**

**Exodus 7:13:** (NASB) *Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.*

**Exodus 7:14:** (NASB) *Then the Lord said to Moses, Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go.*

**Exodus 7:22:** (NASB) *But the soothsayer priests of Egypt did the same with their secret arts; and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.*

**Exodus 8:19:** (NASB) *Then the soothsayer priests said to Pharaoh, This is the finger of God. But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.*

**Exodus 9:7:** (NASB) *And Pharaoh sent men, and they learned that, behold, not even one of the livestock of Israel was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.*

**Exodus 9:35:** (NASB) *So Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.*

### **A few scriptures that help us to understand free will in action:**

**Proverbs 6:16-22:** (NASB) <sup>16</sup>*There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: <sup>17</sup>Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup>A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, <sup>19</sup>A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers. <sup>20</sup>My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother; <sup>21</sup>Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. <sup>22</sup>When you walk about, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you.*

**Deuteronomy 30:19-20:** (NASB) <sup>19</sup>*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, <sup>20</sup>by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.*





**Ezekiel 18:30-32:** (NASB) <sup>30</sup>Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. <sup>31</sup>Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? <sup>32</sup>For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, declares the Lord GOD. Therefore, repent and live.

**Galatians 5:16-17:** (NASB) <sup>16</sup>But I say, walk by the spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For the flesh sets its desire against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

### God's will IS thoroughly reliable:

**Hebrews 6:13-18:** (NASB) <sup>13</sup>For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, <sup>14</sup>saying, I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you. <sup>15</sup>And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup>For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. <sup>17</sup>In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, <sup>18</sup>so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

A few examples of God using the sinful free will of humanity to serve His plan and will:

### Joseph telling his brothers about his journey and how God had protected him, even though they betrayed him:

**Genesis 50:20:** (NASB) As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

**Psalms 76:10:** (NASB) For the wrath of man shall praise You; with a remnant of wrath You will gird Yourself.

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# Study QUESTIONS

## Ep. 1208: Do We Really Have Free Will?

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1208-free-will/>

See:  **CQ Rewind**  
SHOW NOTES

1. List and explain the three criteria for determining free will from the article by Andrea Lavazza.
2. What do we know about God's will?
  - a. What is the difference between "complete" and "flawless"? What is another way to say this? (See James 1:17-18)
  - b. Is God constrained by His own natural laws? What drives God's decisions? (See Daniel 2:19-23, Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18)
  - c. What aspect of God's plan was predicted right from the beginning of man? What was the hint given? (See Genesis 3:15, James 3:17-18)
3. In what way were we created in God's *image* according to His *likeness*? What could have happened to the Garden of Eden if Adam had *not* sinned? Why was the garden the perfect environment in which to learn to be like God? (See Genesis 1:26, 2:8-9, 15-17)
4. Using the criteria above, describe the process of Adam and Eve's free will choice to disobey. What was Lucifer's part in this choice? What was Lucifer's motivation? How did this change the relationship between Adam, Eve and God? How did it change Adam and Eve? (See Genesis 3:1-13, Isaiah 14:12-14)
5. Did God remove the free will from these men in the Bible - Pharaoh, Saul, Herod and Pilate?
  - a. How did God "harden" Pharaoh's heart? Did Pharaoh have a choice in the decisions he made? How should Pharaoh's example warn us of our reaction to our hard experiences? (See Exodus 7:12-14, 9:12, Romans 9:17, 18)
  - b. How did God support Saul as he became king of Israel? How did Saul disobey the Lord's instructions with the Amalekites? Did an evil spirit from the Lord terrorize Saul, causing mental illness? Did God remove Saul's free will by sending him this evil spirit? Explain. (See 1 Samuel 10:9, 15:20-23, 16:13-15)
  - c. Were Herod and Pilate predestined to crucify Jesus? Were Jesus' disciples predestined to cry out joyfully when Jesus passed? How does God use the free will of mankind to further His plan? (See Acts 4:27-28, Luke 19:37-40)
6. How did Noah and Joshua exemplify positive free will choices? What can we take from their examples? (See Genesis 6:5-9, 2 Peter 2:5, Joshua 24:14-15)
7. What choice do you have at this time in your life in regards to your walk with God? If you do not choose the current opportunity, what choice will you have in the future? Which path have you chosen? (See Ephesians 2:1-6, Romans 5:18, 1 Peter 2:12) What is the purpose of God creating man with the ability to exercise free will? How do you use your free will?