

# **BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED**

*What God's Word teaches about*

## **THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD**

**Gordon Lyons**

**KJV Edition**

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### *Special Acknowledgement*

I must acknowledge a genuine debt of gratitude to the work of Dr. Charles Hodge. The writings of this theologian from a previous generation have helped considerably in preparing this work. On a number of occasions—as will be seen when reading these studies—I have cited or alluded to Dr. Hodge's remarks in his three-volume *Systematic Theology*. These references have been acknowledged in the footnotes to the study text.

# The Sovereignty of God

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## Part 1

### ***Synopsis: The Sovereignty of God***

Sovereignty is the right of absolute dominion, power and authority: a right that belongs to God alone. As Absolute Sovereign, all other things are subject to God's almighty rule, while God himself is subject to no one. From eternity, God decreed everything that would take place in the process of time. By his divine sovereignty and divine decrees, God oversees, controls, sustains, governs, and directs all events in the universe according to his wise plan and purposes. God is in absolute control of all circumstances surrounding the lives of every individual man, woman and child in the world, and of every other living creature. Nothing can occur in the life of a believer unless, according to his own wise counsels, God either ordains or permits that event to occur. However, although God is Sovereign over all, this does not make him the author or approver of sin.

#### **Note 1**

##### ***No Excuse for Sin***

God's absolute sovereignty over all events does not absolve man of his responsibility to God for all his actions. Man remains personally accountable to his Creator for every thought, word, and deed. Men and women may seek to make excuses for their sins, for their sinful inclinations and attitudes, or for the expressions of their sinful nature more generally. Even worse, fallen mankind may seek to blame God for making him the way he is. However, they conveniently forget that God did not make man a sinful creature, but that he became such through the abuse or misuse of his free will. God, therefore, does not accept any excuses for our sins or for our sinful dispositions. Rather, he will call every one of us to account for everything we have thought, said and done—or failed to say or do—during our life on this earth.

#### **Scripture References**

Ecclesiastes 7:29

<sup>(29)</sup> Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Romans 1:21-24

<sup>(21)</sup> Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>(22)</sup> Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, <sup>(23)</sup> And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

<sup>(24)</sup> Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: (See vv.25-31)

Romans 1:32

<sup>(32)</sup> Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

## Note 2

### ***Free to Choose Moral Good***

God's sovereign control over all events does not mean that man cannot exercise his own free will in choosing either *moral* good or evil. Man, however, is incapable of exercising his free will in the *spiritual* realm, as his sin has rendered his mind and will spiritually dead. Of his own unregenerate free will, therefore, fallen mankind is incapable and unwilling to seek the salvation of the Lord.

Man's free will is governed by God's sovereignty; but man remains a free agent. As a rule, God does not hinder man's choices, either for moral good or for moral evil. Men and women are perfectly at liberty to make their own decisions and plans. God, however, holds everyone fully responsible for every choice that he or she makes.

Christians are those whose mind and will the Holy Spirit has renewed spiritually and liberated by the grace of God in conversion. However, in the exercise of their free will, the believer should remember that they are free only to do what God desires or requires and not necessarily what they themselves desire. Therefore, the believer ought not to make any decisions that are not in full agreement with the express teaching of God's Word, or with any of the clearly defined principles of that Word. Similarly, none of the Lord's people should make any decisions that they know would conflict with God's will and purposes for their lives. Prayer and seeking God's will should always precede any believer's proposed action or plan.

### **Scripture References**

We should note that some of the following references are not addressed to unregenerate mankind in general, but to God's own people.

Deuteronomy 30:19

<sup>(19)</sup> I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

Proverbs 1:29-33

<sup>(29)</sup> For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD:

<sup>(30)</sup> They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.

<sup>(31)</sup> Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

<sup>(32)</sup> For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

<sup>(33)</sup> But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

James 4:17

<sup>(17)</sup> Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.

### **Note 3**

#### ***Man Chooses to Sin***

God's absolute sovereignty over all events in no respect makes him either the author or approver of sin. Sin entered the world of mankind by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. By the abuse of their free will—or the liberty that God had given them—Adam and Eve made a conscious and deliberate choice of evil instead of good. Nor can men and women say that Adam's sin is not their sin. Adam's guilt and corruption is all mankind's guilt and corruption. Besides this, however, every person chooses—of his own volition or free will—to do wrong. Therefore, they are guilty for their own evil choices as well as for their inherently sinful nature.

#### **Scripture References**

Genesis 6:5

<sup>(5)</sup> And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

Psalms 14:1-4

<sup>(1)</sup> To the chief Musician, *A Psalm* of David.

The fool hath said in his heart, *There is* no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, *there is* none that doeth good.

<sup>(2)</sup> The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, *and* seek God.

<sup>(3)</sup> They are all gone aside, they are *all* together become filthy: *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one.

<sup>(4)</sup> Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the LORD.

Jeremiah 17:9

<sup>(9)</sup> The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

#### ***Related Bible Truths***

Sometimes, we refer to the doctrine of the sovereignty of God—or include it under—the doctrine of Divine Decrees: that is, God decrees or foreordains everything that happens throughout the universe. The doctrine of divine decrees, however, also includes the subjects of predestination and providence. In this series of studies, we will be dealing with the predestination of the elect, and the providence of God, as separate—but related—Bible Truths.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Bible Truths Explained: Predestination; Providence* by the same author.



