

# **God's Sovereignty**

**Trust Him More**

**Dr. Mark C. Roser**

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this book are from the New International Version of the Bible.

The following abbreviations are used for other Bible versions:

KJV is King James Version  
NKJV is the New King James Version  
LB is Living Bible  
RSV is the Revised Standard Version,  
NAS is the New American Standard,  
AMP is the Amplified Bible  
MB is the Message Bible.

All *italicized* emphasis within Scripture is the author's own addition.

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This book is dedicated to all those who long to trust God more deeply. Like the saints at Borrowdale Brooke Church in Harare, to whom these lessons were first delivered, may this book inspire you to trust in a sovereign God, even when life is difficult.

Special appreciation to my wife, Pat, who stood with me during those years of national crisis in Zimbabwe, enduring many difficulties like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. May God richly reward your steadfast faith in Him!

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# Introduction



## **Introduction**

Imagine a family of mice who lived all their lives in a large Grand Piano. To them, in their piano world, came the music of the instrument, filling all the dark spaces with sound and harmony. At first the mice were impressed by it. They drew comfort and wonder from the thought that there was someone who made the music – invisible, yet close to them. They often thought of the great Player whom they could not see.

Then one day a daring mouse climbed up part of the piano. He returned very thoughtful. He had found out how the music was made. Wires were the secret; tightly stretched wires of graduated lengths, which trembled and vibrated. They must revise all their old beliefs; none but the most conservative could any longer believe in the Unseen Player. Later, another explorer carried the explanation further. Hammers were now the secret, numbers of hammers dancing and leaping on the wires. This was a more complicated theory, but it all went to show that they lived in a purely mechanical world. The unseen Player came to be thought of as a Myth. But the Pianist continued to play!

## ***Thoughts of God***

We humans are no longer impressed with thoughts of God's grandeur. God's nature and attributes are seldom articulated as the basis for living. Although many claim to believe in God, men base their lives on what they see and not on One who is unseen. And when it comes to how this world operates, people focus on the observable laws of nature rather than on an invisible Maker who orders His creation.

The Bible however teaches us to believe in the invisible, sovereign God. Such teaching honors God and keeps man from pride and unbelief. Contemporary theology tends to exalt man, feeding both his pride and false sense of independence; whereas, teaching on God's sovereignty confronts such deceitfulness, revealing man's utter dependence on God.

The comfort and wonder of an all powerful, all knowing, ever present God directing the affairs of this life is all but lost in our secular society. As a result, contemporary man is without an anchor and has lost his bearings. In the storms of life this becomes most noticeable. Everyday life apart from a true knowledge of God also loses harmony and purpose. What we need are new thoughts concerning the infinite majesty of our God. That is what this book is all about.

### ***Trust Him More***

Many Christians have failed to seriously consider God's sovereignty. This book will encourage you to take into account the Unseen Player: to think new, inspired, Biblical thoughts that will create a deeper trust in Him. "God's Sovereignty" will bring sound and harmony to the dark places of your life. It will surely comfort you in times of trouble.

For me, "God's Sovereignty" was birthed out of intense turmoil. In the last years of President Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe experienced untold suffering, leaving many praying Christians confused. As I lived and pastored there during this crisis, I was wonderfully encouraged by the truth that God is sovereign over nations and even evil itself. The truth of God's sovereignty was restored to my life, and, oh, how it helped me trust God in every area of my life.

Before then, I had widely studied the Bible, earning a doctorate in Biblical Studies, and yet I was not well versed in this subject. I tended to equate the doctrine of God's sovereignty to Calvinism and had pretty much avoided it. Consequently my faith was lacking a most vital truth.

Besides the doctrine Christ and His atoning work, I can honestly say that insight into God's sovereignty has benefited me as much as any great truth in Scripture. I now rest more assured of God's loving care and faithful oversight of my life. My anxiety and stress levels have been greatly reduced. I know that God is in control of my life, and that He is well able to fulfill His will for me. Oh, the grace that the truth of God's sovereignty has brought me to trust Him more!

