

The Sovereignty Of God (Part Five)

The Animate Creation

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I'm going to be continuing this series regarding God's sovereignty over His creation. The last time we talked about this principle that His working within His creation is very precisely timed. We can learn from the movement of the heavenly bodies, such as the stars, the moon and the planets, including the earth, to appreciate how this is so.

His physical creation shows the way that He is working and thus how He is also working in His spiritual creation. Now in like manner, the Bible shows that God sets Himself deadlines in His dealings with us and He brings them to pass right on time, according to His schedule though, not necessarily according to ours, and it's because of this difference that we very frequently need to exercise our trust in Him.

We also saw in that sermon that the earth requires management, so God gave mankind a limited dominion to do so. We also saw that while there are natural laws regulating life too, (I would have to say a pretty good extent), that because of mankind's general mismanagement, combined with the spiritual sins in addition to that, God is **very** involved overseeing and overruling mankind in behalf of His purpose.

When that sermon ended, we were exploring what the Bible shows about God's involvement in the inanimate elements of His creation, and that includes things like weather and the earthquakes. Today we are going to continue in that, but also extend it even further, and then proceed into showing His sovereignty over the animate elements as well.

We're going to begin in Psalm 147. Let's read verse 12 because it has a line in it that many of you may remember from one of the more famous hymns.

Psalm 147:12-14 Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion. For he has strengthened the bars of your gates; he has blessed

your children within you. He makes peace in your borders, and fills you with the finest of the wheat.

That already ought to begin to show you that God is involved. This is first person, singular here—He does this, He does that.

Psalm 147:15-20 He sends forth his commandment upon earth: his word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool: he scatters the hoarfrost like ashes. He casts forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? He sends out his word, and melts them: he causes his wind to blow, and the waters flow. He shows his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He has not dealt so with any nation:

Please try to get the sense there, because what the psalmist is saying is that God is very deeply, actively involved with Israel. "He has not dealt so with any nation." You might recall what it says in Amos the 3rd chapter. He said, "You only have I known of all the nations on the earth." He knows about the other nations, but that word "known" gives a sense of intimacy. "*You only have I been intimate with.*" Something that you are intimate with—something or someone, you are very actively involved with. You can't say you are intimate with something when you are detached from it, or you are just merely viewing it from afar.

Psalm 147:20 He has not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise you the LORD.

If that was said in regard to the nation of Israel, how much **more** is He involved with His church, which consists of His children begotten by His spirit? We're showing here His involvement in terms of weather—something inanimate. In reading the whole psalm, what we just saw there in verses 15 through 20 was just kind of a microcosm, an example, of what is in the remainder of the psalm as well. The entire psalm shows God exercising His sovereignty in a way that gives the impression that it is almost on a daily basis.

Adam Clark had this to say about the last five verses: "God's word is personified and appears as a very active agent running everywhere and performing the purposes of His will."

That catches the essence what these sermons about the sovereignty of God are about. If we look at God's sovereignty with the context of this psalm, it's not just the big disasters that we call "Acts of God" that God is involved in, but they are certainly included. The psalm tends to give the impression that elements such as the weather are a matter of both uniform law **and** God overseeing and overruling.

I want you to turn to the book of Amos, which I just mentioned a few minutes ago. We're going to go to chapter 4, and we're going to read right to where it says, "Prepare to meet your God."

Amos 4:6 And I also have given you cleanness of teeth [meaning a famine] in all your cities, and want [or lack] of bread in all your places: yet have you not returned unto me, says the LORD.

What's that saying to you? Doesn't it show God actively involved for the purpose of bringing people's attitudes—bringing their attention to focus on Him and what He is doing? If they're thinking at all about "Why is this terrible weather happening?" they might begin to think, "Oh, well, God is sovereign, and God said that He would bless us, but we're not being blessed. Maybe there's something wrong with us." But we can see here that it wasn't working.

Amos 4:7 And also I have withheld the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city.