## Part 2

### ***Extent of God's Sovereignty***

God's sovereign rule or dominion is universal, absolute and immutable (or unchangeable). We may summarise these aspects more fully as follows:

#### **1. Universal Sovereignty**

The sovereignty of God is universal. It extends over his entire creation; animate and inanimate—and from the highest form of living creature to the lowest. In the realm of living creatures, God exercises his sovereign power over angels, mankind, and the lower animals. Not one sparrow can fall to the ground without the will of our Father in heaven.

To this end, the Lord Jesus said:

Matthew 10:29-31

<sup>(29)</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. <sup>(30)</sup> But the very hairs of your head are all numbered: <sup>(31)</sup> Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. (See vv.16-33; cf. v.30 with Luke 21:18)

Again, it is written:

Psalms 103:19

<sup>(19)</sup> The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.

Daniel 4:17

<sup>(17)</sup> This matter *is* by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

#### **2. Absolute Sovereignty**

The sovereignty of God is absolute. His authority is perfect in its administration; it is exercised from God's infinite wisdom, and it is supreme in the extent of its power, glory and dominion. No limit can, or ever will, be placed on God's sovereign authority, power or control. In the advancement of his own eternal plans and purposes, the LORD does as he pleases throughout the heavens and among the inhabitants of the earth. Nothing in all creation is able to resist God's will, or thwart his purposes—whether it be human, super-human, angels, fallen or evil spirits, or anything else.

To this end, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 14:24

<sup>(24)</sup> The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: (See v.25)

Daniel 4:34-35

<sup>(34)</sup> And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth forever, whose dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom *is* from generation to generation:

<sup>(35)</sup> And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (See vv.19-37)

### **3. Immutable Sovereignty**

The sovereignty of God is immutable. It remains unalterably the same at all times, and under all circumstances. God's sovereign rule and dominion cannot be ignored; it cannot be rejected, and it cannot be thwarted or hindered by mankind or by anything else in creation. God's sovereign power and dominion binds all creatures as completely as physical laws bind the material universe. What God has decreed or foreordained must inevitably take place.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the Scripture declares:

Psalms 33:10-11

<sup>(10)</sup> The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to naught: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect.

<sup>(11)</sup> The counsel of the LORD standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

Isaiah 14:26-27

<sup>(26)</sup> This *is* the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this *is* the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations.

<sup>(27)</sup> For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul *it*? and his hand *is* stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

Acts 4:28

<sup>(28)</sup> For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 1, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1871, 1977 reprint], p. 440.





## Part 3

### ***Exercise of God's Sovereignty***

God exercises his sovereign rule over all creation in the following ways:<sup>3</sup>

#### **1. *Moral and Physical Laws***

God's sovereignty is exercised in establishing the laws or principles—physical and moral—by which he rules or directs all creation. Under normal circumstances, all of us are limited by the physical laws governing time and space. For example, we are all subject to such physical laws as the law of gravity. In the moral and spiritual realm, all of us are subject to those laws or principles which God has written on our hearts, and which operate on our consciences. For instance, we know intuitively the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. When we choose the wrong, our conscience convicts us of sin.

#### **2. *Endowments and Capacities***

God's sovereignty is exercised in determining the nature and endowments of the different orders of created beings, and in allocating each to its appropriate sphere. For example, God created powerful holy angels to inhabit the heavenly spheres, and he created both mankind and animals to inhabit the earthly spheres. Each of these forms of created beings exhibits differing natures and capacities, faculties or abilities. God, who is uncreated and eternal, is the Supreme Being. Beneath him in honour, dignity and power—and subservient to him—are the highest order of created beings; i.e. the several classes of holy angels. God created mankind a little lower than the angels. The animal creation is lower than mankind, and subject to mankind's dominion. God, angels, and mankind are fully rational, moral, spiritual, and eternal beings. The animal creation is not.

Thus, God's Word says:

Psalms 8:1-9

- <sup>(1)</sup> To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm of David.  
O LORD our Lord, how excellent *is* thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.
- <sup>(2)</sup> Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. [Cf. Matt. 11:25; 21:16]
- <sup>(3)</sup> When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; <sup>(4)</sup> What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? <sup>(5)</sup> For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. C. Hodge, *op. cit.* Vol. 1, pp. 440-441.

<sup>(6)</sup> Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: <sup>(7)</sup> All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; <sup>(8)</sup> The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. [Cf. vv.4-6 with Heb. 2:5-9]

<sup>(9)</sup> O LORD our Lord, how excellent *is* thy name in all the earth!

### **3. *Destiny and Circumstances***

God exercises his sovereignty in appointing to each individual his position and circumstance in life. It is the Lord who assigns the bounds of our abode. Our times are in his hands. He determines when, where, and under what circumstances, each human being is to be born, live, and die. Every ethnic group, tribe and nation is thus in God's hands. He apportions to them their heritage in the earth, and controls their destiny. As free and responsible agents, men make their own plans, and follow their own purposes. However, if man's plans and purposes are not in accord with the plans and purposes of God, they cannot succeed. The will of sinful men cannot, in any way, thwart or hinder the exercise of God's eternal decrees.