When I face adversity, I now expectantly look for God's hand to turn it for good as He has so graciously promised. This fresh awareness of God's sovereignty has ushered me into a higher realm of living by faith. "Grace and peace have been multiplied to me through the knowledge of God" (2 Pet. 1:2). That is why I decided to put this message into print for your benefit.

This study on God's sovereignty was initially delivered in a series of sermons at Borrowdale Brooke Church in Harare, Zimbabwe. These teachings helped us to trust God in the midst of prolonged, national adversity. I believe it will help anyone who is going through difficult circumstances, which is something we all face from time to time.

If you are a preacher, small group leader, or Bible teacher, please feel free to draw from these lessons to share with others. The doctrine of God's sovereignty is for new believers as well as for the more mature. I believe this teaching will help establish your faith on the bedrock of Scripture.

You will see that the doctrine of God's sovereignty is necessary for strong Biblical faith. Our reliance on God can only genuinely extend in proportion to God's ability. If God is not sovereign over nations, individuals and evil itself, how can we completely trust Him? If my Father is unable catch me, I should not venture to jump. If God were not sovereign, then there would be whole areas of human experience in which I must fend for myself.

### ***God's Nature and Attributes***

Bible literacy and an accurate understanding of God's nature as revealed in the Bible is often lacking. As an attribute of God's nature, the sovereignty of God was an expression that was once generally understood. But today, to make mention of God's sovereignty is, in many quarters, to speak in an unknown tongue. It is however the language of Scripture! Consider Paul's language as he contemplated God's sovereign ways: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unfathomable are His judgements! And how untraceable are His ways ...For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever! Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36).

After the Epilogue, you will find Discussion Questions. These questions are useful for personal study or in a small group setting. They can stimulate thoughtful and lively discussions. You may also wish to use the final page of the book to write out your own questions or insights as you read “God’s Sovereignty.”

Throughout the lessons in this book, my desire is for Scripture to speak. By looking at Scripture you will come to an understanding of what God’s sovereignty means. In the process I will systematically draw out principles on God’s sovereignty and outline the practical implications of this doctrine for you as a believer. I also address what is clearly the chief difficulty many have with this doctrine - the meeting point of *God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility*.

To many it has seemed that for God to do anything more than to invite or to warn would be to interfere with man’s freedom, destroy his responsibility, and reduce him to a robot. We will see, however, that God remains sovereign while man remains responsible for his actions. In the process, God’s power is revealed and our own good safeguarded.

Someone said, “We can never understand the sovereignty of God over our world, unless we regard it as a complicated machine having ten thousand parts, directed in all its operations.” I like that statement. Therefore, let us joyfully examine some of the parts of this vast subject. And let’s see if we can come to a better understanding of how God’s sovereignty operates. This will definitely help us to trust him more!

### ***Prayer***

I pray that by this study you will have a fuller revelation of who God is! That as you consider God’s sovereignty, “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” (Eph. 1:17-18). May we clearly see that “Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours; you are exalted as head over all” (1 Chr. 29:11).

## **CHAPTER ONE**

# **God's Sovereignty Over Nations**



## **God's Sovereignty Over Nations**

In his 1983 Templeton Address, Alexander Solzhenitsyn reviewed the tragic history of Russia under communism by saying, “Over half a century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: “Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this happened.””

He went on to say, “Since then I have spent well-nigh fifty years working on the history of the revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: Men have forgotten God; that is why all this has happened.” Lest we forget!

### ***Old Testament***

Men cannot disregard and neglect God without serious consequences! No nation is exempt from the dreadful consequences of forgetting God. God told the nation of Israel not to forget Him when she experienced great peace and prosperity in the Promised Land. “Only take heed to yourself lest you forget... Beware that you forget not the Lord...if you do at all forget the Lord thy God...you shall surely perish” (Deut. 4:9, 23; 6:11-12; 8:11, 14). Jeremiah lamented with God that “My people have forgotten Me days without number.” The prophet also saw the consequences of Israel forgetting her God. (Jer. 2:32; Lam. 1:1ff).

