

May 23, 2004 by Steve Brandon



Does God Know the Future?

Isaiah 40-48

1. To be God is to know the future
2. A Specific Example
3. His knowledge of the future is exhaustive

For several months now, I have been thinking about preaching on the foreknowledge of God, and have been looking for a good opportunity to do so. And this week seems to be to be as good a time to do so than any. Last week, we finished up our exposition of Matthew 17, so we have somewhat of a natural break before we get to chapter 18. Additionally, my last 12 sermons have come from the gospel of Matthew. A break from Matthew would be good for us. It might come like a refreshing rain. But perhaps the most compelling reason is that the very last verse of Matthew 17 is a demonstration of the foreknowledge of Jesus Christ. Jesus knew that there would be a fish in the sea with a coin in its mouth that Peter would catch to pay the temple tax. And so, this week, I want to step back from the text of Matthew and think about the foreknowledge of God. You might think of this morning's message a bit like a footnote to last week's message. I want for us to think about what God knows of the future.

My sermon is entitled, "Does God Know the Future?" On the one hand, this ought to be a simple question. The confession of the church of Jesus Christ throughout all time has overwhelmingly affirmed that God knows all things. He knows everything that has ever taken place. He knows everything that ever will take place. This is part of what it means to be God -- to know all things, past, present and future. If you would go through the annals of church history, you would find an overwhelming agreement on this issue. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A. D.) believed this. In his book, "The City of God," he wrote, "to confess, that God exists, and at the same time to deny that He has foreknowledge of future things, is the most manifest folly." ^[1] All of the Reformers believed this - Martin Luther, John Calvin, and even James Arminius. John Calvin wrote, "[God] foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place." ^[2] And Arminius (a man who you won't hear me quote very often), wrote, "[God] knew from all eternity those individuals who would, through his preventing grace, believe, and, through his subsequent grace would persevere." ^[3]

In 1647, when the Westminster Confession was finally completed, it includes a section that speaks about God's knowledge of the future. It reads, "God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." ^[4] In 1689, this exact phraseology was included in the London Baptist Confession as well.

Does God know the future? Throughout all times, the church has emphatically said, "Yes!" But, in recent years, there has been a theological movement in our land that would deny the exhaustive foreknowledge of God. There are those in our land today that would deny that God knows everything about the future. They say that much of the future is undetermined and unknown, so, of course, God cannot know it. Those who believe this are often called "Open Theists" in the sense that they believe that God is open to all sorts of possibilities for the future. Sometimes this system of thinking is referred to as "Open Theism" or the "Open View of God."

Now, on the one hand, this isn't anything new. There have always been those who have taught divergent views of God, alternate ways of salvation, and relative moralities. This has always taken place in the liberal seminaries, churches, and public universities. But, what is somewhat unique about this teaching is that it is making inroads in conservative seminaries, and in evangelical churches. In the seminaries, this teaching is being tolerated. In the pulpits, this teaching is being spread through the church. Many are being led astray. Books and articles are being written about this topic. It is being debated in the academic community as well as in the church community.

In recent years, one battleground for these matters has been in the "Baptist General Conference," which has about 1,000 churches participating in the conference. The conference oversees Bethel College and Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota. There are two key popular figures on opposite sides of this debate. Both of them are pastors of large congregations in Minneapolis. Both of them are teaching or have taught at Bethel Seminary. Their names are Gregory Boyd and John Piper. Gregory Boyd is a pastor of Woodland Hills Church in Minneapolis. He also teaches at Bethel Seminary. He has written several books on this topic, the most central of which is entitled, "God of the Possible," which is subtitled, "A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God." This past week, I got my hands on this book and read it from cover to cover to understand where he is coming from so that I might fully understand his position. John Piper is a pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis. He used to teach at Bethel Seminary. He is very outspoken in seeking to uphold the supremacy of God in all things. In fact, the mission of Bethlehem Baptist Church is the same as the life goal of John Piper. He and the church exists "to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ." Naturally, John Piper would seek to resist with all of his being the teaching of Open Theism.