Concerning the fact that the circumstances of each of our lives are in God's hands, the Scripture says:

Acts 17:24-27

<sup>(24)</sup> God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; <sup>(25)</sup> Neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; <sup>(26)</sup> And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; [Cf. Deut. 32:8] <sup>(27)</sup> That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: (See vv.16-31)

Again, concerning the fact that the destiny of nations and their rulers is in God's hands, the Scripture says:

Job 12:23-24

<sup>(23)</sup> He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them *again*. <sup>(24)</sup> He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness *where there is no way*. (See vv.7-25)

Concerning the fact that man's intentions or decisions cannot alter the plans and purposes of God, the Scripture says:

Proverbs 16:9

<sup>(9)</sup> A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps. (See also vv.1,4,33)

Proverbs 19:21

<sup>(21)</sup> *There are* many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand. (See also Prov. 20:24)

Proverbs 21:30-31

<sup>(30)</sup> *There is* no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD.

<sup>(31)</sup> The horse *is* prepared against the day of battle: but safety *is* of the LORD. (Cf. Isa. 14:24-27)

#### **4. Favours and Blessings**

God exercises his sovereignty in the distribution of his favours or blessings. He does what he wills with his own. To some people, God grants riches; to others, honour; to others, health; while others are poor, unknown, or victims of disease. To some, God sends the light of the Gospel; but he leaves others in darkness and to the just recompense of their sins. God's Holy Spirit brings some people through faith unto salvation. Others, however, perish in their unbelief and hardness of heart. In all things, God works according to the counsels of his own will, and none can stay his hand.

As the Scripture says:

Proverbs 16:4

<sup>(4)</sup> The LORD hath made all *things* for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

To the question, 'Why are these things so?' the only answer is that given by our Lord:

Matthew 11:26

<sup>(26)</sup> Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. (See vv.25,27; cf. Luke 10:21-24)

Concerning the granting or withholding of providential blessings, the Scripture says:

1 Samuel 2:7-8

<sup>(7)</sup> The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.

<sup>(8)</sup> He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, *and* lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set *them* among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth *are* the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them. (See vv.6,9)

Concerning the fact that the light of the Gospel reaches some, but not others, the Scripture says:

Romans 9:21-24

<sup>(21)</sup> Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? <sup>(22)</sup> *What* if God, willing to show *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: <sup>(23)</sup> And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which

he had afore prepared unto glory, <sup>(24)</sup> Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

John 3:36

<sup>(36)</sup> He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. (See vv.31-35)

Regarding the fact that no one and nothing can thwart or hinder God's eternal plans and purposes, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 14:26-27

<sup>(26)</sup> This *is* the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this *is* the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. <sup>(27)</sup> For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul *it*? and his hand *is* stretched out, and who shall turn it back? (See vv.24-25)

Isaiah 46:9-10

<sup>(9)</sup> Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, <sup>(10)</sup> Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

Daniel 4:35

<sup>(35)</sup> And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

Ephesians 1:11

<sup>(11)</sup> In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

## Part 4

### ***The LORD God Omnipotent Reigns***

As has been shown, the sovereignty of God is universal, absolute, and immutable. God, however, extends and exercises his sovereign dominion out of his infinite wisdom, holiness, and never-ending love.

The sovereignty of God is a fundamental reason for the settled peace and confidence of all his people. The redeemed children of God rejoice that their Father in heaven is the LORD God omnipotent; and that he reigns supremely over his entire creation. They rejoice too, that the one who rules the universe also rules their lives. God does not leave the lives of his people to the control of such uncertain and indeterminate things as necessity, chance, or fate.

Again, God's people rejoice in the sure and certain knowledge that their Father in heaven controls all events. They rest confidently in God, knowing that their lives are not subject to the foolishness of man, or to the evil schemes of Satan. God controls and determines everything that occurs for the greater glory of his name, and for the ultimate good of his beloved children. Infinite wisdom, love, and power belong to God—and to his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom God has committed all power in heaven and on earth.<sup>4</sup>

### **Kept by an Almighty Hand**

In Christ Jesus, we remain forever secure. His Father—and ours—rules supremely over all. Nothing in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, can thwart God's intended purposes for our lives. Nothing in all creation can ever pluck us out of our Father's hand, nor separate us from the unending love he has for us in Christ Jesus our Sovereign Lord.

Concerning the fact that God has committed all power in the universe to his Son, the Scripture says:

Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>(18)</sup> And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. [Cf. Dan. 7:13,14] <sup>(19)</sup> Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: <sup>(20)</sup> Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

And, concerning the fact that we are forever secure in Christ, God's Word tells us:

John 10:27-30

<sup>(27)</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: <sup>(28)</sup> And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. <sup>(29)</sup> My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand. <sup>(30)</sup> I and *my* Father are one. (See vv.22-33)

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. C. Hodge, *op. cit.* Vol. 1, p. 441.