The ten statements that follow provide a brief overview of what the Old Testament teaches on God’s sovereignty over nations. These truths are illustrated in many nations throughout the Old Testament. They still apply to the nations today as daily news reports evidence this somber fact that people for their own good need to remember God. Men may choose to forget God but they can’t choose the consequences to such a choice.

## *God's Sovereignty*

1. God reigns over the nations (Ps. 47:8; 2 Chr. 20:6; Ps. 22:28).
2. He disciplines nations and will judge among them and settle their disputes (Ps. 94:10; 110:6; Isa. 25:7).
3. He makes nations great and destroys them; enlarges and disperses them (Job 12:23).
4. His eyes watch the nations (Ps. 66:7).
5. He foils the plans of the nations and thwarts their purposes. But His plans stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations (Ps. 33:10-11,16).
6. He used Israel as his witness to the nations (Num.14:15; Deut.29: 24; 1Chron.16:24; Ps.126:2).
7. He blesses all nations through Abraham's seed and brings the Desire of All Nations (Gen.18:18; 22:18; 26:4; Ps. 72:17; Hag.2:7).
8. He makes His salvation known to the nations (Ps.98:2; Isa. 52:10).
9. He shakes all nations and brings them to a decision (Joel 3:2-14).
10. He alone will be exalted among the nations (Ps. 46:10).

### *New Testament*

Jesus is Abraham's Seed. He has come to bless every believing nation. In the New Testament, God's sovereignty over the nations is therefore focused on His redemptive purposes in Christ. God has promised that the Goodnews of His Kingdom will be preached "in all the world as a witness to every nation before the end of the age" (Matt. 24:14).

When Christ died on the cross, God displayed His awesome sovereignty over the nations. "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your will and power decided beforehand should happen" (Acts 4:27-28).

Herod, Pilate and the Jewish leaders did what they wanted to do, and yet the Bible says, "*they did what God's will and power decided beforehand should happen.*" It is true that human rulers played a key role in the events surrounding Jesus' death. It is however equally true that these events happened according to God's will and purpose.

Theologians refer to this aspect of God's sovereignty as Providence. John Newton, a converted slave trader and author of the familiar hymn "Amazing Grace," wrote that "the kings of the earth are continually disturbing the world with their schemes of ambition and the gratification of their own passions. But in all that they do... the great King and Lord fulfils His purposes."

Newton's words are true to Scripture. In the Gospel accounts we see several instances in the early life of Jesus where rulers directly affected Jesus' life. And in each instance the Scriptures make the observation that through their actions certain prophecies were fulfilled. Below is a brief outline of such events in Jesus' early life:

- ***Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken.*** This census led to the place where Jesus was born and resulted in the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Lk. 2:1-7; Micah 5:2).
- ***Herod attempted to take Jesus' life*** when he killed the babies under the age of two in Bethlehem; thus fulfilling a prophecy of Jeremiah (Matt. 2:16-18 and Jer. 31:15).
- ***Herod's threat caused Jesus' parents to flee to Egypt*** where He stayed for a season as Hosea predicted (Matt. 2:14-15; Hos. 11:1).
- ***Herod's son ascended to his father's throne***, which led to Jesus growing up in the town of Nazareth just as another prophet foretold (Matt. 2:16-23; Isa. 11:1).

Like in Jesus' life, God sovereignty over nations is crucial because the governments of the day - their leaders, laws and policies, their handling of the economy and public issues - affect our lives in real ways. So God recorded specific instances of His sovereign rule in the affairs of nations so that we might trust Him as the events of our day unfold.

Although we cannot exhaust the subject of God's sovereignty over nations, what in essence might we learn so that we might trust Him better? In the remainder of this chapter we enlarge on *four truths* that will help us trust God as events unfold in our day.