After several years of discussions and meetings within the Baptist General Conference, it all came to a head in June 2000, when the conference met for its annual meeting. At that meeting, two resolutions were passed. The first said, "Be it resolved that we, the delegates of the Baptist General Conference (who are also the delegates of Bethel College and Seminary) affirm that God's knowledge of all past, present and future events is exhaustive; and, we also believe that the "openness" view of God's foreknowledge is contrary to our fellowship's historic understanding of God's omniscience." In other words, the conference declared that the Open view of God is wrong and contrary to the historic teaching of the Baptist General Conference. So far, so good. But then, in a strange, post-modern sort of way, the conference affirmed

by a close vote (423-363 or 54% to 46%) that, "[open theist] Dr. [Gregory] Boyd's views [do] not warrant his termination as a member of the Bethel College faculty and by inference that his views fall within the accepted bounds of the evangelical spectrum." In other words, they declared that though they believed that Dr. Boyd's views are entirely wrong and totally contrary to what Christians have historically believed and taught, his views are still acceptable for them.

When you understand what Open Theists believe about God, you will see that their God is quite different than the God of historic Christianity. I believe them to be two different Gods. Yet, their views are tolerated within the evangelical circle! And so, the Baptist General Conference remains divided on this issue with the majority of people willing to tolerate this Open View of God. Only time will tell the true impact of this. Personally, I believe that this is a step toward liberalism. It is how it always takes place. Rather than standing firm, a little compromise is made here. Later, another little compromise is made there. After a generation, you look up and the ship is heading a different direction. You have lost your bearings. Everything for which you have worked and labored is now being torn down or denied.

So, why did I tell you what took place four years ago at the annual meeting of the Baptist General Conference meeting? We aren't even a part of that group. It's simple. As this doctrine has made inroads into the Baptist General Conference, and as this doctrine continues to be propagated, and as this doctrine continues to gain more and more adherents, we will encounter it in the future. Indeed, we have encountered it already.

As we go forward as a church, it is of great importance that we view God correctly. Over forty years ago, A. W. Tozer wrote,

"The gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that compose the church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God." [\[5\]](#)

Tozer goes on to explain how important it is that our minds conceive God as nearly as possible to what God is actually like. It's not what we say about God that is important. It's not what we know about God that is important. Of utmost importance is what we believe deep in our hearts and are convinced God is like. Tozer writes,

"that our idea of God correspond as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us. ... A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well." [\[5\]](#)

And Tozer is so right. If your view of God is wrong, it will affect many areas of your life. It will affect your prayer life. It will affect your worship. It will affect your evangelism. It will affect your confidence. It will affect your faith in God. But perhaps most important, it will affect how you respond to the difficulties that come your way. Trials are coming in your life. When they come, you will find comfort only in a God who is entirely in control of the situation, and committed to your good and His greater glory.

If you think that God doesn't know the future, you are headed for difficult times. When the tragedy strikes your life, and you are completely confused as to why it took place, You won't find comfort in a God who is equally as surprised at the turn of events as you are. He had no idea that your husband would die in an automobile accident! That's not comforting. You will find comfort only in a God who knew what was going to take place, and caused it to take place, because He is in control of all things and has designed the circumstances of your life. He knew full well that your husband would die in an automobile accident! He brought it about for your good and for His glory. We may never understand why tragic things happen, but you will find comfort in knowing that God does understand.

When you encounter financial difficulties, losing a job or not getting enough sales, you won't find comfort in a God who didn't anticipate your struggles. Your only hope is that things might turn around. With this view of God, this is God's hope as well! But, you will find comfort in a God who is in control of your job and of your sales. He knows of your difficulties and has brought them about for your good and for His glory! Your joy is that God knew that your situation was coming and has a purpose in it. When you are slandered for your faith, when you speak the good news of the grace of God that is found in Christ Jesus and are hated for it, you won't find comfort in a God who doesn't know what more persecutions you will face. But, you will find comfort in a God who has planned your days and will keep you immortal until the day that He has ordained for you to breathe your last.