We might think carnally, "Well, this is just the luck of the draw. The clouds went over there, but they didn't come here, and therefore they got the rain. They just happened to be within the weather pattern, and we weren't." No, God said not to leave Him out of your thinking. There might be a reason why it's raining over there, and it's not raining here.

Amos 4:7-13 One piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have you not returned unto me, says the LORD. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have you not returned unto me, says the LORD. I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt. [Was God involved in bringing Egypt down?] Your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have you not returned unto me, says the LORD. [I think the stink there refers to the odor of people dying and decomposing.] I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning. [In other words, here they were—burning up! That's what happens to a firebrand that is plucked out of the fire. It's on fire!] yet have you not returned unto me, says the LORD. Therefore thus will I do unto you, O Israel: and because I will do this unto you, **prepare to meet your God, O Israel:** For, lo, he that forms the mountains, and creates the wind, and declares unto man what is his thought, that makes the morning darkness [when it should be light], and treads upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, The God of hosts, is his name.

Brethren, is God involved, or what? He does these things to grab His people's attention, and because He has revealed Himself to His people, He feels that they are responsible for making the connection between what is going on in their lives and the possibility that He is blessing or cursing.

Let's continue to develop this plot more thoroughly. We're going to go back to the book of Genesis, in the 27th chapter and verse 28, and then we're going to go to the book of Deuteronomy. Here's the blessing that Isaac pronounced on Jacob.

Genesis 27:28 Therefore God give you of the dew of heaven [meaning rain], and the fatness of the earth [meaning mineral wealth, meaning agriculture wealth], and plenty of corn and wine.

"God give you." Our understanding of the blessing that came upon Jacob is that God made the choice of Jacob over Esau, and God then **chose** to bless Jacob. In other words, He was going to **ensure** that Jacob be blessed.

Let's go to Deuteronomy 28. This is the "blessings and curses" chapter.

Deuteronomy 28:7-13 The LORD shall cause your enemies that rise up against you to be smitten before your face: they shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways. The LORD shall command the blessing upon you in your storehouses, and in all that you set your hand unto; and he shall bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you. The LORD shall establish you an holy people unto himself, as he has sworn unto you, if you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of you. And the LORD shall make you plenteous in goods, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers to give you. The LORD shall open unto you his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto your land in his season, and to bless all the work of your hand: and you shall lend unto many nations, and you shall not borrow. And the LORD shall make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall be above only, and you shall not be beneath; if that you hearken unto the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day, to observe and to do them.

Don't these verses show God deeply involved in the inanimate aspects of His creation? The sense of those verses certainly does not show nature just automatically producing great benefits according to natural law. Think about this principle. If they did—if natural law produced these great benefits—then

uniform law would have to be shown as sovereign and not the Creator God. God would be lying to us here when He says that "He did this," or "He did that." Let's look again, a little bit more specifically, at how God shows that He is the active cause of Israel's blessings.

Deuteronomy 28:1-2 Now it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD your God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command you this day, that the LORD your God will set you on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on you, and overtake you, if you shall hearken unto the voice of the LORD your God.

The very fact that the blessings, which we are concentrating on now, are conditional shows that God is observing, that He is watching, and it is His response, which brings the blessings.

Deuteronomy 28:7 The LORD shall **cause**...

Deuteronomy 28:8 The LORD shall **command**...

Deuteronomy 28:9 The LORD shall **establish**...

Deuteronomy 28:11 The LORD shall **make** you plenteous...

Deuteronomy 28:12 The LORD shall **open** unto you His good treasure...

Now, for you numerologists among us, there are five times (which is the number of grace) that He says the Lord will do this or that. Five different ones, and five is the Biblical number of grace, which indicates something given. Now that's pretty clear. He is actively involved bringing the blessings, giving the blessings, rather than it being natural law.

There is such a thing as natural and uniform law, but God is overriding and overruling. He gave Israel benefits and blessings far beyond what those natural laws—those uniform laws are capable of producing. Now let's go to a scripture familiar to all of us because of our knowledge and understanding of

the Feast of Tabernacles. In the book of Zechariah we'll see this in context with a curse.

