

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

What the Bible Teaches About

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Revised Edition, 2026

GORDON LYONS

ESV Edition

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The Sovereignty of God

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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 (ESV)

No Excuse for Sin

Ecclesiastes 7:29

²⁹See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

Romans 1:21-24

²¹For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, (See vv.25-31)

Romans 1:32

³² Though they know God's decree that those who practise such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practise 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 (ESV)

Free to Choose Moral Good

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

¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live,

Proverbs 1:29-33

²⁹ Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the LORD,
³⁰ would have none of my counsel
and despised all my reproof,
³¹ therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way,
and have their fill of their own devices.
³² For the simple are killed by their turning away,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;
³³ but whoever listens to me will dwell secure
and will be at ease, without dread of disaster."

James 4:17

¹⁷So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for 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 (ESV)

Man Chooses to Sin

Genesis 6:5

⁵The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Psalms 14:1-4

¹The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds,
there is none who does good.

²The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man,
to see if there are any who understand,
who seek after God.

³They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt;
there is none who does good,
not even one.

⁴Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers
who eat up my people as they eat bread
and do not call upon the LORD?

Jeremiah 17:9

⁹The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand 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.¹

¹ See *Bible Truths Explained: Predestination; Providence*.

PART 2

The 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

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?^[a] And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you 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

¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

Daniel 4:17

¹⁷ The sentence is by the decree of the watchers,² the decision by the word of the holy ones,³ to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest 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

² *watchers*: [Daniel 4:17](#); Hebrew, עִיר *ir*, *messenger* (of God); a *sentinel* to guard and protect; an *angel* (of God).

³ *holy ones*: [Daniel 4:17](#); Hebrew, קַדְדִּישׁ *qaddiṣh*, *angels* (of God)—in the present context. In other places, the same Hebrew word for 'holy ones' can refer to holy people (of God), or 'saints' (the sanctified people of God).

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, superhuman, angels, fallen or evil spirits, or anything else.

To this end, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 14:24

²⁴ The LORD of hosts has sworn:
“As I have planned,
so shall it be,
and as I have purposed,
so shall it stand, (See v.25)

Daniel 4:34-35

³⁴ At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar,⁴ lifted my eyes to heaven,
and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised
and honoured him who lives for ever,

for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand
or say to him, “What have you done?”
(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.⁵

⁴ *Nebuchadnezzar*: King of Babylon (605–562 B.C.) and conqueror of Jerusalem.

⁵ Cf. C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 1, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1871, 1977 reprint], p. 440.

Thus, the Scripture declares:

Psalms 33:10-11

¹⁰ The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands for ever,
the plans of his heart to all generations.

Isaiah 14:26-27

²⁶ This is the purpose that is purposed
concerning the whole earth,
and this is the hand that is stretched out
over all the nations.

²⁷ For the LORD of hosts has purposed,
and who will annul it?
His hand is stretched out,
and who will turn it back?

Acts 4:28

²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

PART 3

The Exercise of God's Sovereignty

God exercises his sovereign rule over all creation in the following ways: ⁶

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.⁷ 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

¹ O LORD, our Lord,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!
 You have set your glory above the heavens.
² Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
 you have established strength because of your foes,
 to still the enemy and the avenger. [Cf. Matt. 11:25; 21:16]

⁶ Cf. C. Hodge, *op. cit.* Vol. 1, pp. 440-441.

⁷ *several classes of holy angels*: That is, **Archangel(s)**, (Michael as chief warrior-angel), **Seraphim** (worship around God's throne; "burning ones"), **Cherubim** (guardians of holy space; throne-bearers), **Angels** (general messengers and servants of God).

- ³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings⁸
and crowned him with glory and honour.
⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet, [Cf. vv.4-6 with Heb. 2:5-9]
⁷ all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your 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

²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [Cf. Deut. 32:8] ²⁷ that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way towards him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, (See vv.16-31)

⁸ *heavenly beings*: Psalms 8:5; Hebrew, אֱלֹהִים 'ēlōhîm, *God or god*. (Greek Septuagint, *angels*) The Hebrew word can refer to any mighty one, divine, angelic, or human. *Elohim* often refers to God, but in the present context the reference is to the heavenly beings or angels who are God's servants and messengers.

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

Job 12:23-24

²³ He makes nations great, and he destroys them;
he enlarges nations, and leads them away.

²⁴ He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth
and makes them wander in a pathless waste. (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

⁹ The heart of man plans his way,
but the LORD establishes his steps.
(See also vv.1,4,33)

Proverbs 19:21

²¹ Many are the plans in the mind of a man,
but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.
(See also Prov. 20:24)

Proverbs 21:30-31

³⁰ No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel
can avail against the LORD.