Again, God's Word assures us:

Romans 8:38-39

<sup>(38)</sup> For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, <sup>(39)</sup> Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (See vv.31-37)

1 Peter 1:3-5

<sup>(3)</sup> Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>(4)</sup> To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>(5)</sup> Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (See vv.2-9)

### **Matters Beyond Our Comprehension**

The sovereignty of God presupposes that God adopted the whole plan of creation, providence, and redemption on the grounds of his own good pleasure. Again, it presupposes that God determined the execution of that plan—in all its limitless details—according to his own absolute and perfect will.

With our finite understanding, there are many matters concerning God's sovereignty that we cannot comprehend. For instance, we may ask why God permitted Adam to fall, and thus to involve all humanity in sin and suffering. Again, we may ask why God provided salvation for fallen mankind, but not for fallen angels. Similarly, we may ask why God first revealed that salvation to the Jews, but not to the Gentiles. Yet again, we may ask why God made us, rather than others, partakers of this redemption and of eternal life in Christ Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

No human being is competent to answer such questions. The ways of God are not our ways. They are past finding out. We can only submit to his sovereignty over all events; thanking him that he extended redemption to us, but humbly accepting that there are things we do not, and cannot, fully understand.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. C. Hodge, *Princeton Sermons*, [1879, 1979 reprint] p. 5.

## Part 5

### ***God's Sovereignty over the Believer***

#### **God Controls the Universe**

As the absolute Ruler of the universe, God upholds all creation by his sovereign and almighty power. He directs and sustains the course of every individual star and planet. God has not left the universe to govern itself, merely according to the laws of nature. Rather, the God who established the laws of nature continues to exercise his direct control over these laws.

Concerning God's direct control over the universe, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 40:25-26

- <sup>(25)</sup> To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.  
<sup>(26)</sup> Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these *things*, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that *he is* strong in power; not one faileth. (See vv.21-24; cf. Ps. 147:4)

Isaiah 48:13

- <sup>(13)</sup> Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: *when* I call unto them, they stand up together. (See vv.12-15)

Psalms 135:6-7

- <sup>(6)</sup> Whatsoever the LORD pleased, *that* did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.  
<sup>(7)</sup> He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures. (See vv.8-9; cf. Jer. 10:13; see also Job 36:27-32; 37:5-13; 38:22-41)

The Sovereign God is in total control of all events, howsoever arising. Nothing can take place anywhere in the universe unless the Lord has already decreed (or foreordained) its occurrence. No event can ever take place without God's express knowledge, will or consent. Not one sparrow can fall to the ground except by the will of God in heaven. To this end, God's Word says:

Matthew 10:29

- <sup>(29)</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. (See vv.26-31)

#### **Our Times are in His Hands**

The Almighty God not only concerns himself with ruling the universe. Just as significantly, he also concerns himself with ruling over the lives of his redeemed people. He is the Sovereign Lord of our individual lives. From moment to moment throughout our lives, our times are in his hands. Thus, the Scripture says:

Job 14:5

<sup>(5)</sup> Seeing his days *are* determined, the number of his months *are* with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; (See vv.1-4)

Psalms 31:15

<sup>(15)</sup> My times *are* in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.

Acts 17:28

<sup>(28)</sup> For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. (See vv.22-31)

Nothing can happen in a believer's life except by the express will of God, and according to his own wise purposes. Everything that happens to us happens only as the Lord either ordains or permits. This is only saying that every detail of our lives is foreknown to, and foreordained, by God—and is under his absolute or sovereign control. Thus, it is written in God's Word:

Proverbs 16:9

<sup>(9)</sup> A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps. (See also Prov. 19:21; 20:24; 21:30-31)

Matthew 6:8

<sup>(8)</sup> Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. (See vv.5-13)

Luke 12:29-31

<sup>(29)</sup> And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. <sup>(30)</sup> For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. <sup>(31)</sup> But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. (See vv.22-34)

Romans 8:28

<sup>(28)</sup> And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. (See vv.27-30)

## Part 6

### ***Jesus Christ is Lord***

In acknowledging Christ as our Saviour, we are owning him as our Redeemer. However, in acknowledging Christ as our Lord, we are acknowledging him as our Sovereign; i.e. the One who has absolute dominion over our lives. It is for this reason that we ought always to seek the will of God, as it is in Christ Jesus. Since Christ be our Lord, then we should submit all our decisions and plans to him for his approval. This applies to any decisions we need to make, which—in some way—might affect our lives or our work. We should always make such decisions in accordance with the Lord's express will and purposes for our lives. Similarly, we should never do anything that may take us out of line with these purposes. Christ our Saviour is also Christ our Lord. He is our Sovereign, as well as our Redeemer.

Concerning the supremacy and Sovereignty or Lordship of Christ, the Scripture says:

Colossians 1:15-17

<sup>(15)</sup> Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: [Cf. Ps. 89:27] <sup>(16)</sup> For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: <sup>(17)</sup> And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. (See vv.10-19; see also Heb. 1:2-3)

### **Submitting to Christ's Lordship (Scripture References)**

Concerning the fact that the Lord Jesus should have complete dominion over our lives, the Scripture says:

Romans 12:1-2

<sup>(1)</sup> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. <sup>(2)</sup> And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (See vv.3-11)

James 4:13-15

<sup>(13)</sup> Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: <sup>(14)</sup> Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. <sup>(15)</sup> For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

James 4:16-17

<sup>(16)</sup> But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. <sup>(17)</sup> Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.