Zechariah 14:16 And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

Everybody knows—everybody hearing my voice knows that we're talking about something that is going to occur in the millennium. The nations are going to keep the Feast of Tabernacles—**or else!**

Zechariah 14:17-18 And it shall be, that whoso will **not** come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon **them** shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

Is that selective or what? That doesn't happen according to uniform law, where one nation is just separated from all the nations to receive a plague because of their disobedience. So, clearly, this shows selectivity in choosing the plague of disobeying nations.

We're going to look in another place that involves the millennium in Ezekiel 34. I want verse 23 so that you will see the sense of the context.

Ezekiel 34:23 And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.

David is dead. He is in his tomb. He needs to be resurrected to be in this position. We're talking about a time after David is resurrected. He's going to be resurrected at the return of Jesus Christ—at the 7th trumpet, and we know that he is going to be king over the nation Israel. So this is the time period that is encompassed here.

Ezekiel 34:26 And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower [meaning rain] to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing.

Again, God is selectively choosing to bless those nations that submit to Him.

This is not to say that the laws of nature have no effect; but rather what the Bible shows is that it is a matter of uniform law, combined with the state of a relationship that determines to a great measure whether He (God) will cause blessing or cursing.

Please get this part: Even this is not the entire picture, because of God's spiritual purpose. God's spiritual purpose overrules **everything**. That's where His focus is. It overrules, overrides, all things because He is the Sovereign over all, and that's where the focus of His attention is. Therefore, because of this factor (i.e., God's spiritual purpose) it is entirely possible for one to be obedient to God's will, to have a very good relationship with God, and **still** suffer or seemingly not prosper as one would normally expect.

Perhaps one of the outstanding examples in all of the Bible of this is Job. Even God admitted that Job was a righteous man. Hardly anybody ever went through so much trouble as he did, but God was working something out in Job's life so that all of us would benefit from Job's experience.

The epitome of all this is Jesus Christ, because here He was—sinless. He didn't deserve to die. He was perfect in all of His ways, and yet God's spiritual purpose overrode everything, and so He died for all of us. One could conclude that it doesn't pay to obey God. Look at how good Jesus was, and He still died. Not only did He die, but He suffered horribly before He died. It says that He was marred more than any man. He underwent a great deal of pain, a great deal of torture in that brief period of time before He died.

So it's good to think these things through and not be really hasty in judgment about a person's spiritual condition, because a person may indeed be in good spiritual condition, but God is working something out, and the end of that (I

don't mean the conclusion—when it's going to be over), is far different from what we might expect. Often times, brethren, somebody else suffers for our good.

Now another good example of this is the apostle Paul. Three times he appealed to God for the healing of his affliction, but he came to understand that he was not going to be healed in order to keep him humble. But was he faithful to God? Oh, he sure was! Was there anybody in the New Testament church who underwent more difficulty than the apostle Paul did? Maybe they all (the original 12) went through the same kind of things that Paul did, but only Paul's is recorded and the others' are not.

So it's good to take Jesus' admonition about being slow to judge somebody, because God's spiritual purpose may be overriding. It's not wrong to inquire. It's not wrong to understand that somebody may be having a spiritual problem, and that could be why they are not prospering. But on the other hand, we have to understand that God's spiritual purpose overrides all, and therefore it doesn't necessarily mean that a person is in a bad spiritual shape simply because he appears to be being cursed.

What we have to understand in addition to that, is that we...(Let me put this in form of a question.) Are we willing to accept what I just explained—that is, that we might be actually in good spiritual shape, and being cursed seemingly? Are we willing to accept that, in **trust** that the faithful God is aware, and that His purpose in allowing us to go through that difficulty, is going to result in far better, and far more, than if we had our way in having the difficulty removed?