## **God's Sovereignty**

### ***First: God's sovereignty does not deny human responsibility***

Many struggle with the seemingly conflicting beliefs that God is sovereign over the actions of men and yet men have the power of choice. How can God exercise His sovereignty and men still have real freedom to choose their course of action? Can these two realities possibly co-exist?

The answer is a resounding YES! For example, the rulers in Jesus' day chose their actions. They did what they intended to do according to their own agendas, and yet God worked out his purposes. Also at times God simply frustrated their plans and overruled what they had in mind. For example, the first Herod tried to take Jesus' life but failed, "for His (Jesus') time had not yet come" (John 7:6-8). Later, the Jewish leaders, another Herod, and the Roman leader Pilate succeeded in taking Jesus' life. Why? Because God had purposed for Christ to suffer and die. And "His time had come" (Matt. 26:18).

Horace Greeley shares this same idea. He sat behind Abraham Lincoln when he read his inaugural speech on a bright, warm, still March day in 1860. He later wrote that "there were forty times the reason for shooting him in 1860 than there was in 1865, and at least forty times as many intent on killing him or having him killed...no shot was fired then, however, for his hour had not yet come."

To reconcile God's sovereignty and man's moral freedom, A. W. Tozer used the illustration of an ocean liner in the days when people crossed the Atlantic by boat. He pointed out how the boat leaves New York City for Liverpool in England. Its destination is determined beforehand by proper Port Authorities. On board are scores of passengers. They are not in chains nor are their activities determined beforehand. They are free to move about, eat, sleep, play, read, and talk as they please; yet, all the while they are moving steadily toward a predetermined port. Both freedom and sovereignty are present and co-exist here without any conflict between them.

The Bible is clear that men are accountable to God for their decisions and actions, while God is sovereign over every eventual *outcome*. This point is more fully addressed later in our chapter on “**God’s Sovereignty Over People.**” We mention it at this point since it is the main stumbling block to many. In each chapter we build on the truths of the preceding chapter so as to increase our appreciation of God’s power.

### ***Second: God’s sovereignty is often not apparent***

The fact that God is sovereign over rulers is usually not evident to us as we view their actions on a human plane. Government officials do their work quite apart from any intent to carry out the will of God. On the surface there seems to be nothing to see except human activity creating and defining history on a horizontal level. It is only in the Biblical revelation that we see the hand of God ruling over and guiding the activities of a nation on a vertical level.

We may not perceive the unseen hand of God in the affairs of our nation as we view them today, and yet His rule is no less sovereign today than it was in the days of Christ, the prophets and the apostles. The events that the Gospel writers recorded, like those of the Old Testament, were worked out in the course of ordinary human circumstances. Were it not, however, for the inspired commentary in Scripture, we would have no more reason to see the sovereign hand of God in them anymore than we do in the most mundane occurrences reported in our daily newspapers.

That being true then, we should likewise see in those affairs, which are reported in our daily paper, the sovereign hand of God just as we see it in the Bible. Of course, we do not have the advantage of the divinely revealed explanation of today’s events, as we do of those recorded in the Bible. Our lack of insight however does not make God’s activity today any less certain. Remember, for those experiencing the events that are recorded in the Bible narratives, God’s hand was no more apparent to them than His hand is apparent to us today in ours.

At this point it is helpful to briefly outline three specific Bible truths that stand out regarding God's sovereignty over nations, which are not apparent to many people today.

### ***1. God instituted government and He sets up rulers***

Paul writes that “everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God” (Rom. 13:1). In the Old Testament Daniel wrote that “the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men” (Dan. 4:17).

Evil tyrants and dictators, weak and foolish men have often held high office but it is God who put them there for His own purposes. How sin and evil ultimately rebound to God's glory is a mystery to us at the time, but that is nevertheless the case as it was both in Jesus' birth and death. In another chapter we examine in-depth this sovereignty of God over evil.