### **Guided by The Lord**

Concerning the fact that God guides his people when they patiently seek his will, and are prepared to trust and obey him wholeheartedly, the Scripture says:

Numbers 9:18-19

<sup>(18)</sup> At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents. <sup>(19)</sup> And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not. (See vv.15-17)

Numbers 9:20

<sup>(20)</sup> And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed.

Numbers 9:21-23

<sup>(21)</sup> And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and *that* the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether *it was* by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. <sup>(22)</sup> Or *whether it were* two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed. <sup>(23)</sup> At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

### **Does The Lord Still Guide His People? (Scripture References)**

But does the Lord still guide his people like this?

Yes—by his providence, by his Word and by his Holy Spirit. Thus, the Scripture says:

Acts 8:29

<sup>(29)</sup> Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. (See vv.26-40)

Acts 13:2-4

<sup>(2)</sup> As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. <sup>(3)</sup> And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away.

<sup>(4)</sup> So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. (See v.1)

Acts 16:6-7

<sup>(6)</sup> Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, <sup>(7)</sup> After they were come to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.

Acts 16:8-9

<sup>(8)</sup> And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. <sup>(9)</sup> And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

Acts 16:10

<sup>(10)</sup> And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. (See vv.1-13; see esp. vv.14-15)

### ***God Guides by His Spirit and His Word***

We cannot claim to be guided by God's Holy Spirit, if we have not sought God's will earnestly in prayer. In response to prayer, God may guide us by his providence—i.e., by opening or closing doors of opportunity. However, there is no such thing as direct revelation or direct guidance; i.e. guidance purporting to be from the Holy Spirit, *but arising independently of the precepts or principles of God's Holy Word, and perhaps even found to be in conflict with that Word.* When guiding his people, the Lord always confirms providential or circumstantial events in our lives on the basis of his Word, the Bible—never by emotional feelings, or by bare intuition, etc.



## Part 7

### ***Failing to Submit to Christ***

It is when we fail to acknowledge the sovereign Lordship of Christ, and to submit to his rule, that the Lord sometimes chastises us for our good. If we will not have this man to rule over us, then we are rejecting the sovereign authority of Christ over our lives. If, however, we reject his dominion over us, then we will find ourselves opposing Jesus Christ our Lord, and resisting his purposes for us.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus gives us this example:

Luke 19:12-14

<sup>(12)</sup> He said therefore, A certain noble man went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. <sup>(13)</sup> And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.

<sup>(14)</sup> But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this *man* to reign over us. (See vv.1-27; see esp. vv.26-27)

When we persist in pursuing our own way—in disregard of Christ's sovereign will—then the Lord may hinder us in our progress. He may suspend or withdraw his material and spiritual blessings from us, or he may frustrate our cherished hopes and plans until we repent and acknowledge his right to rule over our lives. If, however, we stubbornly continue to rebel against his will, the Lord may withdraw the nearness of his presence from us. He may do so to make us realise that we cannot succeed in opposing his chosen way for our lives.

### **Disciplined, but Never Forsaken**

For our waywardness, the Lord may chastise us. For our disobedience and rebellion, he may bring upon us great sorrow, hardship, or even disaster. Yet, though he disciplines us with the rod, *he will never forsake us*. If we repent—if we acknowledge his right to govern our lives—and if we are obedient to his will in all respects, then we will experience the restoration of his blessings upon our lives.

Concerning the fact that the Lord will discipline us, but will never forsake us, the Scripture says:

Psalms 89:30-33

<sup>(30)</sup> If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; <sup>(31)</sup> If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; <sup>(32)</sup> Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. <sup>(33)</sup> Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. (See vv.28-37; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14-15)

Hebrews 12:5-6

<sup>(5)</sup> And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: [Cf. Job 5:17,18] <sup>(6)</sup> For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. {Prov. 3:11-12} See Heb. 12:7-8)

Hebrews 12:9-10

<sup>(9)</sup> Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected *us*, and we gave *them* reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? <sup>(10)</sup> For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure; but he for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness.

Hebrews 12:13

<sup>(13)</sup> And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. (See vv.12-14)

### **God Restores Those Who Repent (Scripture References)**

Concerning the fact that God restores spiritual and temporal blessings when we repent and submit to him, the Scripture says:

Job 22:21-23

<sup>(21)</sup> Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.

<sup>(22)</sup> Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thine heart. <sup>(23)</sup> If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles. (See vv.24-30; see also Ps. 119:67,71)

Job 42:10

<sup>(10)</sup> And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. (See vv.7-11)

Job 42:12

<sup>(12)</sup> So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. (See vv.13-17)

Joel 2:12-14

<sup>(12)</sup> Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye *even* to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

<sup>(13)</sup> And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he *is* gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. <sup>(14)</sup> Who knoweth *if* he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; *even* a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God? (See vv.1-11)

Joel 2:25-26

<sup>(25)</sup> And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. <sup>(26)</sup> And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and

praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. (See vv.15-27)



## Part 8

### ***God Afflicts Because He Loves***

Many events in a believer's life may be very painful. Some of these events may bring great sorrow and grief into a believer's life. Yet, regardless of such painful and distressing circumstances, God is still working his purposes out in our individual lives. We may not understand the reason for many of these events, but this does not alter the fact that God works all things according to the counsel of his own will. The God who exercises sovereign control over our lives, does so out of his great love for us in Christ Jesus.