This is how life works. When you see God as He really is (entirely sovereign and ruling and reigning upon this earth), you can stand firm in the midst of incredible difficulties in life. You can do this, precisely because you know that God's ways are perfect and nothing has caught God off guard and all things are proceeding according to His plan. The open view of God undermines all of these things!

My aim this morning is to present you with a Biblical view of God as it relates to His knowledge of the future. My prayer for you is that you will love and embrace and cherish the God of the Bible. And so, when the difficulties of life come your way, you will stand firm. When you think of your own future, you will be emboldened to trust in His ways. When you hear someone presenting a distorted view of God, you might hear it, understand it and resist it.

So, "Does God Know the Future?" Yes He does. Does God know the future exhaustively? Yes. "God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." [\[4\]](#) To demonstrate this, I want to take us to the book of Isaiah. My message this morning will be taken from Isaiah 40-48. These chapters are some of the richest chapters in all of the Bible in describing who God is. I look forward to the day when we as a church might go through these chapters, verse by verse. But today, we will simply skim them.

The theme of these chapters is "God." A summary verse is found in Isaiah 40:9. It trumpets the theme of this section in dramatic fashion.

Isaiah 40:9, "Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news. Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Life it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'" And in the next nine chapters, Isaiah speaks about what God is like.

Isaiah 40:12-18 is pretty typical of this entire section of Scripture. Isaiah writes, ...

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, And marked off the heavens by the span, And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, And weighed the mountains in a balance, And the hills in a pair of scales? Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and [who] gave Him understanding? And [who] taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, And informed Him of the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, And are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; Behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust. Even Lebanon is not enough to burn, Nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before Him, They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless. To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?

Isaiah says that God is so far above us that He measures the universe by the span of His hand (verse 12). He weighs the world using a small scale (verse 12). He needs no counselors or teachers (verses 13, 14). The nations of the world are like a speck of dust (verse 15). If you would compare our greatest nations to God, they would be practically meaningless (verse 17). There is no way that you can even begin to compare anything with God. This is what Isaiah 40-48 is about. This morning, we won't spend much of our time contemplating the vastness of God, but we will concentrate on the knowledge of God. What does God know? These chapters tell us much about what God knows. He knows, "all things." But, again, our focus will be a bit more specific than that. We want to think of God's knowledge of the future. **What does God know of the future?**

As we comb through these chapters, we are going to be looking explicitly at those verses that speak of God's knowledge of the future. There are so many other things about God in these verses that we will be compelled to skip over. They will remain for another day. My first point:

1. To be God is to know the future

Fundamental to the very idea of what it means to be God is that you know what the future holds. Turn with me to Isaiah 41 and verse 21. We find ourselves in a mock courtroom. God says, "OK, You who think that there are other gods beside me, let me hear your case. You are the defending attorney. Take the stand and show us you proof, that me might be convinced, beyond a reasonable doubt that other gods exist." Pick it up in verse 21, ...

"Present your case," the LORD says. "Bring forward your strong [arguments,]" The King of Jacob says. Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place; As for the former [events,] declare what they [were,] That we may consider them, and know their outcome; Or announce to us what is coming. Declare the things that are going to come afterward, That we may know that you are gods; Indeed, do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear together.

The focus of these verses is upon the ability of other gods to predict the future. God says to those presenting their case, "Tell us what the future holds! ... that we may know that you are gods." Fundamental to being God is knowing the future and declaring the future. If your "god" can predict beforehand what the future will be, and it comes to pass, then you will have demonstrated that your God is God! This is one test that God, Himself has established. So, if you say that God doesn't know the future, then you have just eliminated one of the very characteristics of what it means to be God, as established by God, Himself. God is ready to denounce as false gods all who can't predict the future. Should God fail in His ability to predict the future, His own judgment would fall upon Him as well.

