



*What God Wills,
Happens;
What He Wills Not,
Won't*

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EVERY WANDERING LOST SHEEP WILL BE FOUND

What man of you having 100 sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the 99 in the desert and go after the one having been lost, until he find it? (Luke 15:4).

This parable is a picture of God, Who wills to find every lost sheep and will accomplish it. It is fascinating that God not only seeks the sheep but continues until He finds it. Isaiah 29:24 reports that “*Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding.*”

“Lost” comes from *apollymi*, a Greek verb which, means “to destroy,” when applied to an inanimate object, but when referring to a living person, it can indicate “... to kill (by taking a life), cause to lose (especially a life); to die or perish” (*Goodrick and Kolenberger's Greek and Hebrew Dictionary (GK)*). So, the word means “lost” and it includes those lost sheep who are also “dead.” Nothing in the parable or the rest of Scripture shuts off salvation after the hour of death. So the word “lost” actually encompasses *lost in death*. This parable supports the idea that God will someday redeem all such lost souls.

Luke 19:10 uses the same verb *apollymi* this way: “*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which had been lost.*” The lost sheep in Luke 15:4 represents lost people, all of whom will be sought out, saved and reconciled to God. Paul knew that if only the lost among the living could be saved, then believers would be the most pitiable people on earth: “*If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men*” (I Corinthians 15:19). If the dead who are lost were permanently consigned to everlasting torment in hell, living with that knowledge of such austere punishment would make Christians the most miserable people on earth. Isaiah 49:6, however, proclaims that Christ is a light to all of the Gentiles, and that salvation is not limited just to Israel or to those who are alive: “*I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*”

ALL WILL BE HEADED UP UNDER ONE HEAD, JESUS CHRIST

... *He purposed within Himself, when the times have reached fulfillment, to head up all under one head in Christ, both in the heavens and on the earth in Him* (Ephesians 1:9-10).

The word “*purposed*” is the verb *protithēmi* which is found three times in the Greek New Testament, having been translated three ways in the NIV: “*planned*,” “*presented*” and “*purposed*.” When it was a human, like Paul in Romans 1:13, who did the planning, the outcome was uncertain. For example, Paul, speaking to the believers in Rome, wrote, “... *I planned [protithēmi] many times to come to you, but have been prevented from doing so until now ...*”; but when *protithēmi* was used about a plan of God, as in Romans 3:25 where it was used about Christ’s death for the sins of the world, the outcome was quite certain: “*Whom God purposed [protithēmi] for a Propitiatory shelter, through faith in His blood ...*” God’s plan to send Christ was carried out flawlessly.

In Ephesians 1:9, *protithēmi* (“purposed”) was also used in its fixed sense about a plan of God. It was made doubly firm in that God’s purposing to “*head up all under one head in Christ*,” arose out of His innermost being: “*He purposed within Himself*.” Nothing could be more incontrovertible than God’s developing a plan from His inner being to head up all on earth and heaven in Christ. Philippians 2:10 includes all “*under the earth*,” which covers the dead as well. The ultimate reconciliation of mankind is a “done deal,” a *fait accompli*. There is no room in the Bible for the “everlasting hell” concept, because all will be included under Christ’s blessed dominion.

ALL WILL BE WORKED OUT ACCORDING TO THE PURPOSE OF GOD’S WILL

In Whom [Christ] our lot was also cast for an inheritance, predestined according to the plan of Him Who works all according to the purpose of His will (Ephesians 1:11).

The “*lot*” of those who receive the faith of Christ is cast with Jesus for an inheritance. The believers have been predestined in keeping with the plan of Him Who works all according to the purpose of His will. Each of the bold-face words indicates certainty, and together they show an end result which is firmer than the Rock of Gibraltar!