### ***2. God determines the length and extent of their rule***

Isaiah the prophet is very bold when he says, “He brings princes to naught and reduces the leaders of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff” (40:23-24).

Nebuchadnezzar's reign seemed endless but his sanity was taken from him. He was driven away from his people and ate grass like a cow. No man or government is so powerful as to be beyond the sway of God's sovereign rule once He determines their day is over. The Bible is clear: “No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, He exalts another” (Ps. 75:6-7).

### **3. God works out His purposes in their decisions. He decides who wins on the battlefield and at the ballot box**

Even when God allows rulers to act contrary to His revealed will, as expressed in His commandments, their actions are never beyond the bounds of His sovereign rule. We saw this in the birth and death of Christ where God's law was repeatedly violated by evil rulers.

God sometimes even *causes* government leaders to make foolish decisions in order to expose what is in their hearts and to bring about their demise. Most of these decisions are based on counsel that they receive. In the Old Testament there are many examples of leaders rising and falling on the counsel they receive.

There is the example of King David and his son, Absalom, who rebelled against his father. This was part of God's chastisement of David, spoken by Nathan the prophet because of David's sin with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 12:11). David and his loyal followers fled from Jerusalem in the wake of Absalom's coup. Absalom entered Jerusalem and sought advice from two men: Ahithophel and Hushai. These men gave contradictory advice and Absalom chose the advice of Hushai.

It was foolish for Absalom to follow Hushai's advice for the Bible says, "in those days the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God" (2 Sam. 16:23). Yet Absalom chose to follow Hushai's advice. Why? The Scripture is clear: "For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom" (2 Sam. 17:14).

We see the same scenario later with Solomon's son. King Rehoboam was asked by his people to lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke Solomon had put on them. The older men advised Rehoboam to give the people a favorable answer, but he rejected their advice. After he consulted the young men, he followed their advice, and answered the people harshly.

The result: ten tribes revolted. Why such a foolish decision? “So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the LORD, to fulfil the word the LORD had spoken” (1 Kings. 12:15). The same scenario has repeated itself countless times in history.

Napoleon, at the height of his career, is reported to have given this cynical answer to someone who asked if God was on the side of France, “God is on the side of whoever has the heaviest artillery.” When he heard the words of Thomas a’ Kempis, that “man proposes and God disposes,” Napoleon said, “Ah, but I propose and dispose too.”

Against the good advice of his confidants, Napoleon proposed to invade and take Russia. In fact he proposed to make all Europe his. And how did he come back again? How did he dispose? He came back solitary and alone. His mighty army perished and wasted, having nearly eaten and devoured one another through hunger. According to history he entered Russia with well over two hundred thousand men and left with but a mere twenty thousand, half-dead men.

Four times in the space of a chapter in the book of Daniel we read “that God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men” (Dan. 4:17, 25-32). Nebuchadnezzar had to learn this lesson and “acknowledge that Heaven rules and those who walk in pride God is able to humble” (Dan. 4:26; 5:21). God humbled that proud world leader. He went out of His mind until he acknowledged God’s dominion is eternal and His kingdom endures from generation to generation (see Daniel 4:34-37).

God rules in the affairs of men. This is the lesson with which history confronts us all. God is able to work His will – despite man. The Proverb is true that “in his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps” (16:9). Therefore, when we say that God is sovereign, we acknowledge that “He is the Most High” and that “all the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. *He does as He pleases* with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him: ““What have you done?”” (Dan. 4:35; Ps. 115:3).

I like the story of the boy who came to breakfast while his father was reading the morning newspaper. The year was 1902 and the place was England. The official announcement in the newspaper had set the date on which Prince Edward was to be crowned king and become Edward VII. The boy would never forget hearing his father say “Oh, the wording here is not right! There is no *Deo Volente!*” In Latin that means “God willing!” The British Empire was at the zenith of its power. Queen Victoria was gone and Prince Edward was to be crowned. As the boy noted, when the day came, mighty England could not crown her new king. Edward had a high fever due to a kidney infection and the ceremony had to be rescheduled. We must always remember “*Deo Volente!*” This brings us to our third main truth.