In the 1600's without an eye to our controversy at hand, Stephen Charnock wrote,

"Such a fore-knowledge of things to come, is here ascribed to God by God himself, as a distinction of him from all false gods; such a knowledge, that if any could prove that they were possessors of, he would acknowledge them gods as well as himself: 'that we may know that you are gods.' He puts his Deity to stand or fall upon this account, and this should be the point which should decide the controversy, whether he or the heathen idols were the true God; the dispute is managed by this medium, -- He that knows things to come is God; I know things to come, ergo, I am God; the idols know not things to come, therefore they are not gods; God submits the being of his Deity to this trial." [\[6\]](#)

Open Theists deny God on His own terms. I don't believe that those who advocate this open view of God, quite understand how condemning of God their view is. To say that God doesn't know the future is to say that He is not God! To use God's own terminology, it is to say that He is "of no account." This is what verse 24 says, "Behold, you are of no account, And your work amounts to nothing; He who chooses you is an abomination." If you can't predict the future, you are no God at all.

Time and time again, these chapters in Isaiah 40-48 speak of how God can predict the future. Isaiah 42:9 says, "Behold, the former things have come to pass. Now I declare new things; Before they spring forth I proclaim them to you." This ability is connected intimately with God being God. The previous verse says, "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images." "I am God, and there is no other! ... I proclaim to you before they spring forth!"

Isaiah also writes in chapter 44 and verses 6-8,

"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, And there

is no God besides Me. 'And who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, From the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place. 'Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any other Rock? I know of none.'"

Again, the idea is the same! Gather the people! Gather the gods! Let's put the evidence upon the table. Let them predict the future. Let them "declare .. the events that are going to take place." And thus prove that they are God! Just let them try. But, they can't do this. Therefore, they proved that they are not God. But, God has done it! (verse 8). Thus, there is no other God besides the LORD!

To be God is to know the future. The corollary is also true: not to know the future is not to be God!

Let's focus our attention upon, ...

2. A Specific Example

At the end of Isaiah 44, we have the story of Cyrus. It is one of the most stunning fulfilled predictions in all of the Bible. Let's catch the context beginning in verse 24, ...

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, "I, the LORD, am the maker of all things, Stretching out the heavens by Myself, And spreading out the earth all alone, Causing the omens of boasters to fail, Making fools out of diviners, Causing wise men to draw back, And turning their knowledge into foolishness, Confirming the word of His servant, And performing the purpose of His messengers. [It is I] who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited!' And of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built.' And I will raise up her ruins [again.] [It is I] who says to the depth of the sea, 'Be dried up!' And I will make your rivers dry. [It is I] who says of Cyrus, '[He is] My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"

In verse 24, God declares Himself to be Israel's redeemer and creator. In verse 25, God shares how it is that He actually knows the future. He knows the future, because He actually causes the future. Verse 25 says that God "causes the omens of boasters to fail, Making fools out of diviners." An omen is a sign. It is a prediction. The idea here is that somebody predicts what is going to happen in the future. They boast about knowing what the future holds. But, God changes the circumstances, so that their boastings are proved to be incorrect. Proud people enter the casinos in Las Vegas, boasting that they will come out a richer person. They go to the roulette table and God causes the roulette wheel to fall on black, not red. They go to the slot machine and God prohibits a jackpot. They go to the black jack table, and God causes the shuffling of the deck, so that the much needed ace doesn't come up until when it isn't needed. And these boasters leave the casino humiliated. The Bible says that "the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD" (Prov. 16:33).

There are those who predict what will take place in the future. Men get together and draw up a business plan. They have a great new design for umbrellas. They go into great debt to build this umbrella factory, expecting to make millions, but God brings a drought (see Isaiah 44:27) which means nobody will need an umbrella any time soon. In James 4:13, we face some foolish business men, who say to one another, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Such men are arrogant (James 4:16). James corrects them, "Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that'" (James 4:15). It is God who orchestrates the events of history, shaping it and molding it exactly as He has already planned.

