

SOVEREIGNTY-1, THE FORGOTTEN PRINCIPLE, 6 pgs

Acts 4:

These events occurred shortly after Jesus had been crucified, had risen from the grave, and had ascended into heaven before a large crowd. **A man who had been lame from birth was begging beside the temple gate and Peter helped him up** in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and he was healed, **Acts 3:1-8**. Peter and John addressed the growing crowd that saw the miracle and heard of it. Many believed in Jesus. The temple officials were very disturbed by the Gospel and had Peter and John incarcerated for a hearing the next morning. After warning them not to speak of Jesus further, the council released them not knowing how to punish them without starting a riot. The sovereignty of God is the subject of the entire passage.

*²³ As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. ²⁴ When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God: **O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them**— ²⁵ you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying, [quoting from **Psalm 2**, included in it's entirety below] **Acts 3:***

PSALM 2:

*¹ Why are the nations so angry? Why do they waste their time with futile plans? ² The kings of the earth prepare for battle; the rulers plot together against the LORD and against his anointed one. ³ Let us break their chains, they cry, and free ourselves from slavery to God. ⁴ But the one who rules in heaven laughs. The Lord scoffs at them. ⁵ Then in anger he rebukes them, terrifying them with his fierce fury. ⁶ For the Lord declares, I have placed my chosen king on the throne in Jerusalem, on my holy mountain [ref. to the coronation of Jesus]. ⁷ The king proclaims the LORD's decree: The LORD said to me, You are my son. Today I have become your Father [ref. to the resurrection of Jesus, see **Acts 13:32-35**]. ⁸ Only ask, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the whole earth as your possession. ⁹ You will break them with an iron rod and smash them like clay pots. ¹⁰ Now then, you kings, act wisely! Be warned, you rulers of the earth! ¹¹ Serve the LORD with reverent fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Submit to God's royal son, or he will become angry, and you will be destroyed in the midst of all your activities—for his anger flares up in an instant. But what joy for all who take refuge in him! [Notice the absolute futility of rulers who scheme to thwart the plans of God. They have no idea who they are dealing with.]*

<Continuing the prayer from **Acts 4:** >

*²⁷ In fact, this has happened here in this very city [Jerusalem]! [that is, their rulers plotted together against the LORD and against his anointed one, Jesus, **Ps.2:2**] For **Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus**, your holy servant, whom you anointed. ²⁸ But everything they did [including the wrongful death of Jesus] was determined beforehand according to your will. ²⁹ And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus. ³¹ After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit**. **Then they preached the word of God with boldness**. [They had confidence in God's working.]*

Misconceptions are spoken of a lot in the Scriptures,

often because people fail to give due consideration to the primacy of God's sovereignty

[see essay Adamant Certainty].

¹ Jesus ... saw a man who had been blind from birth. ² his disciples asked, why was this man born blind? [So far this question is entirely appropriate. It envisions a rational cause and effect universe governed by the will of a supernatural being. Notice that there is no doubt that the man's blindness was **an abnormal condition** caused by God's will.] They asked, Was it because of his own particular sins or those of his parents? [the only acceptable reason they could think of that would justify God to take such an action. Jesus' disciples were MEN OF THEIR TIMES. That is, they were Jews and exhibited a viewpoint of limited possibilities typical of their teaching and culture. They really couldn't conceive of any cause other than specific wrongdoing to justify God's actions. Very few people within such a subculture escape the influence of the thinking characteristic of it.]

Jesus answers, ³**Neither** ... This [blindness] happened so the power of God could be seen [or revealed by the display of Jesus' power in miraculously healing the man], **Jn.9:** Jesus introduces a more complex possibility that acknowledges the sovereignty of God and his purposes as something that takes precedence over the normal administration of his governance that they were led to expect by the teachings of the OT (reward for good behavior; punishment for bad behavior [see **Dt.6-8, and 29** below]). It's not that Jews were unaware of this. It just wasn't foremost in their thinking because they didn't keep it refreshed.

MISJUDGING JOB

We see this same inability to conceive of God's sovereign purposes in many other places spoken of in Scripture. The book of Job begins, ^{1:1} Job was blameless, a man of complete integrity. He feared God and stayed away from evil. Unknown to Job, God bragged about him to **Satan who replied** Of course ... ¹⁰ You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! ¹¹ But ... take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face! [In other words Job's real motives for living as a godly man have nothing to do with allegiance to God, but with the material benefits he gets out of it.] ¹² All right, you may test him ... Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don't harm him physically.

So through various means, all Job's animals were stolen or destroyed, his servants and children killed, etc. ²² In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God [for wrongdoing] . So **Satan proposed a second test.** Take away his health, and he will surely curse you to your face! ^{2:6} All right, do with him as you please ... But spare his life ... ⁷ So Satan ... struck Job with terrible boils from head to foot.

Next we find Job sitting among the ashes scraping his skin with a piece of broken pottery. And besides this, ⁹ His wife encouraged him to Curse God and die. ¹⁰ But Job replied, Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad? So in all this, Job said nothing wrong.