³¹ The horse is made ready for the day of battle,
but the victory belongs to 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

⁴ The LORD has made everything for its purpose,
even the wicked for the day of trouble.

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

Matthew 11:26

²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.
(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

⁷ The LORD makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low and he exalts.
⁸ He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honour.
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's,
and on them he has set the world. (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

²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honourable use and another for dishonourable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

John 3:36

³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains 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

²⁶ This is the purpose that is purposed
concerning the whole earth,
and this is the hand that is stretched out
over all the nations.

²⁷ For the LORD of hosts has purposed,
and who will annul it?

His hand is stretched out,
and who will turn it back?

(See vv.24-25)

Isaiah 46:9-10

⁹ remember the former things of old;
for I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me,
¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
and I will accomplish all my purpose',

Daniel 4:35

³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand
or say to him, "What have you done?"

Ephesians 1:11

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been
predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things
according to the counsel of his 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.⁹

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

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [Cf. Dan. 7:13,14] ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

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

John 10:27-30

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all,

⁹ Cf. C. Hodge, *op. cit.* Vol. 1, p. 441.

and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one." (See vv.22-33)

Again, God's Word assures us:

Romans 8:38-39

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (See vv.31-37)

1 Peter 1:3-5

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a 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. ¹⁰

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.

¹⁰ 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

²⁵ To whom then will you compare me,
that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see:
who created these?

He who brings out their host by number,
calling them all by name,
by the greatness of his might,
and because he is strong in power
not one is missing.

(See vv.21-24; cf. Ps. 147:4)

Isaiah 48:13

¹³ My hand laid the foundation of the earth,
and my right hand spread out the heavens;
when I call to them,
they stand forth together.

(See vv.12-15)

Psalms 135:6-7

⁶ Whatever the LORD pleases, he does,
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and all deeps.

⁷ He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth,
who makes lightnings for the rain
and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.

(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

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?¹¹ And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from 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

⁵ Since his days are determined,
and the number of his months is with you,
and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass,
(See vv.1-4)

Psalms 31:15

¹⁵ My times are in your hand;
rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!

Acts 17:28

²⁸ for
“In him we live and move and have our being’;
as even some of your own poets have said,
“For we are indeed 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:

¹¹ [Matthew 10:29](#) Greek *assarion*, Roman copper coin (Latin *quadrans*) worth about 1/16 of a *denarius* (which was a day's wage for a labourer). (ESV footnote)

Proverbs 16:9

⁹ The heart of man plans his way,
but the LORD establishes his steps.
(See also Prov. 19:21; 20:24; 21:30-31)

Matthew 6:8

⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (See vv.5-13)

Luke 12:29-31

²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his^[a] kingdom, and these things will be added to you. (See vv.22-34)

Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are 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

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn¹² of all creation. [Cf. Ps. 89:27] ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (See vv.10-19; see also Heb. 1:2-3)

Submitting to Christ's Lordship

Scripture References (ESV)

Submitting to Christ's Lordship

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

Romans 12:1-2

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers,¹³ by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your

¹² *firstborn*: Colossians 1:15; Greek, πρωτότοκος *prōtotokos*, In the present context, the apostle Paul is using the Greek word, *prōtotokos*, in a metaphorical sense to mean first in *rank, status, or office, or pre-eminent*. In the literal sense, *prōtotokos* means 'the firstborn' (child of a family), but this is not the sense intended in this passage. The passage in Colossians 1:15-17 makes it very clear that he (Christ) created all things in heaven and earth. This means that God the Son is before all things and exists eternally with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. 'Firstborn' in this passage relates to Christ's pre-eminence and supremacy over the entire creation—not to his supposed birth or creation. As the One by whom all things were created in heaven and earth, the Son of God precedes the creation and brings about the creation. Therefore, since he is not part of the created order, but rather the One through whom all creation came into being, Jesus must have existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity.

¹³ Romans 12:1 Or *brothers and sisters* (ESV footnote)

spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world,¹⁴ but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.¹⁵ (See vv.3-11)

James 4:13-15

¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

James 4:16-17

¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for 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

¹⁸ At the command of the LORD the people of Israel set out, and at the command of the LORD they camped. As long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. ¹⁹ Even when the cloud continued over the tabernacle for many days, the people of Israel kept the charge of the LORD and did not set out. (See vv.15-17)

Numbers 9:20

²⁰ Sometimes the cloud would remain for a few days over the tabernacle, and according to the command of the LORD they remained in camp; then according to the command of the LORD they set out.