In verse 26, God says, "It is I who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited!' and of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built.' And I will raise up her ruins again." The amazing thing about this passage is that when Isaiah wrote these words (700 B. C.), Jerusalem was doing fine and well. It was a thriving city, like Rockford today. Oh, there may have been some unemployment struggles. And there may have been portions of Jerusalem that needed repairing. But, the city was not in ruins. And God says, "I'm going to rebuild Jerusalem," raising her ruins. And God continues on to show how much He knows of the future. In verse 28, He says, "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'" (Is. 44:28). Cyrus is the name of a Persian king, who would be born 150 years later. You can read about him in the very last verse of 2 Chronicles,

"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!" (2 Chron. 36:23)

In the book of Ezra, it says that "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" to do these things. One hundred and fifty years before Cyrus was even born, God knew that Jerusalem would fall to the Babylonians. God knew that the Babylonians would fall to the Persians. God knew that the king of Persia would be named, "Cyrus." God knew that Cyrus would rise to power within Persia. God knew that Cyrus would be in a political position to bring the Jewish people back into the land.

When Cyrus was finally born, God put His hand upon Cyrus to do everything that God had ordained for Him to do. This is an amazing display of God's foreknowledge. God calls Him, "my shepherd" in verse 28. In chapter 45 and verse 1, God calls this pagan king, "My anointed." If you continue reading through chapter 45, you will discover that God promised to bless this king greatly. God will protect Cyrus. God will make things smooth for him. God will raise him up. God will give him a title of honor. All of these things took place exactly as the LORD had predicted. Now, the reason why God did this is stated in verse 6, "That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:6). Again, we come back to this same thought that we had in the first point. God's knowledge of the future is what demonstrates that He is God.

But God prophesies of even more than the man who will bring the Jews back into the land. Look at Isaiah 45:13, "I have aroused him in

righteousness, and I will make all his ways smooth; He will build My city, and will let My exiles go free, without any payment or reward,' says the LORD of hosts." God told the Jews that when Cyrus would bring the people back into the land, they wouldn't need to pay any redemption price. They wouldn't need to buy their freedom. They would simply be let go. And this is exactly what happened. Cyrus sent the Jewish people back into the land, whoever wanted to go. He ordered that the temple be rebuilt in Jerusalem. He decreed that the cost of doing so would come from the royal treasury of Persia (Ezra 6:5).

God is able to predict the future with amazing accuracy. This is what it means to be God. God's knowledge of the future is incredible. God calls a man by name, who comes along 150 years later. This is similar to President Abraham Lincoln predicting, by name, the winner of the upcoming 2004 presidential election, and then telling about some political accomplishment this new president will make.

We come now to our third point,

3. His knowledge of the future is exhaustive

The teaching of Open Theism is subtle; it would affirm much of what I have already said. Open Theists will agree with you that God knows the future. Often, Open Theists believe their Bibles enough that they don't doubt at all everything that I just told you about Cyrus. They understand enough of Scripture to believe that God knows portions of the events of human history long before it comes to pass. When the Scripture speaks, they affirm it. They will freely admit that Jesus knew that Peter would deny Jesus three times before the night was over. They will freely admit that Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him. They will freely admit that God knew that Jesus would die upon the cross. [\[7\]](#)

But, here is the subtlety of the open view of God: while they accept the portions of the Bible that confirm God's knowledge of the future. Yet, they will limit God's knowledge of the future to these particular circumstances that are mentioned in the Bible. They may acknowledge that there are more examples, but certainly not every event. They will say that in these cases, God knows the future. But in other instances, they say, the future is open-ended and unknowable. The future depends upon the free-will choosing of men. And thus, it is impossible to know the future. God has only a few things established in the future, they say. [\[8\]](#) In other words, much of the future remains "open."

I have worded my final point very carefully: His knowledge of the future is **exhaustive**. This is where the rubber meets the road. Does God know all things about the future? Does God, "unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass" (III.1). Or, is the future unknown in the mind of God?

