

SOVEREIGNTY-2: INTRIGUE & GRACE IN PUNISHMENT, 6pgs

Israel began with God's promises to Abram, Isaac, and Jacob (**Gen.12:1**), that he would take their descendants for his own people, give them their own land, and bless them in it. But **wherever men are found, especially in the halls of power, there is also intrigue**. It is in the midst of the conspiracies, schemes, and plots of wicked men that God's sovereignty is revealed.

EGYPT - 1st Major Power to Subjugate the Hebrews

*¹³ Then the LORD said to Abram ... **your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years.** ¹⁴ But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth ... ¹⁶ After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction ... [The time is not yet ripe for conquest. The Hebrews are not a people of sufficient numbers to constitute a nation. When the time is right, God will use his people to judge the Amorites.] ¹⁸ So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day and said, I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt to the great Euphrates River— ¹⁹ the land now occupied by ... 7 Nations (**Gen. 15:**)*

During the years that followed, a number of incidents occurred that might be thought of as accidental, but were not, or as insignificant, but taken together reveal the working out of God's large scale plans. I'll just mention a few here to illustrate the point.

*When Joseph was seventeen years old, he often tended his father's flocks. He worked for his half brothers ... [and] reported to his father (Jacob) some of the bad things his brothers were doing [which turned them against him] ... Jacob even had a beautiful robe made for Joseph. ⁴ ... his brothers hated Joseph [all the more] because their father loved him more than the rest of them. [Their hatred was consuming them so much that] they couldn't say a kind word to him. (**Gen.37:**)*

*⁵ One night **Joseph had a dream** ... ⁷ We were out in the field, tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood up, and your bundles all gathered around and bowed low before mine! ... And they hated him all the more because of his dreams and the way he talked about them. ⁹ **Joseph had another dream**, and again he told his brothers about it ... The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me! ¹⁰ This time he told the dream to his father as well ... ¹¹ But while his brothers were jealous of Joseph, his father [though he rebuked him for telling them] wondered what the dreams meant.*

*Soon after this, Jacob sent Joseph to check up on his brothers who had been away pasturing the flocks. ¹⁸ When Joseph's brothers saw him coming, [their hatred had become so strong that] they made plans to kill him ... ²¹ when he heard of their scheme, **Ruben** convinced them to throw him into an empty cistern there in the wilderness to die "without our laying a hand on him." [For he planned to rescue Joseph.] ... ²⁵ Then, [as it happened] they ... saw a caravan of camels ... coming toward them - a group of Ishmaelite traders taking a load of [goods] from Gilead down to Egypt. ²⁶ Judah [proposed that they sell Joseph to the] traders [rather than killing him] ... ²⁸ So [they] sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver ... ³⁶ the traders then sold Joseph to Potiphar, captain of the palace guard to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. **Q - Was the appearance of that caravan happenstance or was it due the providential hand of God?***

During the years of his captivity, Joseph served his various masters faithfully despite being falsely accused and incarcerated. He resisted every evil temptation that presented itself to him. Eventually he came to be elevated by the Pharaoh to the second highest position in Egypt, next only to Pharaoh himself. **Q – How important was Joseph’s fidelity (1) in serving his masters, (2) in refusal to allow bitterness to infect his heart when falsely accused and jailed, and (3) in resisting temptations to the accomplishment of God’s plans?**

During this time, God brought conditions of great abundance and then a great drought over all the land thereabouts. Acting upon the special knowledge and wisdom God gave him, Joseph managed the assets of Egypt and greatly increased the Pharaoh’s wealth. He also provided a means for the people roundabout suffering from that drought to survive. He eventually brought all his kin to dwell in the land of Egypt. He said to his brothers ⁵ ... **don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place.** *It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives.* ⁶ *This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years ...* ⁷ *God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors ... And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.* (**Gen.45:**)

Don’t be afraid of me ... ²⁰ *You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.* (**Gen.50:**)

Q - How do these statements of purpose reveal what drove Joseph, what kept him on track?