Numbers 9:21-23

²¹ And sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning. And when the cloud lifted in the morning, they set out, or if it continued for a day and a night, when the cloud lifted they set out. ²² Whether it was two

¹⁴ [Romans 12:2](#) Greek *age* (ESV footnote)

¹⁵ [Romans 12:2](#) *Or what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.* (ESV footnote)

days, or a month, or a longer time, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, abiding there, the people of Israel remained in camp and did not set out, but when it lifted they set out. ²³At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out. They kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by Moses.

Does The Lord Still Guide His People?

Scripture References (ESV)

Submitting to Christ's Lordship

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

²⁹And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” (See vv.26-40)

Acts 13:2-4

²While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

⁴So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (See v.1)

Acts 16:6-7

⁶And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

Acts 16:8-9

⁸So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

Acts 16:10

¹⁰And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to 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

¹² He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. ¹³ Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas,¹⁶ and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' ¹⁴ But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want 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

³⁰ If his children forsake my law
and do not walk according to my rules,
³¹ if they violate my statutes
and do not keep my commandments,
³² then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their iniquity with stripes,
³³ but I will not remove from him my steadfast love

¹⁶ [Luke 19:13](#) A *mina* was about three months' wages for a labourer. (ESV footnote)

or be false to my faithfulness.
(See vv.28-37; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14-15)

Hebrews 12:5-6

⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

⁶ For the Lord disciplines¹⁷ the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”
{Prov. 3:11-12} See Heb. 12:7-8)

Hebrews 12:9-10

⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

Hebrews 12:13

¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. (See vv.12-14)

God Restores Those Who Repent

Scripture References (ESV)

God Restores Those Who Repent

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

Job 22:21-23

²¹ “Agree with God, and be at peace;
thereby good will come to you.

¹⁷ *disciplines*: Hebrews 12:6; Greek, παιδεύω **paideuō**, The word, ‘discipline’, means to *train, instruct, correct, or direct* (in the right ways or paths, or conduct). It usually involves oral/verbal training—as when Jesus taught his disciples. It can also involve punishment in the form of blessings or benefits withheld or other temporary deprivations of favours until correction and repentance is achieved. Again, it can involve more severe deprivations of liberty or freedom such as when Israel was taken into captivity due to their repeated disobedience to and rebellion against the LORD their God. However, in all cases, God applies discipline out of love for his children, and with the aim of bringing about their genuine repentance and restoration to full fellowship with himself. Similarly, parental discipline should be applied only in love and out of a due regard for a child’s best interests and welfare and primarily to honour the Lord in training a child in the way he or she should go. (The ways of love, righteousness, truth, and justice as taught in the Bible, the Word of God.) (Prov. 22:6)

²² Receive instruction from his mouth,
and lay up his words in your heart.
²³ If you return to the Almighty you will be built up;
if you remove injustice far from your tents,
(See vv.24-30; see also Ps. 119:67,71)

Job 42:10

¹⁰ And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. (See vv.7-11)

Job 42:12

¹² And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. (See vv.13-17)

Joel 2:12-14

¹² "Yet even now," declares the LORD,
"return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
¹³ and rend your hearts and not your garments."
Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.
¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
for the LORD your God? (See vv.1-11)

Joel 2:25-26

²⁵ I will restore to you the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent among you.
²⁶ "You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.
And my people shall never again be put to shame.
(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

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Psalms 51:17

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
(See entire Psalm.)

And, on another occasion, the Psalmist says:

Psalms 118:18

¹⁸ The LORD has disciplined me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.

According to God's Good Purpose

Scripture References (ESV)

According to God's Good Purpose

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

Ephesians 1:11

¹¹In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, (See vv.3-12)

Philippians 2:13

¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for 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

³² then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes,
³³but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness. (See vv.30,31)

Psalms 119:67

⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.

Psalms 119:71

⁷¹ It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.

Loving Discipline of Children

Scripture References (ESV)

Loving Discipline of Children

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

Proverbs 13:24

²⁴ Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

Proverbs 19:18

¹⁸ Discipline your son, for there is hope;
do not set your heart on putting him to death.

Proverbs 22:6

⁶ Train up a child in the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:15

¹⁵ Folly is bound up in the heart of a child,
but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

Proverbs 23:13-14

¹³ Do not withhold discipline from a child;
if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.
¹⁴ If you strike him with the rod,
you will save his soul from Sheol.

Proverbs 29:15

¹⁵ The rod and reproof give wisdom,
but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

Proverbs 29:17

¹⁷ Discipline your son, and he will give you rest;
he will give delight to your heart.

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

¹⁷ “Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves;
therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.