### ***Third: God’s sovereignty extends from the big picture to the smallest detail***

In the big picture, God says of Assyria, “the rod of my anger” (Isa. 10:5). Although Assyria did not consider itself as an agent to punish God’s people, it was. Remember God’s sovereignty is seldom apparent. Assyria was proud in its military conquest and considered Israel just another nation to dispossess. Nevertheless, God had planned it long ago. He also planned afterward to judge Assyria for its heavy-handed treatment of Israel. “I will punish the king of Assyria for his willful pride ... For he says: ‘By the strength of my hand I have done this’” (Isa. 10:5ff). Note, God still held Assyria responsible for their actions.

### ***The Smallest Detail***

Earlier in a series of woes pronounced on wicked Judah, Isaiah reveals the divine details of the impending invasion by the Assyrian army. Assyria invades Judah as a response to God’s summoning “whistle” (5:26). Isaiah describes the battle ready condition: “They come, swiftly and speedily! Not one of them tires or stumbles, not one slumbers or sleeps” (5:26-27). Then the prophet adds a rather amazing statement, “not a sandal thong is broken” (5:27).

## **God's Sovereignty**

In modern day language we would say, "Not a single shoelace [of any soldier] is broken." We see that this statement not only affirms the absoluteness of God's sovereignty, but also the thoroughness with which his sovereignty penetrates down to the last, minute detail. Maybe you've heard the old adage,

*"For want of a **nail**, the shoe was lost.  
For the want of a shoe, the horse was lost.  
For want of a horse, the rider was lost.  
For the want of a rider, the **battle** was lost!"*

Details are important and God is just as sovereign over the details as He is over the so-called "big picture." All the hairs on your head are numbered. He calls all the stars by name. Not one of them is missing. God is a God of great detail. This is evidenced throughout creation.

### **Fourth: God's sovereignty does not promote fatalism but faith**

God's sovereignty is never meant to promote fatalistic thinking and a "do nothing" attitude. On the contrary, it should inspire us to act with greater faith than would otherwise be possible. We can fully trust God, because He is truly sovereign over all of creation! Although His sovereignty is not obvious to mankind, and much of life seems like random details based on human whim, the Bible tells us that God is sovereign. We are thus called to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).

"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God" (Ps. 20:7). In modern day language we could say "some trust in armies or money or crafty plans." Although the Psalmist did not discard these things, he did not put his trust in them. "I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory" (Psalms 44:6-8). He recognised that an army must fight, but that victory comes from the Lord!

Belief in God's sovereignty should first motivate us to call on Him. We are told to pray for those in authority. This will help us to lead a peaceful and godly life. We are instructed to pray for the salvation of all men, especially for those who have authority over others (see 1 Tim. 2:1-4). We should pray also that God's will be done and His Kingdom come to our nation. He will answer our prayers when we humbly turn to Him and pray (see 2 Chron. 7:14).

The prophet Daniel did this. He understood from Scripture, in the book of Jeremiah, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. What did Daniel do as a result? Did he assume that since it was predicted and determined by God that nothing was necessary? No! He set himself to pray. Daniel recognised that Israel had been exiled from the land because of their sins, but he asked God to do what He had revealed in His covenant – to restore them. Therefore, he prayed prayers of repentance, confessing the sins of the nation. Neither God's sovereignty or His promise to visit them after seventy years caused Daniel to lapse into a fatalistic do-nothing attitude. Rather it stimulated him to pray! (see Daniel 9:1-27).

When our lives are adversely affected by the decisions of presidents, legislative bodies, courts and government officials, it is so we might learn to rely on God and earnestly seek Him. All of life is a classroom where God's people learn to trust and obey Him. There are test but these tests are within guidelines set by our Great Teacher (see 1 Cor.10:13).