... Joseph, when he was about to die, said confidently that the people of Israel would leave Egypt [according to God’s promises]. (**Heb.11:22; Gen.50:24-25**)

⁶ *In time, Joseph and all of his brothers died, ending that entire generation.* ⁷ *But their descendants, the Israelites ... multiplied so greatly that they became extremely powerful and filled the land [God was growing his nation within the womb of Egypt].* ⁸ *Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done.* ⁹ *He said to his people, Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are.* ¹⁰ *We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don’t, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country.*

¹¹ *So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves [just as God said they would]. They appointed brutal slave drivers over them, hoping to wear them down with crushing labor. They forced them to build the cities of Pithom and Rameses as supply centers for the king.* ¹² *But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the more alarmed the Egyptians became.* ¹³ *So the Egyptians worked the people of Israel without mercy.* ¹⁴ *They made their lives bitter, forcing them to mix mortar and make bricks and do all the work in the fields. They were ruthless in all their demands.* (**Ex.1:**) *[This is not a punishment from God upon Israel, but a preparation to separate them from Egypt and a strengthening of Israel for the desert trials ahead and conquest of Canaan.]*

¹⁹ *But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand forces him.* ²⁰ *So I will raise my hand and strike the Egyptians, performing all kinds of miracles among them. Then at last*

he will let you go. ²¹ And I will cause the Egyptians to look favorably on you. They will give you gifts when you go so you will not leave empty-handed. ²² Every Israelite woman will ask for articles of silver and gold and fine clothing from her Egyptian neighbors and from the foreign women in their houses. You will dress your sons and daughters with these, stripping the Egyptians of their wealth. (Ex.3:)

³³ All the Egyptians urged the people of Israel to get out of the land as quickly as possible, for they thought, "We will all die!"...³⁵ And the people of Israel ... asked the Egyptians for clothing and articles of silver and gold. ³⁶ The LORD caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites, and they gave the Israelites whatever they asked for. So they stripped the Egyptians of their wealth! (Ex.12:)

Because of Pharaoh's resistance to God's will, God used a heavy hand in the form of a series of plagues to cause him to release his people. This process is described by the seemingly contradictory phrases *God hardened Pharaoh's heart* and *Pharaoh hardened his [own] heart*. Egypt was economically devastated by the plagues, she lost her entire slave labor force, her military might was destroyed, and God's people were compensated for their years of service.

CANAAN

It took 2 years for the company of the Israelites with their possessions and animals to reach the embarkation point from the desert into the promised land. That is all it would have taken to cross the deserts, all it was supposed to take – 2 years. But the people demonstrated time and again as they encountered each trial that they were not about to listen to God. They were not thrilled with God's training one little bit and they didn't trust him to do what he said. They just wanted to go back to Egypt. So God delivered them into the hands of the deserts (aka wildernesses). 38 more years they walked the trackless sands of the Desert of Shur, the Desert of Sinai, the Desert of Sin, the Desert of Zin, and the Desert of Paran. The Promised Land was bounded on the eastern side by the Desert of Edom, the (vast) Eastern Desert, and the Aramean Desert. So they walked and died under the relentless sun without having a destination or purpose until that entire unbelieving generation was gone.

¹⁴ Thirty-eight years passed from the time we first left Kadesh-barnea until we finally crossed the Zered Brook! By then, all the men old enough to fight in battle had died in the wilderness, as the LORD had vowed would happen. ¹⁵ The LORD struck them down until they had all been eliminated from the community. (Dt.2:)

THE RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT

These are the terms of the covenant the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites while they were in the land of Moab in addition to the covenant he had made with them at Mount Sinai. ² Moses summoned all the Israelites and said to them, You have seen with your own eyes everything the LORD did in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to his whole country— ³ all the great tests of strength, the miraculous signs, and the amazing wonders. ⁴ **But to this day the LORD has not given you minds that understand, nor eyes that see, nor ears that hear!** [referring to the spiritual dullness of the Jews, see *Isa.29:10; Rom.11:8; 2 Cor.3:12-18*] ⁵ For forty years I led you through the wilderness, yet your clothes and sandals did not wear out [But you didn't

notice!]. ⁶ You ate no bread and drank no wine or other alcoholic drink, but he provided for you so you would know that he is the LORD your God. (Dt.29:)

A Prophecy of what lay ahead for Israel from Dt.29

So the Hebrews invaded the land of Canaan and for the most part conquered it and settled there. Maps show that the land eventually occupied by the Hebrews was very small when compared to the surrounding territories. The new generation that had been raised walking in the wilderness, and had known their destination and purpose under the leadership of God, nevertheless failed to keep the covenant completely, consequently future generations suffered not only from bad leadership, but because of their own wickedness as well. They were taken over by a number of great empires. The Assyrians conquered them and transported the leading citizenry to a distant territory, thereby disconnecting the people from the land to stabilize it from revolt. After them, the Babylonians and then the Persians conquered the Hebrews. Each of these great nations in turn became the dominant power.