Most of the book is composed of Job's friends attempting to convince him to repent of his sin so God will once again bless him. They say things like, *Wicked people are in pain*

throughout their lives. (15:20) ... the triumph of the wicked has been short-lived and the joy of the godless has been only temporary. (20:4) **This represents the prevalent view with which Job disagrees.** He says, ⁷ *Why do the wicked prosper, growing old and powerful?* ⁸ *They live to see their children grow up and settle down, and they enjoy their grandchildren.* ⁹ *Their homes are safe from every fear, and God does not punish them.* ¹⁰ *Their bulls never fail to breed. Their cows bear calves and never miscarry [exaggeration] ... (21:)*

What seems to represent a basic difference in the observable facts I think of as a philosophical lens, that is, one's basic beliefs interpret what he experiences or how he understands it (aka presuppositionalism). (He sees what he expects to and concludes accordingly.) Job's friends represent the general consensus that Job did not agree with. They cannot imagine God would harm an upright man. Indeed this is the major problem Job wrestles with. *If he is suffering unjustly, and if God is in charge, then hasn't God wronged him? (19:6).*

Job's 4th friend, **Elihu, finally speaks up (chap.32-37)**. He asserts that although Job has acknowledged God's greatness, Job has gone too far by so insisting on his own righteousness he has made God out to be some kind of ogre – *in this you are not right, 33:12*. He sees Job's sole guilt to be in charging God with guilt. Elihu asserts that God is not as distant and as inaccessible as Job makes him out to be (33:14ff). God may actually speak **in** the language of pain, forestalling arrogance and independence (33:19-28). **Elihu has opened up questions as to the purpose of suffering not entertained by either Job or his antagonists.** He is not saying that Job deserves all the suffering that has come to him. In fact he insists that Job ought to be cleared of wrongdoing (33:32) because suffering may have for its purpose something other than deserved punishment. Biblical revelation provides us many things to consider. And it reminds us that God has not disclosed everything, Dt.29:29. At some point our allegiance is exposed. Something beyond our evaluation and understanding like trust and obedience will manifest.

Elihu's summary of Job's argument, 34:5-9: that he is guiltless, has done no wrong, and that God denies him justice carries the implication that there is no advantage (profit) in trying to please God, 34:9. At this point Elihu sides with Job's 3 accusers. Far be it from God to do evil, from the almighty to do wrong, 34: 10 . It is unthinkable that God would do wrong [pervert justice] 34:12 . The following verses pile up more arguments along the same lines and **Elihu appears to be heading into the same traps of reductionistic merit that devoured his predecessors. But he adds an element that again puts his speech in a framework different from theirs by leaving room for mystery.** While he insists that God is utterly just, he does not conclude that this means every case of suffering must be the direct result of God's just punishment. He asks *if God remains silent, who can condemn him? If he hides his face, who can see him? 34:29* While Job flirts with the idea that God's silence opens him to a charge of unfairness, Elihu assumes God's justice. He allows room for mystery where divine silence is nevertheless just silence.

But God is sovereign and includes people in his plans. Job was honored, chosen as God's representative to prove Satan wrong. His integrity was tested publicly (before the hosts of heaven) through suffering. Nevertheless, despite all he suffered, Job continued to trust God as his defender (lit. kinsman-redeemer, 19:25-27. At the end of the book **God challenges Job's desire to argue his case** and shows him something of his greatness. Job accepts his rebuke with humility and

confesses his ignorance in matters of divine sovereignty. Then **God affirmed what Job had said to his 3 friends and restored all that he had lost, 42:12-17. He does not rebuke Elihu which implies that his basic stance is right**, that God may have mysterious and hidden reasons for his actions to which we do not have access.

In all three of the above examples, the normal expectations of God rewarding our efforts to obey and live carefully before him and of his punishment of evildoers are turned upside down. That is because sovereignty trumps our sense of justice. Like these people, we also have trouble understanding and defending God's actions when they seem to violate the basic principles of reward and punishment that characterize God as just or fair. In all cases, however, God is not throwing people under the bus, but is working out a plan according to his will. **This allows us to place a positive construction on the events and circumstances of our lives as well as those of others.**

THE ERROR OF THE SAMARITANS

continuing the theme that people are often wrong in their assessment of things

Jesus left Judea and was returning to Galilee through Samaria. ⁵ Eventually he came to the village of Sychar ... ⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus asked her for a drink ... ⁹ The woman was surprised, for Jews typically refused to have anything to do with Samaritans ... During their conversation, she realized that Jesus was more than a common Israelite. ¹⁹ Sir, you must be a prophet. ²⁰ So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped? [Jesus could have easily answered this question from the history of the northern kingdom (10 tribes) of Israel, **2Ki.17:15, 24-41**. See following NOTE.] ²¹ Jesus replied ... the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. [ie, the location will no longer be relevant] ²² You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, [You're whole culture is wrong about God in many ways.] while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews, **Jn.4:** [Though the Jewish Scriptures contained much knowledge about God, it didn't necessarily reach the hearts and minds of the people.]