We might just say that that is the crux of the issue in regard to faith. Paul, I think it was, wrote, "All the day long are we suffering for His sake." (God's sake—God's purpose's sake). If we can truly accept that, if we can truly accept God's sovereignty, then we can have a life that is filled with great peace. This is what Jesus means when He said, "My peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you." You see, a truly converted person will accept that God **is** involved in His life, and knows **exactly** what is going on in his life, and that everything is under control.

Last week we read that series of verses from Mark where His disciples were in the boat with Him. The boat was pitching back and forth, up and down, left and right, filling up with water. Surely some of those men who were in that boat were familiar with the Sea of Galilee, as fishermen, and understood the tempest that arose on that violent little sea, when probably the equivalent of a Santa Ana blew through it—and what was Jesus doing? He was asleep! That's how safe He felt.

He knew that God was not going to let Him die until His course was finished. Jesus didn't tempt God, but He knew that His life was in His Father's hand, and His life had peace in it because God is Sovereign. Now we're really getting down to what faith is all about, brethren, and why we need to understand God's sovereignty over everything. It's not merely that He rules, but rather that He rules with **great, specific concern** over each and every one of His kids. We're going to see a little bit later... His involvement with the unconverted is astounding.

The Bible also reveals God as being sovereign over animals as well. We're going to move into the animate world now. Let's go back to the book of Genesis, chapter 2. Man is able to use animals, like horses, mules and dogs to do his will. Doesn't it naturally follow that the Bible will show that the Creator used them, even to a greater extent, and certainly with more purpose behind it, illustrating His ability to even use an animal to bring about His purpose?

Genesis 2:19 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

We see Adam, exercising the dominion that God gave to him. We also see that God **brought** the animals. God directed them there. Adam didn't run out there with a lasso and get each one; rather, God made them pass before him. He put a little "bug" in their heads and told them to go before Adam. They came dutifully and lined up so that Adam could see them and name them.

Genesis 6:19-20 And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shall you bring into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall **come** unto you, to keep them alive.

Again, Noah didn't have to go out and catch each one separately. God **brought** them there. He ordered the ones that He wanted to appear before Noah to go into the ark.

Genesis 9:2 is an interesting one. The flood is over, so God tells Noah to leave the ark and replenish the earth.

Genesis 9:2 And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moves upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.

"The dread of you." I think that it implies very clearly that God **did** something to their very little brain, so that now there was an enmity between man and animal. God did that. It wasn't Satan. God did it. So we see an indication of a change of the relationship between man and animals. God built into them something to alter the relationship that previously existed, but this does not mean that the attitude of Satan, or the attitude of human beings, cannot intensify the dread, or in the case of a demon, actually possess an animal and use it to its end. But the original dread, the original fear, was something that God did.

Now one of God's major purposes regarding His devastation of Egypt was to show all concerned that He is the Sovereign Lord.

Exodus 7:4-5 But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall **know** that I am the LORD.

He means that they shall **know** that God is Sovereign over the earth. "I am the Boss" is a blunt way of putting it. Of course Israel would know a little bit about that as well as a result.

Exodus 10:2 And that you may tell in the ears of your son, and of your son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that **you** may know how that I am the LORD.

He makes that statement (before Israel finally left Egypt) two more times, at least. He did this, at least on some of the plagues, by turning some of the Egyptians' gods into curses.

I think that you're familiar enough, most of you anyway, with Egyptian history. You've seen pictures of Egyptian gods, and very frequently there was a similarity. Usually there was a human-being torso and legs, and an animal head. One of the first of the gods of Egypt God devastated was the frog god. The frog god was a woman, by the way—was female. In history she is called Heket (transliterated into English), and according to Egyptian religious lore, she was the wife of a god named Khnum. In the drawings of Heket, she is shown as having a woman's body, with a frog's head. (Boy! Would you want to kiss a frog?)

But the interesting thing about her is that this Khnum was pictured as a potter and he is shown sitting at a potter's wheel and he is forming creatures from the dust of the earth. As he formed creatures of the dust of the earth on his potter's wheel, she (Heket) breathed into them the blessing of the breath of life. So, she gave life to Khnum's creation. So who's the first Egyptian god that God picked on? Who's the one who really gives life? He does! He is not only the Giver of life, He is also the Potter.