Though, at times, he may afflict or chasten us, yet it is because he loves us. A parent who does not chasten his children, is a parent who does not love his children. But our heavenly Father loves us. God's hand of discipline may be painful at times. Yet—though he must needs strike us with the rod of affliction—he will never take his love away from us.

### **Punishment May Be Deeply Painful**

The Lord may see something in our lives that we need to change, so he deals with us as parents deal with a child they love. If loving and caring parents see their child doing something wrong, they will speak to their child. However, if the child persists in wrongdoing, the father or mother may eventually need to discipline their wayward offspring more directly, and perhaps even painfully.

David was a child of God: but, for his grievous sins, the Lord disciplined him severely. Yet, because he had experienced the pain of God's chastisement—which included the loss of his infant son—David learned to appreciate the seriousness of his sin in God's eyes. As a result, he was brought to true humility and contrition; and, from his heart, he pleaded for God's forgiveness:

Psalms 51:7

<sup>(7)</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Psalms 51:17

<sup>(17)</sup> The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (See entire Psalm.)

And, on another occasion, the Psalmist says:

Psalms 118:18

<sup>(18)</sup> The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.

**According to God's Good Purpose (Scripture References)**

Concerning the fact that God works all things according to the counsel of his own will, the Scripture says:

Ephesians 1:11

<sup>(11)</sup> In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: (See vv.3-12)

Philippians 2:13

<sup>(13)</sup> For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure. (See vv.12-16)

And, concerning the fact that God will discipline us, but will never forsake us, the Scripture says:

Psalms 89:32-33

<sup>(32)</sup> Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. <sup>(33)</sup> Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. (See vv.30,31)

Psalms 119:67

<sup>(67)</sup> Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.

Psalms 119:71

<sup>(71)</sup> *It is* good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

**Loving Discipline of Children (Scripture References)**

Concerning that fact that a faithful father will discipline his children in love, the Scripture says:

Proverbs 13:24

<sup>(24)</sup> He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him quickly.

Proverbs 19:18

<sup>(18)</sup> Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.

Proverbs 22:6

<sup>(6)</sup> Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:15

<sup>(15)</sup> Foolishness *is* bound in the heart of a child; *but* the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

Proverbs 23:13-14

<sup>(13)</sup> Withhold not correction from the child: for *if* thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. <sup>(14)</sup> Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.

Proverbs 29:15

<sup>(15)</sup> The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left *to himself* bringeth his mother to shame.

Proverbs 29:17

<sup>(17)</sup> Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.

### **God Hurts in Order to Heal**

Even when we do not appear to be doing anything wrong, the Lord may have cause to afflict us. Let us suppose that our beloved son or daughter was suffering from an illness that only a major surgical operation could cure. The thought of submitting our son or daughter to this operation might cause us much anxiety and heartbreak. Yet, ultimately, we would not hesitate to do what was best for our child. We might be well aware that such an operation would be followed by a certain amount of pain and discomfort. However, we believe that much greater pain and suffering could follow, if we withheld our child from the necessary surgery.

So it is in our lives. The Lord is the Great Physician: but when he hurts us, he hurts only to heal. At the time, we may not understand the reason for the pain, the sorrow, the grief, or the heartache. But we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those whom he has called according to his purpose.

Thus, Eliphaz the Temanite said to Job:

Job 5:17-18

<sup>(17)</sup> Behold, happy *is* the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: <sup>(18)</sup> For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. (See vv.19-22)

And again, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 30:26

<sup>(26)</sup> Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound. (See vv.19-25)

Hosea 6:1-3

<sup>(1)</sup> Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. <sup>(2)</sup> After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. <sup>(3)</sup> Then shall we know, *if* we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter *and* former rain unto the earth. (See vv.4-10)

Romans 8:28

<sup>(28)</sup> And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. (See vv.31-39)

1 Peter 5:6-7

<sup>(6)</sup> Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: <sup>(7)</sup> Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (see v.5)

1 Peter 5:10-11

<sup>(10)</sup> But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle *you*.

<sup>(11)</sup> To him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

## Part 9

### ***God's Sovereignty Over the World***

The Scriptures make it abundantly plain that the LORD God omnipotent rules over all creation, and that all events—from the least to the greatest—are in his hands. Thus, the Scripture says:

Psalms 103:19

<sup>(19)</sup> The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. (See vv.20-22; cf. Ps. 22:28; 47:1-9; 66:7)

### **God is Sovereign Over All Nations**

Concerning his almighty and sovereign power over all nations, the LORD God declared about Cyrus, king of Persia:

Isaiah 45:4-6

<sup>(4)</sup> For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. <sup>(5)</sup> I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else, *there is* no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: <sup>(6)</sup> That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that *there is* none beside me. I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else. (See vv.1-13; see esp. vv.9-13)