When a “*lot*” is cast, an issue was permanently decided. The verb “*predestined*” (*proorizō*) means “decided beforehand” (GK). “*Plan*” is an accurate translation of the Greek noun *prothesis*. It indicates a fixed program of events. The inheritance which lies ahead is based on the plan of One who “*works all*” (Greek, *energōō*) according to the “*purpose*” (*boulen*) of His “*will*” (*the lēma*). These six bold-faced words in one verse emphasize the incontrovertible manner in which God works all according to His will. Whatever He wills is going to happen, and nothing can stand in its way, not even man’s “free will.” There is an unwavering resolve on God’s part seen in this verse. The final result is that all will transpire exactly as God has proposed, for believers and for all humanity as well.

GOD WILL BRING ALL MEN TO SALVATION AND TO FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH

... *For this is right and acceptable before God our Savior, Who wills [thēlo] all men to be saved, and to come to full knowledge of the truth* (I Timothy 2:3-4).

In this verse, the verb *thelō* (“wills”) means that God exercises His immutable plan to save all people. There are several other verses in which *thelō* indicates absolute certainty. James 4:15, for example, says, “*Instead you ought to say ‘If The Lord wills [thelō], we will live and also do this or that.’*” One’s very life depends on the operation of God’s will. Using *thelō* in Acts 18:21, Paul had this to say when he left Ephesus: “*I will return to you again, if God wills [thelō] ...*” Paul understood the fixity of God’s plan in all matters. He knew that if it was not God’s design that he return to Ephesus, he would not.

One way to understand the firmness of *thelō* in I Timothy 2:4 is to determine what topic was under discussion. Previously (I Timothy 2:1) Paul had been encouraging Timothy to make petitions, prayers, thanksgiving, and intercessions for kings, others in authority, and for *all people*.

One result of such universal prayer would be the ability to lead quiet, holy, godly and productive lives (:2). Another result of broad-based prayer is that the believers will appreciate the fact that God is going to save *all people* and bring them to full knowledge of the truth. When believers pray broadly for people, they are getting “in step” with God Who wills and plans to save them *all*. Praying for *all people* helps Christians “get with the program” of God!

Some of the ways the NIV translators rendered *thelō* in the New Testament are: want(s)(ed), will(s), is willing, desire(s), would, wish(es), choose(s)(ing), longed, decided, delights, and determined. While the key meaning of *thelō* in the context of I Timothy 2:3-4 is “wills,” each of the other concepts contained in these English words sheds more light on God’s outlook on the great work of redeeming everyone. For example, reconciliation of all is something God really wants and wishes to accomplish; He *desires* to *save all men*. The Lord longed for such a comprehensive work to occur. He determined to do so – not grudgingly, but delighting in the task.

GOD’S WILL WILL TAKE PLACE ON EARTH, AS IT DOES IN HEAVEN

Thy kingdom come. Thy will [thelēma] be done, as in heaven, on earth also (Matthew 6:10).

This model prayer links directly to words in I Timothy 2:4, “*God our Savior Who wills all men to be saved ...*” A major part of God’s will is that all people experience salvation. So when God’s will (*thelēma* of Matthew 6:10) has been accomplished on earth, then the saving of all souls (*thelō* in I Timothy 2:4) will have likewise been completed! Whether realizing it or not, people who pray the Lord’s Prayer are thus actually asking God to save everyone.

JESUS PRAYED THAT THE FATHER’S WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED, NOT HIS OWN

Going forward a little, He [Christ] fell upon His face, offering prayer, and saying – “My Father! If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me, – Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39).

With His face to the ground, Christ uttered these requests to His Father. Although flinching at the horrible hours that lay ahead of Him, Christ asked for the Father’s will [*thelēma*] rather than His Own. Christ knew that the Father had sent Him to be the Savior of the world (I John 4:10), and He wanted to fulfill that grandiose plan, even knowing the great cost involved!

CHRIST IS GOING TO GATHER THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM UNDER HIS “WINGS”

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who were sent to her! How often I wanted [thelō] to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling [willed not – thelē] (Matthew 23:37).