So He had frogs by the billions come out of the rivers and invade their homes. So they were squishing them all over the place—stepping on their god! Their god became a curse. It's interesting, if you read the story there, you will find that Moses gave Pharaoh the choice of how long the plague was going to last. Actually, Pharaoh called an end to it when he said,

"enough is enough"—probably when frogs jumped out of his cup. Now, later on in chapter 8 (that incidentally appears in chapter 8) in verses 21 and 22 we have a plague of flies. Moses says:

Exodus 8:21-22 Else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies upon you, and upon your servants, and upon your people, and into your houses: and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground whereon they are. And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth.

The significant element here is that God exercised His dominion by refusing to allow Goshen to be plagued by the swarms of flitting flies. The same thing occurred in regard to this murrain (which makes one think of the dreaded "mad cow disease" now that is plaguing Britain.) In this case again the murrain came upon the cattle of Egypt, but the murrain did not come upon the cattle of the Israelites. The Israelite cattle remained healthy. God exercised His dominion. He had power to stay the pestilence and said "this far, and no further." You see, He was selectively choosing to plague one people, and not another—and they lived side by side! Can you imagine God controlling flies? He did.

Now there are a lot of these, and one of the more remarkable ones of these was the time in Numbers 22 where Balaam's ass spoke to him, and Balaam spoke right back to the ass. It barely never dawned on him that asses can't speak! But this ass did, and they had an argument. But there are others that are kind of interesting to show God's presence where animals are involved. Do you remember the time that the Philistines were plagued with hemorrhoids, and by mice, because they had possession of the Ark of the Covenant?

Well, the diviners and the priests—the wise men of the Philistines finally figured out that they were being plagued because the Ark was there, and so they set a test for God. So this test was that they would get two milk cows, hitch them to a new cart, put the Ark on top of the cart, and then put the five golden mice and these tumors into the Ark. They then set the milk cows free to see whether the cows would go up to Bethshemesh.

If the cows would go directly there without turning to the right hand, or to the left hand, then they would know that they were being plagued because the Ark was there. So they did that, and God directed the Ark right to Bethshemesh, and it says right in the story that the cows turned neither to the left hand nor to the right. They made a beeline right to Bethshemesh. Well, you know, cows aren't the smartest animals you ever saw, and no human being whispered in their ear. There weren't any Israelites around. But God whispered in their ear, and He said, "Go this way and don't turn." And they sure enough did. They went exactly where God told them to go.

Ravens fed Elijah, as written in I Kings 17:2-6. We find in II Kings 2 that God commanded two she-bears to maul forty-two tormentors of God's prophet Elisha. In Daniel 6, God sealed the mouths of the lions when Daniel was thrown in there with them. He caused a great fish to come into being to pick up, swallow Jonah, deliver him to Nineveh, vomit him right up on the shore, right at the right place. Then in Matthew 17, which we'll get to a little bit later, God caused a fish to bring Peter a coin so that both Jesus and Peter could pay their taxes.

Now let's conclude this section by turning to Malachi 3. There is a doctrine that really gives people a test these days, and that is tithing. It's very difficult to trust God, in some peoples' minds, and so we have this promise from God regarding tithing.

Malachi 3:10 Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me now herewith, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

I have read writings of people with Church of God backgrounds who say that this is not true.

Malachi 3:11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, says the LORD of hosts.

You have to understand that in an agricultural context, that it's written in the way it is because their economy was agriculturally based. For most of us our incomes are not agriculturally based anymore. We work in an industrial society, rapidly turning into an information society; but nonetheless, we work for wages for other people who are not directly connected to agriculture, but the principle holds true.

It says, "I will rebuke the devourer (i.e., what would eat up all the money—the income) for your sakes." He will intervene personally and individually for the sake of those who trust Him. So, on the one hand we can look at this showing God selectively exercising His authority to prosper an entire nation, or individual beings...and not another person when there is a general plague in a given area. I tell you. That is really putting a challenge before God in one sense. I mean, nothing is too hard for Him.