NOTE: Gentiles were not included in God's covenant with Israel. The Samaritans were a mixed blood race resulting from the intermarriage of Israelites left behind when the people of the northern kingdom were exiled and Gentiles brought into the land by the Assyrians. They had their own set of Scriptures that were altered to suit the king's purposes. After Jesus had risen from the dead, the new covenant in his blood made people from every nation equally acceptable to be born into God's family. Consequently the Gospel is now preached to people of all nations, **Mt.28:19**.

THE WORST SINNERS

¹... Jesus was informed that Pilate [Roman governor of Judea who held the office of magistrate] had murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices at the Temple, **Lk.13:** [had his armed soldiers go into the temple in Jerusalem and slaughter unarmed men who were offering sacrifices to God – he mingled their blood with that of their animal sacrifices, an offense known as sacrilege. Scripture doesn't say what prompted this].

Jesus asked, ² *Do you think those murdered Galileans were worse sinners than all the other people from Galilee? Is that why they suffered [ie God punished them] ?* ³ *Not at all! [you would be wrong to conclude this] And you will perish too unless you repent of your sins and turn to God.*

Then he mentions another earlier incident where people apparently died as the result of an accident. ⁴ *And what about the eighteen people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem [so as to incur God's wrath]?* ⁵ *No, and I tell you again [repetition for emphasis] that unless you repent, you will perish too.*

Did you hear about the spectators and runners killed and maimed at a Boston Marathon bombing few years ago? Have you seen pictures of the Florida swamp where ValuJet Flight 592 crashed around that same time? **Do you think God brought special severe punishment upon those people causing them to suffer so much because they were more deserving than any others** ... more guilty than you? Jesus answers NO! He is not discussing punishment for any particular wicked behavior. Jesus introduces another more basic consideration with regard to God's punishment. He is referring to our general condition as rebels before God and the peril we are all in every moment of every day.

Sin & Death

Here's how the Bible explains this. Adam was the head of the human race and his disobedience condemned us all. ¹² *When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned ... [in Adam]* ¹⁸ *Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone ...* ¹⁹ *Because one person disobeyed God, many [all of us] became sinners,* **Rom.5:**

Death has 2 parts. **Heb.9:27** says *each person is destined to die physically once and after that comes [the carrying out of] judgment.* God has addressed our sad condition as condemned sinners by sending us a Redeemer, a Savior, a Deliverer. *now, once for all time, Christ has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a [substitutionary] sacrifice.* ²⁷ *And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment,* ²⁸ *so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people [everyone who believes in him]. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him,* **Heb.9:**

¹⁶ *this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone [not just Jews, see **Rom.3:29-30** below; also the account of Paul's visit to Jerusalem, **Acts 21:17-22:23**. Notice how the Jews went crazy when he related God's intent to send him to the Gentiles.] who believes in him will not perish [as they deserve] but have eternal life.* ¹⁷ *God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him [ie, through his substitutionary sacrifice].* ¹⁸ *There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him [They are absolved from guilt]. But anyone who does not believe in him has **already** been judged [is guilty] for not believing in God's one and only Son, **Jn.3:***

JUDGING OURSELVES

The messages to some of the churches in Revelation challenge what the people believe about themselves. God instructs them to repent.

Sardis: ... *I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are*

dead. ² **Wake up! Strengthen what little remains**, for even what is left is almost dead. I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God. ³ Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly. Repent and turn to me again. If you don't wake up, I will come to you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief, **3:**

Laodicea: ¹⁵ I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! ¹⁶ But **since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth**! ¹⁷ You say, I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing! And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, **3:**

The history of the 20th century testifies how quickly people forget. We seem to leak knowledge and to be easily swayed from the truth unless we keep reviewing it and renewing it by reading the books that record it. This is what Israel's kings were instructed to do to keep that knowledge fresh throughout their reign.

¹⁸ When he sits on the throne as king, **he must copy for himself this body of instruction** on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. ¹⁹ He must always keep that copy with him and read it daily as long as he lives. That way he will learn to fear the LORD his God by obeying all the terms of these instructions and decrees. ²⁰ This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way. And it will ensure that he and his descendants will reign for many generations in Israel, **Dt.17:**

It should be noted that I haven't mentioned a major source of deception in the world – Satan, who is a liar and a deceiver.

Notice the principles that can be derived from the OT. The Scriptures repeat over and over that prolonged blessing in the land depends on paying careful attention to, remembering, and heeding what God says. This is not in contradiction of our discussion on sovereignty. But it reads that way and can easily be misconstrued if we do not **hold God's will for NT believers foremost in our thinking**. Such passages can easily be misconstrued as descriptive of NT times [see **GT#2, p.4; CT#4, p.3, 2nd para.**; New Covenant Church, **p.1, para.2-4** under The Confusion; Short Course, SUFFERING].