

Does Jeremiah 19:5 Mean That God is Not Omniscient?

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Some Bible critics use this verse to deny the perfect foreknowledge of God. But the believer can quickly demolish the critics' argument using sound principles of Biblical interpretation. It is vital that we do so, because the issue the critics raise is no obscure point of theology; it attacks the very heart of the Gospel.

The Critic's Argument

Some Bible critics (including some who embrace the "open theism" heresy) argue that Jeremiah 19:5 means that God is not omniscient - that the people of Judah invented ways of pagan worship that God did not foresee or foreknow. Here is the passage in context, with the phrase in question in bold:

4. "Because they have forsaken Me and made this an alien place, because they have burned incense in it to other gods whom neither they, their fathers, nor the kings of Judah have known, and have filled this place with the blood of the innocents
5. (they have also built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or speak, **nor did it come into My mind**),
6. therefore behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that this place shall no more be called Tophet or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter."

The same thought is repeated in Jeremiah 32:35 -

And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, **neither came it into my mind**, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

The Bible Believer's Answer

The Scripture-driven Christian can quickly demolish the critic's argument, that God did not foreknow Judah's despicable acts of paganism, by employing sound principles of Biblical interpretation. Two of the foremost principles are these:

1. The Bible is its own infallible interpreter, as stated in 1 Corinthians 2:13 and elsewhere. When we have a problem understanding the Word of God, our infallible interpretive authority is the Word itself.
2. Because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21), Scripture bears the attributes of God Himself. Three of those attributes especially bear upon the passage before us: God is absolutely, perfectly holy (e.g., Isaiah 57:15, Habakkuk 1:13). He possesses perfect, eternal knowledge of all events past, present, and future (e.g., Proverbs 5:21, 15:13; Psalm 139:2-3; Isaiah 40:26-27; Isaiah 46:9-10). And, God never contradicts Himself (e.g., 1 Samuel 15:29; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). In fact, for God to have less than perfectly comprehensive knowledge of all things, or to contradict Himself to the slightest degree, would themselves be violations of His holiness.

If we keep these attributes of God and His Word clearly in mind, the answer to the argument of the Bible critic concerning Jeremiah 19:5 is likewise very clear. We can refute the critic in two steps.

Step one: We must eliminate the wrong interpretation. Because the Bible makes it clear that God never contradicts Himself, and that He possesses eternal and comprehensive knowledge of all things, the phrase "nor did it come into My mind" cannot mean that the people of Judah had done something that was outside of God's perfect foreknowledge. Nothing ever takes the eternally omniscient God by surprise, not even our deepest sin. If that were true, God would not be God. And if that were true, we could have no certainty that Christ paid the penalty for all our sins - there might be some future sin that God did not foresee in the death of His Son. So the issue we are dealing with is no obscure point of theology; it goes to the very heart of the Gospel.

So much for the critic's misinterpretation. But we must also establish the correct interpretation. It is not enough to say what God's Word does *not* mean; we must firmly establish what it *does* mean.

That brings us to step two: We must focus on the context. We have eliminated the possibility of lack of foreknowledge on God's part by paying attention to the *broad context* of all of Scripture, which boldly sets forth the attributes of God and His Word, and the necessity of comparing Scripture with Scripture. In order to establish the true meaning of the phrase "nor did it come into My mind," we now focus upon the *local context* of Jeremiah 19:5.

We find that the essence of the context is that the people of Judah are about to experience God's judgment because they have violated God's absolute holiness. In worshipping the pagan gods of the surrounding nations and engaging in their most despicable practices, Judah was doing something that God "did not command or speak" - something that was foreign to His holiness. They had made the land God had given them, and in which He had condescended to dwell with them, "an alien place." The phrase "nor did it come into My mind" indicates not a lack of foreknowledge on God's part, but rather that to entertain the thought of such vile deeds, much less to command it, would be completely and utterly foreign to the nature of God.

Comfort to the Believer, A Warning to the Critic

We can quench the fiery darts of the Bible critic, who is the instrument of our ultimate enemy, Satan, when we wage war by God's rules of engagement - putting on the whole armor of God, taking up the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:10-18). The problem of the Bible critic is that he refuses to be bound by God's rules; his rebellious spirit makes up its own rules. In 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Paul states that the preaching of the cross itself is foolishness to such a person, and that God will destroy the wisdom of those who exalt themselves against Christ, who is true wisdom.

The Word of God gives both solid comfort to the believer, and a stern warning to the Bible critic: "Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:5-6).

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