Too often the message of God's sovereignty is used as a cop out. William Carey is called "the father of modern missions." You may recall his famous words: "Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God." It took young Carey great courage to confront the hyper-Calvinism in the denomination of his day. At a ministers' meeting in 1786, Carey raised the question of Christian duty to spread the Gospel throughout the world. A respected minister retorted, "Young man, sit down; when God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine." However Carey acted and an unusual turning point in the history of the worldwide Christian movement followed.

## **God's Sovereignty**

Each one of us should trust God as we do what He has placed within our power to do. We can then bring about constructive change for our nation and our world. That is our right and our responsibility! We are to act within the framework of God's word, which teaches us to "be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom.12:21).

### **End Time Sovereignty**

There is much in the Bible about God's sovereignty over the nations, from the formation of the first nations in Genesis to the final judgement of the nations in the book of Revelation (see Gen. 10:5ff; Rev. 19:15). The Bible tells us how Lucifer once laid the nations low by spreading a veil of deception over them (see Isa. 14:12; 25:7; Rev.20:3-8). How Christ came to remove that veil, and sprinkle many nations, cleansing them from their abominations (see 2Cor. 2:13; Isa. 52:15; Zech. 8:22; Mic. 4:2; Mal. 1:11).

Now the church carries Jesus' saving message into all the world as a witness to every nation. Through Christ, she is also God's house of prayer for all nations (Isa. 2:2;56:7). The prophet goes on to say "the nation or kingdom that will not serve Him will perish." (Isa. 60:12). For Christ "was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped Him" (Dan 7:14; Rev.5:9).

Having served as a missionary in Africa for some twenty years, I have seen Christ display His authority over a nation. I have noted God's supernatural ability and favor upon our life while conducting crusade meetings, planting churches, training nationals and doing relief work.

Time and again I have found His word absolutely true, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matt. 28:20). God watches over His word. He'll not spoil His perfect record by allowing you or I to be the first one that to whom He has ever been anything less than completely trustworthy.

## ***Nations in Eternity***

Finally, the Bible tells us that “nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore” (Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3). And “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Psa. 9:17). “When the Son of Man comes in His glory... All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goat (Matt. 25:31-32). But the redeemed “nations will walk by its (the New Jerusalem’s) light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it” (Rev. 21:24-26;22:2).

Jesus rules over everyone and everything – powerful nations and peoples. Like the individuals that comprise a nation, the so-called sovereign nations of the world are not truly sovereign (Ps. 9:20). They may claim sovereignty, but they are inter-dependent on each other and ever dependent on the only true Sovereign, Almighty God. Christ at His appearing “will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate (Sovereign Ruler), the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:16).

As we therefore watch events unfold in our day we can be expectant. The Lord has an exciting end-time plan for the nations. We can anticipate a great harvest before the Lord comes (see Ps.2:8;22:27; Isa.2:2;9:7;11:9; Matt.24:14; Mk.4:32; Rev.15:4 see also 1 Chr. 16:24,31; Psa. 67:1-2; 72:11;86:9; 102:15; Isa. 40:15; Jer. 10:7; Zech. 14:16).

From our point of view it may not look like God is in control of a nation! We often ask questions such as “Why?” and “How?” because we are on the incomplete side of eternity, trying to make sense out of what we see (Hab. 1:1ff; Ex.1:1ff). Someone observed that the history of a nation is like a giant piece of fabric with a very intricate and complex pattern. We see only a tiny fraction of the pattern, and that from the underside which usually makes no sense. God, however, sees the upper side and the entire fabric. He sees the beginning and the end, the complete picture.

## **God's Sovereignty**

God is fashioning the history of every nation. In the end we will see from the upper side of eternity that history is His Story!

In our next chapter on **God's Sovereignty Over People**, we look at that well-known verse: "The heart of the king is in the hand of the LORD; He directs it like a watercourse wherever He pleases" (Prov. 21:1). This will help us to understand one of the main ways in which God's sovereignty operates among people and nations.