There is much about God and His relationship with His creation that we have a tendency to take for granted. There are things that we accept, but rarely maybe actually search out in His word. One of these might be His relationship with angels. Think of man's relationship with God and how man goes through all kinds of mental contortions to avoid submitting to God. There is a subtle tendency to think of angels as just kind of automatically doing their thing.

I think that that's partly due to the fact that the time of their great testing is behind them, but they are still beings of choice. They are not only beings of choice, they are beings of far greater power than we—with far greater mental capacities; with far greater knowledge of the laws of God and how to use and manipulate them. Besides this, they have immortality. The Bible says there in Hebrews 2 that we are **lower** than angels, they being of course greater than we are. In the past, one-third of them, having the choice to do what they were going to do with their lives, went to war against God.

The Bible consistently shows God **commanding** angels, or using them to perform functions in His government of project earth. The reason I went into this little prelude is because I have actually heard of them being compared to the domesticated animals of the spirit realm. I tell you, what a put-down that is of these great powerful beings. When Daniel saw Gabriel, he fainted dead

away! He was so in awe of what he saw, and it was just "an angel." This great angel explained to Daniel that he had battled to get to him. He had to battle the prince of Persia in order to get there, and had to call on Michael to put this prince of Persia down in order to get to Daniel, and here's Daniel, apparently fasting for three weeks, waiting for an answer. Gabriel was not sitting on his duff, twiddling his thumb, munching on grass like a domesticated animal. He was having a **great** battle royale to get there (to Daniel).

Now he (an angel) is humbly submissive to God, and he carries out functions that God wants him to carry out within God's governments of the earth. The word angel, I think that you know, literally means "messenger." A messenger is one that is sent forth to carry out a responsibility, and the key here is the word "sent." The Greater rules and sends and utilizes the lesser.

I Chronicles 21:15 And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: [Apparently **one** angel. Now look at the power that unfolds here.] and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now your hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

Now the occasion was when David sinned in taking a census of Israel. I don't believe that it was wrong for David to take a census. The reason has to be that David took a census for the wrong reason, because in other places God told them to number, to take a census. David apparently had ordered a census to be taken because he wanted to go to war, and he wanted to know what manpower would be available to him. God had already decided, "David, that's far enough. The borders of Israel are exactly the way I want them. I don't want you to go to war. The census is therefore wrong."

I Chronicles 21:27 And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.

But 70,000 people died because one angel was let loose by God to carry out God's order. That's power—the kind of power that mankind has not seen until the splitting of the atom—to have one angel kill that many people in

apparently a very short period of time. We're going to find (in a New Testament example—Mark 13) that at the "time of the end," Jesus is going to send forth a whole army of angels, and they are going to gather His people from one end of the earth to the other. That's at the end. But again it shows God leading the hosts of heaven and ordering them about. Now there's much more to this—God using the good angels.

Let's look at His use of evil angels—demons. The context here in Judges 9 is after the death of Gideon, and after Abimelech (one of the 70 sons of Gideon) killed all of his brothers and step-brothers, with the exception of one. Only one escaped—the youngest one, a lad by the name of Jotham. Now what we're looking at here is God beginning to take vengeance.

Judges 9:22-24 When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: That the cruelty done to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal [Gideon] might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren.

God stirred up a rivalry—a competition between the people of Shechem and Abimelech. Those two groups had formerly been united, but there's no honor among thieves, no honor among murderers. God sent an evil spirit and stirred one against the other, and the first thing you know they were out killing one another.

In I Kings 22 (this one is rather, almost in a way, humorous), the context is a meeting between the righteous Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and the **very** unrighteous Ahab of Israel. They were conferring on matters of mutual interest; namely war against Syria. Now God intervened to draw Ahab into battle so that he would be killed, but He delivered Jehoshaphat.

I Kings 22:19 And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD : I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven [the angelic beings] standing by him on his right hand and on his left.