¹⁸ For he wounds, but he binds up;
he shatters, but his hands heal. (See vv.19-22)

And again, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 30:26

²⁶ Moreover, the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the LORD binds up the brokenness of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow. (See vv.19-25)

Hosea 6:1-3

¹ “Come, let us return to the LORD;
for he has torn us, that he may heal us;
he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

² After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.

³ Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD;
his going out is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers,
as the spring rains that water the earth.”
(See vv.4-10)

Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (See vv.31-39)

1 Peter 5:6-7

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (See v.5)

1 Peter 5:10-11

¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the dominion for ever 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

¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules 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:¹⁸

Isaiah 45:4-6

⁴ For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I name you, though you do not know me.
⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other,
besides me there is no God;
I equip you, though you do not know me,
⁶ that people may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is none besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is no other.
(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

⁹ remember the former things of old;
for I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me,
¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
and I will accomplish all my purpose',
¹¹ calling a bird of prey from the east,
the man of my counsel from a far country.
I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass;

¹⁸ Persia: Largely corresponds to present day Iran.

I have purposed, and I will 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

¹ The vision of Obadiah.

Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom:

We have heard a report from the LORD,

and a messenger has been sent among the nations:

“Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!” (See vv.5-10)

² Behold, I will make you small among the nations;
you shall be utterly despised.¹⁹

³ The pride of your heart has deceived you,
you who live in the clefts of the rock,
in your lofty dwelling,
who say in your heart,

“Who will bring me down to the ground?”

⁴ Though you soar aloft like the eagle,
though your nest is set among the stars,
from there I will bring you down,
declares 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

¹² And the word of the LORD came to me: ¹³ “Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it and break its supply of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast, ¹⁴ even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, declares the Lord God.

¹⁹ [Obadiah 1:2](#) Or *Behold, I have made you small among the nations; you are utterly despised.* (ESV footnote)

Ezekiel 14:15

¹⁵ “If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they ravage it, and it be made desolate, so that no one may pass through because of the beasts,

Ezekiel 14:17

¹⁷ “Or if I bring a sword upon that land and say, Let a sword pass through the land, and I cut off from it man and beast,

Ezekiel 14:19

¹⁹ “Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out my wrath upon it with 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

¹³ When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, ¹⁴ if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and 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.²⁰

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 (ESV)

God Appoints and Deposes World Rulers

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

²¹ He changes times and seasons;
he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding;
(See vv.1-36)

Daniel 4:17

¹⁷ The sentence is by the decree of the watchers,²¹ the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.' (See vv.4-18)

²⁰ See *Bible Truths Explained: Providence*.

²¹ *watchers / holy ones*: [Daniel 4:17](#); *angels* (of God). Holy angels are the servants and messengers of God, and guardians or protectors of God's people.

Daniel 4:30-32

³⁰ and the king answered and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?”

³¹ While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, ³² and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” (See vv.19-37)

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

¹ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. (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 Deposits 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

¹⁸ O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. ¹⁹ And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled.

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

²⁰But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken 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

²¹He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. He was fed grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom 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

³⁴At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him who lives for ever,

for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,

and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;

³⁵all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth;

and none can stay his hand

or say to him, "What have you done?" (See v.36)

Daniel 4:37

³⁷Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

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, or penalty for, 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.²²

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 called according to his purpose—all things work together for good. As the Scripture says:

Romans 8:28-29

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom

²² See *Bible Truths Explained: The Fall of Man; Sin*.

he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn²³ among many brothers. (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. 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

¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

Psalms 103:17-19

¹⁷ But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting
on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
¹⁸ to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.
¹⁹ The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all. (See vv.8-16)

Again, God's Word says:

Psalms 30:4-5

⁴ Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints,
and give thanks to his holy name.
⁵ For his anger is but for a moment,
and his favour is for a lifetime.
Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.
(See vv.1-12)

Psalms 34:4-8

⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.
⁵ Those who look to him are radiant,
and their faces shall never be ashamed.

²³ *firstborn*: [Romans 8:29](#); Greek, πρωτότοκος **prōtotokos**, In the present context, the apostle Paul is using the Greek word, *prōtotokos*, in a metaphorical sense to mean first in *rank*, *status*, or *office*, or *the pre-eminent One*. (See footnote 12 on page 18 of this study for more detailed information.)

⁶This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.

⁷The angel of the LORD encamps round those who fear him, and delivers them.

⁸Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
(See vv.1-10)

Psalms 34:17-19

¹⁷When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.

¹⁸The LORD is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

¹⁹Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.
(See vv.11-22)

Psalms 57:1-2

¹Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.

²I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfils his purpose for me.
(See vv.3-6)

1 Peter 5:6-7

⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (See v.5)

1 Peter 5:10-11

¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (See vv.8-9; cf. 1 Pet. 4:12-19)