First of all, let me say that sheer number of things that God has told us concerning the future ought to give us assurance that these are merely the tip of the iceberg of what he actually knows. Many of the verses in Isaiah have been broad and general, pointing to the breadth of the foreknowledge of God. It would be practically impossible for God to tell us everything that He knows of the future. Consider a small sampling of the things that God has told us would take place before it actually took place:

- He told Satan that he would be crushed on the head by the seed of the woman.
- He told Noah that there would be a flood on the entire earth.
- He told Noah that he would never again flood the earth.
- He promised Abraham that we would be made a great nation.
- He told Abraham that those who bless him will be blessed and those who cursed him would be cursed.
- He said that Sarah would bear a son, though being 99 years old.
- He told Lot that he would send fire to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.
- He told Rachael that her twin sons would become two nations and that the older shall serve the younger.
- He told Jacob that he would give to his descendants the land that he promised to his grandfather, Abraham.
- He revealed to Joseph in a dream that all of his brothers would bow down to him.

All these things and more are recorded in Genesis. Every single one of these things took place exactly as the LORD had said that it would. And it's not just in Genesis that we find things like this. Consider what took place in Exodus:

- God told Moses that Pharaoh wouldn't listen to his requests.
- God told Moses that He would bring the Hebrew people out from under the bondage of the Egyptians.
- God predicted every single plague with amazing accuracy: Water in the Nile turned to blood, frogs, gnats, swarms of insects, pestilence of livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, death to the firstborn of Egypt.
- God predicted that the Red Sea would open up when Moses stretched out his hand over the sea.
- God predicted that the Red Sea would swallow up the Egyptians when Moses stretched out his hand over the sea.
- God told Moses exactly how the Manna would come every morning, but Saturday morning.

This is but a small sampling of the things that God has revealed to us. He predicted what would take place, and it actually did happen. We could continue on with all of the Messianic prophecies that were fulfilled:

- Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.
- Messiah would be raised in Nazareth.
- Messiah would come doing miracles.
- Messiah would ride into Jerusalem upon a donkey.
- Messiah would be rejected.
- Messiah would die upon the cross.

Messiah would rise again on the third day.

We could continue on with everything that Jesus knew during His earthly ministry:

He knew the hearts of people.
He knew that Nathanael was under the fig tree when he was called.
He knew that He was going to die in Jerusalem.
He knew that there would be a colt in the city that had never been ridden.
He knew that the man carrying a pitcher of water would have a room for the Passover.
He knew that a fish would have a coin in its mouth, and it would be exactly the amount needed to pay the tax.
He knew that He was going to be betrayed by Judas.

We could go on and on and on and on with all of the things that God has told us about beforehand. We could continue on with God's selection of the elect. We could continue on with God's promise of the New Covenant and the church. We could speak of the things coming in the future that God has told us about. And the sad reality is that those who believe in an open view of God will agree with every example that I just named, but will say that this is the full extent of God's knowledge of the future.

I don't think that those who believe in the openness of God fully realize the extent to which God must know many other things in order for Him to know these things. For instance, take the point of Cyrus. In order to know that a man named Cyrus would be born 150 years in the future to bring the Jewish people back into the land, think of everything else that must be known. He must know that Jerusalem must fall to the Babylonians. Just think about all of the little contingencies of things that must happen in the process of a war. You must know the military power of Jerusalem. You must know the military power of Babylon. You must know the outcome of the fighting. In any war, there is often a pivotal battle that takes place, whose victory could go either way. To know that one nation will prevail is to know the outcome of the pivotal battles. It is impossible to know the entire outcome unless you know a bit about the specifics.

To know that the Babylonians would fall to the Persians would require similar detailed knowledge of the future. Though this single prediction of Cyrus coming from Persia is a seemingly small prediction, there are many, many contingencies that must be known. It is no small thing to know and predict the actions of nations of people over several generations. The knowledge that God has of the future must be massive to make these types of predictions. I believe that these instances are enough for us to project that God knows all things pertaining to the future. If He can know the details of the rise and fall of nations, He is certainly capable of having an exhaustive knowledge of the future.

But rather than seeking to extrapolate what God must know, there are a few texts in Isaiah that give us reason to believe that God's knowledge of the future is exhaustive. The first is found in Isaiah 46. Let's begin in verse 8,

Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; [I am] God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, "My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure"; Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned [it, surely] I will do it.