Dt.28 puts forth the blessings that will accompany obedience to God's covenant and curses that will accompany disobedience to it. **Dt.29** pictures the future when (not if) Israel once again disobeys.

²² Then the generations to come, both your own descendants and the foreigners who come from distant lands, will see the devastation of the land and the diseases the LORD inflicts on it. ²³ They will exclaim, 'The whole land is devastated by sulfur and salt. It is a wasteland ... It is like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD destroyed in his intense anger.' ²⁴ And all the surrounding nations will ask, 'Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why was he so angry?' ²⁵ And the answer will be, 'This happened because the people of the land abandoned the covenant that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. ²⁶ Instead, they turned away to serve and worship gods they had not known before, gods that were not from the LORD. ²⁷ That is why the LORD's anger has burned against this land, bringing down on it every curse recorded in this book. ²⁸ In great anger and fury the LORD uprooted his people from their land and banished them to another land, where they still live today!' (Dt.29:)

ASSYRIA & the wasted years - 2nd Major Power to Subjugate the Hebrews, 2 Ki.15:

¹⁷ Menahem son of Gadi began to rule over Israel in the thirty-ninth year of King Uzziah's reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria ten years. ¹⁸ But Menahem did what was evil in the LORD's sight. During his entire reign, he refused to turn from the sins that Jeroboam son of Nebat had led Israel to commit.

¹⁹ Then King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria invaded the land. But Menahem paid him thirty-seven tons^[1] of silver to gain his support in tightening his grip on royal power. ²⁰ Menahem extorted the money from the rich of Israel, demanding that each of them pay fifty pieces of silver to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned from attacking Israel and did not stay in the land ... ²² When Menahem died, his son Pekahiah became the next king.

²³ Pekahiah son of Menahem began to rule over Israel in the fiftieth year of King Uzziah's reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria two years. ²⁴ But Pekahiah did what was evil in the LORD's sight. He refused to turn from the sins that Jeroboam son of Nebat had led Israel to commit. ²⁵ Then Pekah

son of Remaliah, the commander of Pekahiah's army, conspired against him. With fifty men from Gilead, Pekah assassinated the king, along with Argob and Arieah, in the citadel of the palace at Samaria. And Pekah reigned in his place.

²⁷ Pekah son of Remaliah began to rule over Israel in the fifty-second year of King Uzziah's reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria twenty years. ²⁸ But Pekah did what was evil in the LORD's sight. He refused to turn from the sins that Jeroboam son of Nebat had led Israel to commit. ²⁹ During Pekah's reign, King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria attacked Israel again, and he captured the towns of Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, and Hazor. He also conquered the regions of Gilead, Galilee, and all of Naphtali, and he took the people to Assyria as captives. ³⁰ Then Hoshea son of Elah conspired against Pekah and assassinated him. He began to rule over Israel in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah.

(2 Ki.16:) Hoshea son of Elah began to rule over Israel in the twelfth year of King Ahaz's reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria nine years. ² He did what was evil in the LORD's sight, but not to the same extent as the kings of Israel who ruled before him. ³ King Shalmaneser of Assyria attacked King Hoshea, so Hoshea was forced to pay heavy tribute to Assyria. ⁴ But Hoshea stopped paying the annual tribute and conspired against the king of Assyria by asking King So of Egypt to help him shake free of Assyria's power. When the king of Assyria discovered this treachery, he seized Hoshea and put him in prison. ⁵ Then the king of Assyria invaded the entire land, and for three years he besieged the city of Samaria. ⁶ Finally, in the ninth year of King Hoshea's reign, Samaria fell, and the people of Israel were exiled to Assyria. They were settled in colonies in Halah, along the banks of the Habor River in Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