No one and nothing can thwart the will and purposes of the Sovereign God. Concerning God's intention to fulfil his purposes for his own people through Cyrus king of Persia, the Scripture declares:

Isaiah 46:9-11

<sup>(9)</sup> Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, <sup>(10)</sup> Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: <sup>(11)</sup> Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it. (See vv.3-13; see esp. vv.3-4)

### ***Rulers Cannot Resist God's Will***

Although rulers and nations may oppose the will of God, their opposition is futile. Ultimately, they cannot turn aside the will or the sovereign purposes (or decrees) of Almighty God. To such as show contempt for the living Sovereign God (and originally spoken concerning Edom), the Scripture warns:

Obadiah 1:1-4

<sup>(1)</sup> The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom; We have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle. (See vv.5-10)

<sup>(2)</sup> Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen: thou art greatly despised. <sup>(3)</sup> The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation *is* high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? <sup>(4)</sup> Though thou exalt *thyself* as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD.

### **God Punishes Nations Who Oppose Him**

Nations will rise against nations. However, God is still working his purposes out, as one nation attacks another. Indeed, whether it be by war, pestilence, plague, famine, disease—or by any other means—the Lord will punish those nations who attempt to oppose his divine will and purposes. Thus, concerning the certainty of God’s judgments against such nations, the prophet Ezekiel says:

Ezekiel 14:12-14

<sup>(12)</sup> The word of the LORD came again to me, saying,  
  
<sup>(13)</sup> Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: <sup>(14)</sup> Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver *but* their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 14:15

<sup>(15)</sup> If I cause noisome beasts to pass through the land, and they spoil it, so that it be desolate, that no man may pass through because of the beasts:

Ezekiel 14:17

<sup>(17)</sup> Or *if* I bring a sword upon that land, and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off man and beast from it:

Ezekiel 14:19

<sup>(19)</sup> Or *if* I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast: (See vv.20-23; cf. Ezek. 33:1-7)

### **God’s Sovereignty Over His Sinful People**

In a similar way, and by his providence, the Lord may punish his redeemed people if they persist in rebelling against his sovereign purposes.

For a time, God’s people may find themselves caught up in the sins of mankind. They may share in the plagues, diseases, or other disasters that God sends upon mankind to warn them of greater judgment to come—unless they repent and forsake their sinful ways. To such, however, as repent of their sin and rebellion, the Lord has promised to be merciful. To this end, the Scripture says:

2 Chronicles 7:13-14

<sup>(13)</sup> If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; <sup>(14)</sup> If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (See vv.12-22; cf. 2 Chron. 6:26-31)

The passage quoted above are just a few of the numerous passages in the Bible that illustrate God's sovereign dominion being applied to everyday life and circumstances, on an individual and on a national basis.



## Part 10

### **God Appoints World Rulers**

By his divine decree, the Lord sets up rulers in every kingdom, principality, and republic throughout the world; and he may depose these rulers at his own good pleasure. In a democracy, the people elect their chosen political leader. However, they cannot do this unless God has first appointed that person to rule. God appoints these rulers by his works of providence.<sup>6</sup>

Even in non-democratic countries, the Lord ordains who will rule over the people, and for how long. Rulers are not only answerable to the people (or to a senate, parliament, or committee). They are also answerable to God for their conduct and government. This was the painful lesson that Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and many other rulers had to learn. These individuals imagined (mistakenly) that God had no control over their destiny, or over the destiny of their nation.

### **God Appoints and Deposes World Rulers (Scripture References)**

Regarding the fact that God appoints (and deposes) world rulers, and that their destiny and the destiny of their nations are in his almighty hands, the Scriptures say:

Daniel 2:21

<sup>(21)</sup> And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: (See vv.1-36)

Daniel 4:17

<sup>(17)</sup> This matter *is* by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. (See vv.4-18)

Daniel 4:30-32

<sup>(30)</sup> The king spoke, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

<sup>(31)</sup> While the word *was* in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, *saying*, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.<sup>(32)</sup> And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling *shall be* with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. (See vv.19-37)

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<sup>6</sup> See *Bible Truths Explained: Providence*, by the same author.

## **Submitting to Authorities**

It is the Lord who appoints the governing authorities. Therefore, we must submit to every institution ordained of God. Thus, God's Word says:

Romans 13:1-2

- <sup>(1)</sup> Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. <sup>(2)</sup> Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. (See vv.3-7; cf. John 19:11)

God, however, does not approve of evil or injustice in any shape or form. The Almighty God requires that all earthly rulers act in accordance with their responsibilities toward him. We may not disobey or disregard these rulers, unless they require us to do something that God expressly forbids. Then we must act according to conscience and according to the laws of God.

## **God Deposed King Nebuchadnezzar**

To King Nebuchadnezzar, God had given (delegated) sovereignty, greatness, glory, and splendour. Thus, Daniel said to Belshazzar, the king's 'son':

Daniel 5:18-19

- <sup>(18)</sup> O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: <sup>(19)</sup> And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down.