Whatever God “wills” [thelō] in Scripture will always come to pass, even if the event is delayed. In Matthew 23:37 and in Luke 13:34 Christ expressed a deep desire for close fellowship with Israel when He longingly made these remarks.

Although it may seem that the rebellious will of the people in Jerusalem overcame and outflanked Jesus’ desire, this is going to change. The fellowship that Christ wanted with Jerusalem is going to take place because “*all Israel shall be saved ...*” Romans 11:26. God intends to operate His rule of earth from Jerusalem, through Christ, using His beloved, redeemed Israelites to carry out the task.

WHAT GOD WILLS NOT TO HAPPEN, WILL INVARIABLY NOT OCCUR

Thus it is not the will [thelēma] in front of your Father Who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish (Matthew 18:14).

Christ made it quite plain here and in the parallel text (Luke 15:4-7) that it is not in the Father’s agenda for even one of the “*little ones*” to perish. This very special verse comes right after Christ’s parable of the lost sheep. The words of Isaiah 14:26-27 apply here:

This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart Him? His hand is stretched out and who can turn it back?

WHAT GOD WILL DO AND WHAT HE WON’T

God wills (*boulomai*) no one to perish, and they won’t; God wills (*boulomai*) everyone to repent, and they will.

What God Won’t Do:

*The Lord is not tardy as to the promise, as some are deeming tardiness, but is patient because of you, not intending [Greek verb *boulomai*] any to perish ... (II Peter 3:9).*

This verse is not speaking about believers. It is not showing that God proceeds slowly so that all of the elect will have time to place faith in Christ before His return. Such an exegesis is clearly inaccurate. The passage points instead to the ultimate salvation of all people.

The word “*intending*” is a good translation of the Greek verb *boulomai*. *Boulomai* appears 37 times in the New Testament, where the NIV adopted several words to translate it, including the following: want(ed)(ing), choose, chose, planned, willing, determined, etc., GK.

When *boulomai* deals with the intentions of human beings throughout Scripture, its outcome is somewhat problematic, entailing results that might or might not happen. This uncertain outcome is illustrated in the case of what Barnabas wanted to do: “Barnabas also intended [*boulomai*] to take with them John, surnamed Mark ...” (Acts 15:37). But a repeat missionary trip by these three men (Paul, Barnabas and John Mark) never occurred, even though it was desired (*boulomai*) by Barnabas, a fine Christian. Acts 15:37 is one of the many Scriptures demonstrating that what humans intend (*boulomai*) may or may not take place.

Boulomai has an assured completion when attached to God’s work, as is also seen in the different “gifts” conferred on various Christians by the Holy Spirit: “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit and He gives them to each man, just as He determines [*boulomai*]” (I Corinthians 12:11). This passage is an example of the many Scriptures proving that what God purposes (*boulomai*) to do always transpires. II Peter 3:9 is very similar in that it speaks of God’s will, not man’s. It proves that God wills (*boulomai*) that not any people perish. Surely none of them will!

What God Will Do:

... But [God is willing] all to make room for repentance” (II Peter 3:9).

This is one of the many Bible passages in which the Greek verb *boulomai* has been used in conjunction with God’s plan, not man’s. This is not a weak whim or a vague wish that may or may not be accomplished. It is instead an expression of God’s holy will, which certainly will be fulfilled. All people of all time will repent.

A GRAND FINALE

As a result of all that God does and does not will, an amazing reconciliation scenario appears in the end, a picture in which God’s every wish and desire has been fulfilled. God’s purpose for every last human will have been accomplished. Mankind will have been headed up under one beneficent head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Humanity will be safe at last from sin, having been purified through Christ’s great work and God’s wise remedial judgments. Each person will rejoice in full knowledge of the truth. Not one single soul will permanently perish. Every hardened sinner will have repented, and God will be “All in all,” as stated in I Corinthians 15:28. Is it not what God wills? Will it not take place?

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