⁷ This disaster came upon the people of Israel because they worshiped other gods. They sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them safely out of Egypt and had rescued them from the power of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. ⁸ They had followed the practices of the pagan nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of them, as well as the practices the kings of Israel had introduced. ⁹ The people of Israel had also secretly done many things that were not pleasing to the LORD their God. They built pagan shrines for themselves in all their towns, from the smallest outpost to the largest walled city. ¹⁰ They set up sacred pillars and Asherah poles at the top of every hill and under every green tree. ¹¹ They offered sacrifices on all the hilltops, just like the nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of them. So the people of Israel had done many evil things, arousing the LORD's anger. ¹² Yes, they worshiped idols, despite the LORD's specific and repeated warnings.

¹³ Again and again the LORD had sent his prophets and seers to warn both Israel and Judah: "Turn from all your evil ways. Obey my commands and decrees—the entire law that I commanded your ancestors to obey, and that I gave you through my servants the prophets." ¹⁴ But the Israelites would not listen. They were as stubborn as their ancestors who had refused to believe in the LORD their God. ¹⁵ They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors, and they despised all his warnings. They worshiped worthless idols, so they became worthless themselves. They followed the example of the nations around them, disobeying the LORD's command not to imitate them.

¹⁶ They rejected all the commands of the LORD their God and made two calves from metal. They set up an Asherah pole and worshiped Baal and all the forces of heaven. ¹⁷ They even sacrificed their

own sons and daughters in the fire. They consulted fortune-tellers and practiced sorcery and sold themselves to evil, arousing the LORD's anger. ¹⁸ Because the LORD was very angry with Israel, he swept them away from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah remained in the land. ¹⁹ But even the people of Judah refused to obey the commands of the LORD their God, for they followed the evil practices that Israel had introduced. ²⁰ The LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel. He punished them by handing them over to their attackers until he had banished Israel from his presence.

²¹ For when the LORD tore Israel away from the kingdom of David, they chose Jeroboam son of Nebat as their king. But Jeroboam drew Israel away from following the LORD and made them commit a great sin. ²² And the people of Israel persisted in all the evil ways of Jeroboam. They did not turn from these sins ²³ until the LORD finally swept them away from his presence, just as all his prophets had warned. So Israel was exiled from their land to Assyria, where they remain to this day.

²⁴ The king of Assyria transported groups of people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim and resettled them in the towns of Samaria, replacing the people of Israel. They took possession of Samaria and lived in its towns.

I've been discussing God's sovereignty in major historical movements, but within those are seemingly smaller more personal events such as those associated with Joseph's rise to power in Egypt. The Scriptures are filled with examples of God's hand in the midst of the very judgment he brought upon the Israelites for their disobedience. He doesn't abandon his people. Instead he works through those who are faithful to him. The book of Daniel is a good example of this as is the book of Esther. Read Esther again with this in mind. Mordecai's words to Esther are crucial for us to bear in mind when thinking about the providence of God.

Mordecai was from the tribe of Benjamin ... ⁶ His family had been among those who, with King Jehoiachin of Judah, had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. He had a very beautiful ... young cousin, Hadassah (aka Esther). When her parents died, Mordecai adopted her into his family and raised her as his own daughter. The Persian empire arose rapidly. In 550 BC Cyrus the Persian inherited the kingdom of the Medes. In 539 BC he took Babylon without a fight. Now Xerxes (486-485 BC) had succeeded his father, Darius, as king over the Medo-Persian empire. ⁸ By the king's decree, Esther, along with many other young women, was brought to the king's harem at the fortress of Susa. ¹⁰ Esther had not told anyone of her nationality and family background upon Mordecai's advise. ¹¹ Every day Mordecai would take a walk near the courtyard of the harem to find out about Esther and what was happening to her. (**Est.2:**)

See how God delivered the Jews from certain death using Mordecai and Esther and their fidelity to King Xerxes. [*Mordecai sent word to Esther*] Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed (per Haman's edict) . ^{4:14} If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place [*God will accomplish his purposes without you*] , but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this [*she most certainly was*] ? (**Est.4:**)