Verse 10 is the key. God declares the end (i.e. the future) from the beginning (i.e. the past). He repeats it, using a bit different terms. He says, from ancient times (i.e. the past) think which have not been done (i.e. the future). Verse 10 is exceedingly broad and sweeping through massive amounts of history. It sweeps through all of history, from the end to the beginning. The thrust of the passage is that God's plan, throughout all of history is known and declared beforehand by Him. I will admit that this verse doesn't explicitly say that God knows all things in the future (as the open theists are quick to point out). But, it appears to me to imply it very strongly. God has a plan for history. His plan won't be thwarted. God will accomplish "all [His] good pleasure" (verse 10).

The Open Theists attempt to pinpoint verse 10 to be referring only to Cyrus, who is brought up in verse 11. He is certainly the bird of prey from the east. He is the man of God's purpose from a far country. They attempt to point out that God simply knows this little portion of the future, that Cyrus will free Israel. We have already spoken about the immense amount of future knowledge that God must possess in order to call such a man to free Israel from bondage. But, I don't believe that you can limit verse 10 to speak only of Cyrus, because you need to take verses 8 and 9 into account. In verses 8 and 9, God challenges us to remember all of those things, that we might realize that there is no one like Him. God is in the habit of declaring things that will take place in the future. From the beginning of time to the end of time, God has had a plan. Throughout that entire time, God has assured us that His purpose would be established. Verse 10 gives you a broad brush stroke of the massive foreknowledge of God, which I believe is exhaustive, I and hope that you do as well.

I want for us to turn to another verse. It is found in Isaiah 48. Let's look at verses 3-5, ...

I declared the former things long ago And they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. Because I know that you are obstinate, And your neck is an iron sinew, And your forehead bronze, Therefore I declared [them] to you long ago, Before they took place I proclaimed [them] to you, Lest you should say, "My idol has done them, And my graven image and my molten image have commanded them."

Again, this passage is exceedingly broad and exceedingly general. God declared the things from long ago that would take place (verses 3 and 5). Then, God acts and brings them to pass. God has done so in such a matter that is so clear and so distinct that those in Israel have no possible way for them to ascribe the events of the future to anything (or anyone) other than God. He declares from long ago the things that

would happen with great clarity and exactness, so that we are without excuse if we don't believe God to be God. I admit that this verse doesn't declare the exhaustive knowledge of the future (as the open theists are quick to point out), but it is quite sweeping and broad. What God has said has come to pass. In so doing, he has proven that He is God.

In verses 6-8, God is giving them new things to continue to demonstrate His deity.

You have heard; look at all this. And you, will you not declare it? I proclaim to you new things from this time, Even hidden things which you have not known. They are created now and not long ago; And before today you have not heard them, Lest you should say, "Behold, I knew them." You have not heard, you have not known. Even from long ago your ear has not been open, Because I knew that you would deal very treacherously; And you have been called a rebel from birth.

Again, we come back to this theme: to know the future and to predict the future is the essence of what it means to be God.

I conclude with verse 11, "For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; for how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another." Let me ask a final question: How is God's glory profaned? The context of Isaiah 40-48 has to do with contrasting the true God with false idols. And often the distinguishing mark between idols and the true God is that God knows the future and predicts the future and it comes to pass exactly as God predicts. An idol cannot predict the future. Nor can an idol bring it to pass. One way in which God's glory is profaned is to deny God's ability to know and cause the future. I'm saddened to think of how many open theists are guilty of profaning God's glory, as they have sought to diminish His knowledge of the future. May Rock Valley Bible Church be a church that gives all glory to God and seeks not to take it away!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 23, 2004 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Augustine, City of God, Book 5, chapter 9.

[2] John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book 3, Chapter 23, Section 6.

[3] James Arminius, "The Works of James Arminius," My Own Sentiments on Predestination, point #4.

[4] Westminster Confession of Faith, (III.1)

[5] A.W. Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, pp. 1-2.

[6] Stephen Charnock, The Existence and Attributes of God, volume 1, p. 431.

[7] These examples are listed by Gregory Boyd in his book, "The God of the Possible," pp. 24-29.

[8] Gregory Boyd, The God of the Possible, p. 16.