Now the one speaking is a true prophet of God, named Micaiah. The reason he is speaking is because Jehoshaphat (upon hearing the testimony of 400 prophets of Baal, that they should go into battle) used some wisdom and said, *"Wait a minute. You've got 400 prophets of Baal here. Isn't there somewhere in Israel a true prophet of God?"* Ahab said, *"Well, yeah. There's one here but I don't like him. He's always prophesying evil against me, but if you insist, I'll go get him."*

So Micaiah was brought to them and he listened to the testimony and observed what the prophets of Baal were doing. When it came his turn to speak, he was asked, "Should we go into battle?" That's the stage.

We know exactly what Micaiah said, but we don't know exactly the inflection or the tone in what he said, and I can only come to the conclusion that what he said was said in such a sarcastic way that Ahab knew immediately that Micaiah was pulling his string, because Micaiah said, *"Sure. Go ahead up there."* (I'm paraphrasing.) Then of course he came out with the truth—in verses 17 and 18. After setting the stage by showing the vision that God gave him, Micaiah said:

I Kings 22:20-22 And the LORD said [to all the host of heaven] Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall [be killed] at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. [God took counsel with the angels.] And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? [How? In what manner?] And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, You shall persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.

So, God uses evil angels. We know of course, that Satan himself—the king of all evil angels—he himself is totally subject to God's control. In Eden he had to stand there and listen to his sentence, and he didn't open his mouth. In the book of Job he could not touch Job until God permitted. Even then, he could not cross the line that God set and kill Job. In Matthew 4:11, when Jesus and Satan had their confrontation, Jesus said to Satan, "Get you hence!" ("Get out of here!") Who left? Well, Satan did. At the very end, it is he who is going to be cast into the lake of fire.

The Bible very clearly shows God's sovereignty over the inanimate aspects of His creation—the animate aspects in terms of animals, in terms of good angels, in terms of the evil angels.

Now, what about man? We have to think about this in regard to our free moral agency. What about mankind in general?

There are times when it looks to us as though events are completely out of control. Is man so perverse, so powerful, so unruly that he is beyond God's control? Has sin so alienated man's mind—alienated us from God that we are outside of the pale of God's jurisdiction? Now consider this: If what I have just said is true, then **man** is sovereign, and God is not. Either God rules, or God is ruled over. Those are the alternatives.

Considering our free moral agency—are we entirely free to do as we please? Is man such a rebel against God's throne that God cannot fulfill His purpose through him? By this I do not mean that God merely overrules what man does, because the Bible, even before you get through the 10th chapter, shows very clearly that God overrules. Look what He did at the tower of Babel. What I mean here is that God can actually work through a person and get that person to carry out His will, and it is totally unknown to the person. How about Pharaoh? It says God hardened his heart.

I don't remember reading anywhere in God's word that Pharaoh said that God hardened his heart, and so he did what he was going to do. Now he didn't know that God was working through him in this case. Yet God worked out His will through this man. Let me toss this at you. What about Judas Iscariot? Think about that a minute... Did the scripture reveal that Judas was plotting from the very beginning to betray Jesus? There's no indication of that in the scripture at all.

Yet it says in John 6, right at the end of the chapter, that Jesus **knew** who was going to betray Him from the very beginning. In fact, He even said, "One of you **is** a demon." I had to scratch my head on that. It's kind of interesting. You knew the one who was the demon. It was Judas. He didn't say, "One of you has a demon." That is what makes it so interesting. He said,

"One of you **is** a demon." Now I don't think that Judas knew, because the scripture doesn't reveal it.

You see, God is sovereign to use anybody in any way, and God worked out His purpose through Judas, regardless. I'm going to show you a scripture that I think is astounding in regard to this. It's in the book of Acts in chapter 17. This is not in regard to Judas. This is in regard to the wider subject here. Paul is the speaker and he is speaking to these people on Mars' hill.

Acts 17:26 And has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.

Now that is something that is clearly stated in the book of Deuteronomy—that the nations were set on the earth according to the number of the children of Israel.