### **Prayer**

We thank You Almighty God that You are firmly in control of history. Whether men acknowledge You or not, You are the One who establishes governments, determines

who will govern and for how long. You cause officials to make wise or foolish decisions. You grant victory and defeat. You even use the unrighteous to carry out Your purposes.

Although this is not understood by carnal men, You have revealed these things to us in Your Word. As Your people, we thus choose to completely trust You! We trust You from the big picture down to the smallest details of our life. Help us to trust You yet more and more!

LORD, we also pray that you would raise up godly leaders: men of integrity like Daniel and Joseph, who would advise and administrate the affairs of our country. LORD, we pray that the righteous may hold office and that our nation might be exalted in righteousness and our cities might rejoice. Help us to speak and act in a responsible way according to all that You have revealed in Your Word. Amen!

***CHAPTER TWO***

***God's  
Sovereignty  
Over  
People***



## God's Sovereignty Over People

In the wake of the tragic terrorist attacks of September 11 many stories emerged of those who lived while their co-workers died. Often the difference was a small peculiarity of that day. The head of one company missed work because his son started kindergarten. Another man was alive because it was his turn to bring doughnuts.

One woman arrived late because her alarm clock failed to go off in time. One spilled food on her clothes and had to take time to change. One was stuck on the New Jersey Turnpike due to a motor accident. Another's car would not start; yet another went back to answer the phone.

There are other stories of those that arrived in time, but got out of the building just before it came crashing down. But the story that struck me the most was the man who put on a new pair of shoes that morning. As he headed to work, he thought he would develop a blister on his foot, so he stopped at a drugstore to buy a Band-Aid. This delay is why he is alive today for his office was right where the first plane struck.

The next time you face inconveniences such as misplacing your car keys or hitting every traffic light, do not allow yourself to get angry or frustrated. Rather say to yourself, "Perhaps this is exactly where God wants me to be at this very moment." God's sovereignty often goes unnoticed; yet, it extends from the big picture down to the smallest detail.

In this chapter we look at God's sovereignty over people. We find that the Bible teaches that God exercises sovereignty over people in one of three ways.

In the process we will answer several vital questions like "Who is in charge of your life?" Is it your boss at work, your spouse at home, your parents or who? Is it you? I believe that the lessons in this chapter will be an eye opener for you and help you to trust God a lot more when it comes to people.

**Who Is Calling the Shots**

Can someone, without consulting you, make a decision or act in a way that affects your life profoundly? Whether we like it or not, the answer is “You bet they can!” A boss at work can fire you. Worse yet, a spouse can decide they are no longer in love with you. They now want out! After years of marriage and children, they walk away? And you gave them the best years of your life!

A drunk or careless driver can kill you or leave you crippled for the rest of your life. The possibilities are endless and yet the truth is clear. Often we find our futures and ourselves seemingly in the hands of other people. And at times other people hurt us whether intentionally or just in the course of “doing their own thing.”

As a result people go to great lengths trying to control those around them. They claim to believe in God but often struggle to trust Him in their relationships with others. It is easier to accept God's sovereignty over nature and impersonal circumstances because nature does not have a will of its own.

Can we trust God with people? Can He prevent others from hurting us? When He does not, does He allow it for a purpose? Is God sovereign over people? How can He override their bad, even evil decisions? Would this not violate their free will? What does the Bible teach?

There are many examples in Scripture that will provide helpful answers to these questions. For the sake of simplicity we outline *three ways* in which God does exercise His sovereignty over people.

***First: God can prompt anyone at anytime***

If we believe the Bible, the first point we must concede is that God is able and often does prompt people. There are many examples of this in the Bible but all of them are based on a simple but profound truth we find in the Proverbs: “*The kings heart is in the hand of the Lord, and He directs it like a watercourse wherever He pleases*” (Prov. 21:1).