However, King Nebuchadnezzar's heart had become arrogant, proud, and cruel; and, for these reasons, God brought him down to the ground. The Scripture tells us of how God humbled this once proud and mighty king:

Daniel 5:20

- <sup>(20)</sup> But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him:

## ***Nebuchadnezzar Deprived of his Reason***

King Nebuchadnezzar had lost his throne and his glory—with all its authority and prestige. But more was to follow. The Scripture continues:

Daniel 5:21

- <sup>(21)</sup> And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and *that* he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.

### ***Nebuchadnezzar Acknowledges God's Sovereignty***

Not until Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the sovereignty of the God of heaven, was his sanity restored to him. However, when God brought him to his senses, and later restored him to his throne, this once proud and arrogant king testified of God's dealings with him:

Daniel 4:34-35

<sup>(34)</sup> And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth forever, whose dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom *is* from generation to generation: <sup>(35)</sup> And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (See v.36)

Daniel 4:37

<sup>(37)</sup> Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works *are* truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

The world leaders of today are just as much under the sovereign rule of God as was Nebuchadnezzar. God is just as able to exalt or abase them, as he sees fit.



## Part 11

### **Sovereignty and Free Will**

Although God is sovereign over all events, this does not make him in any respect the author or approver of sin. God's sovereignty governs man's free will, but it does not deprive man of his freedom of choice. Man is still a free and responsible agent. It is because of man's sinful nature that he tends to exercise his free will to choose evil rather than good, and to seek independence from God and from his ways. God is never responsible for the abuse of man's free will, for the consequences of that abuse, or for man's sin.

### **Sovereignty, Sin and Suffering**

People often say, that—since God is sovereign over all events—then he could prevent all the sin, misery, and suffering in the world. This is a common line of argument. However, it is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of sin, and of the reason for much of the suffering that we see around us. Sin, suffering and death are related to the Fall. They exist in this world *only because of Adam's apostasy*. This apostasy, or falling away from original righteousness, meant that the *guilt* and *pollution* of Adam's sin was conveyed to all his descendants. Had Adam remained in his integrity and obedience, it is likely that God would have confirmed him—and all mankind—in this state of righteousness. Then, sin, suffering, and death would not have existed.

We must remember that death is the wages of sin. We must also remember that death includes spiritual death, as well as physical death and eternal death. We must understand, too, that—when the Bible speaks of *spiritual* death—it is speaking of a corruption of nature that affects the whole person and personality in body and soul (total depravity). Spiritual death involves alienation from God in this life, with all its just punishments. This punishment includes exposure to sin, together with all the attendant miseries that our sinful nature brings upon us. This is part of the penalty that fallen mankind pays for sin—original sin, and personal sin.<sup>7</sup>

### **All Things Work Together for Good**

We may not understand all that happens in the counsels of God, or why he does certain things, or permits some things to happen in our lives or in the lives of those we love. Some things are beyond our comprehension, but they are never beyond the Lord's sovereign purposes. Nor is the everlasting love and compassion of God unable to sustain us in the times of our severest trials and greatest need. To those who love God—to those who are the called according to his purpose—all things work together for good. As the Scripture says:

Romans 8:28-29

<sup>(28)</sup> And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. <sup>(29)</sup> For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (See v.30)

### **God Loves Those Who Fear Him**

All things are in the hands of our Almighty God and Saviour. But he, who is the Almighty Sovereign of the universe, is still our loving Father in heaven. In all our sorrows and perplexities, our Father cares.

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<sup>7</sup> See *Bible Truths Explained: The Fall of Man; Sin*, by the same author.

What we cannot understand, he knows. His tender love and compassion will never fail when we need him most. The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. (Deut. 33:27)

Concerning the fact that God comforts us in all our sorrows and afflictions, the Scripture says:

Psalms 103:13

<sup>(13)</sup> Like as a father pitieth *his* children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

Psalms 103:17-19

<sup>(17)</sup> But the mercy of the LORD *is* from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; <sup>(18)</sup> To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.

<sup>(19)</sup> The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. (See vv.8-16)

Again, God's Word says:

Psalms 30:4-5

<sup>(4)</sup> Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. <sup>(5)</sup> For his anger *endureth but* a moment; in his favour *is* life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy *cometh* in the morning. (See vv.1-12)

Psalms 34:4-8

<sup>(4)</sup> I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. <sup>(5)</sup> They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. <sup>(6)</sup> This poor man cried, and the LORD heard *him*, and saved him out of all his troubles.

<sup>(7)</sup> The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. <sup>(8)</sup> O taste and see that the LORD *is* good: blessed *is* the man *that* trusteth in him. (See vv.1-10)

Psalms 34:17-19

<sup>(17)</sup> *The righteous* cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. <sup>(18)</sup> The LORD *is* nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

<sup>(19)</sup> Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all. (See vv.11-22)

Psalms 57:1-2

- <sup>(1)</sup> To the chief Musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave.  
Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until *these* calamities be overpast.
- <sup>(2)</sup> I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth *all things* for me.  
(See vv.3-6)

1 Peter 5:6-7

- <sup>(6)</sup> Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: <sup>(7)</sup> Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (See v.5)

1 Peter 5:10-11

- <sup>(10)</sup> But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle *you*.
- <sup>(11)</sup> To him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (See vv.8-9; cf. 1 Pet. 4:12-19)