Acts 17:27-28 That they should seek the LORD, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Now focus your attention on that "*live, and move, and have our being.*" First of all, notice to whom it was said. Was this said to Israelites? **No** . Was it said to converted Christians? **No** . It was said to unconverted heathens. Billions of them have lived from the time of the creation of Adam—across six thousand years of man's history.

Brethren, what kind of a God is this that we serve? What this means is *not* that man merely owes his life to God's creative acts, rather his very movements across the course of time—even down into personal and individual lives. God moves people about as He sees fit, and these people also have their source in this same almighty God to the end that they might seek Him and live—each in his own order, of course.

But do you see what Paul is intimating here, that God is manipulating their lives, foreseeing the time that they are going to have salvation open to them

and that what they have gone through in their lives is going to have a part to play in their conversion—in many cases, maybe a very **major** part?

Now to me, this is far more stunning than the statement that Jesus made that a sparrow doesn't fall without God's knowledge, because now we're not dealing with irrational creatures, but with rational men made in the image of God, who have sufficient power to form their own conclusions and attempt to go their own ways. I'm going to give you an individual example of this.

Do you know what happened in Daniel 5—"MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN"—the handwriting on the wall (written when) Belshazzar held his great feast using the holy vessels from the temple? In verse 23, Daniel is reading out (I guess you might say) God's sentence.

Daniel 5:23 But [you, Belshazzar] have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines, have drunk wine in them; and you have praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are **all your ways**, have you not glorified.

Do you see that? "All your ways" (all of them). Let me make this very plain. God was manipulating the history of Babylon! He was maneuvering the mind of the king, so that the king would bring certain things to pass. Now you have to understand, gathering these principles together, that that was not the only person God was manipulating and maneuvering.

God was manipulating and maneuvering their educators, the people in charge of their economic systems, the people in charge of their educational systems, because God's purpose is being worked out and He is drawing all of mankind to a specific conclusion. He is setting things up so that these people can be converted and be in His family. In other words, they were not free to do everything that they wanted to do.

Why do you think that He says in the book of Isaiah that Assyria is the rod of His anger? He said it's not in his (the Assyrian's) heart to do it—but he's

going to do it! He's going to do it, because God is working out a great purpose and He wants His people to live within that purpose. He wants His people to understand that a great and awesome thing is being worked out, and for us to use this choice—this free moral agency—to go in the right direction, to make the right choices, to use wisdom, and to do this in faith, that He is working toward an end. I'm going to show you how much further this goes.

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD. [Think of what Paul said back there in the book of Acts. Think of what Daniel said to Belshazzar—"all the ways of the king."] as the rivers of water: **he turned it whithersoever he will.**

Who's ruling the earth, brethren? Who is the sovereign over His creation? Who manipulates events, to give His people the circumstances in which they can exercise their free moral agency to choose the right and good? Very interesting. The mind of our God is so awesome, so magnificent, so **great** in what it is encompassing (over these how many billions of years I have no idea) that He has been planning it.

We only know of about six thousand (years). But from God's word we can pick out these principles and see that He is working toward an end that is going to bring mankind into His family—in His image. Who's running the show? Who turns the king's heart? All that means is that God can manipulate the minds of those who are in power—those who are the leadership, and for most of us, we go in that direction.

Most of us who know the truth don't have to go in the direction of evil. We can exercise the truth in faith, because we see the hand and the mind of God. You might also write down Proverbs 4:23 where it says that the issues of life—those of the things that determine the nature of a person's life... and then connect it with Proverbs 23:7—"As a person thinks in his heart, so is he." You put these three thoughts together—Proverbs 21:1; Proverbs 4:23; and Proverbs 23:7 and we see that God is maneuvering people in order to bring certain things to pass. The governors of men are completely under control of the Almighty.

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turns it whithersoever he will.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Proverbs 23:7 For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

We'll stop there for today, and God willing, once the Days of Unleavened Bread are over and I speak again on the regular Sabbath, we will get back to this subject.