

The primary intent of the book of Job is to explain why there is suffering, and to explain why the righteous suffer, but Job also gives us a unique insight into how God works. It reveals His relationship to evil and suffering. This is very important to understanding God's providence. The Bible teaches both that God is sovereign and humans are morally responsible for their actions.

In other words:

1. God is absolutely sovereign, but His sovereignty never functions in Scripture to reduce human responsibility.

2. Human beings are responsible creatures—that is, they choose, they believe, they disobey, they respond, and there is moral significance in their choices—but human responsibility never functions in Scripture to diminish God's sovereignty.

The problem we face is not in finding ample examples that support these statements, but in believing that both are true.

#### **EXAMPLES:**

##### **GENESIS 50:19–20**

The story of Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers and rising to power is well known (Gen. 37, 41). Joseph's brothers were jealous over the favor he had found in his father's eyes, so they sold him into slavery and told their father, Jacob, that he had been killed by wild animals. Eventually, Joseph rose to power (second only to Pharaoh) and saved his family from famine by inviting them to live in Egypt. It was through this event that God preserved the Messianic line through Judah (Gen. 49:10) and the nation of Israel as a whole (Genesis 45:5–8).

When Jacob, their father, had died the brothers were afraid that Joseph would take revenge on them for the evil they had done to him. Joseph responded by saying, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive" (Gen. 50:19–20).

Note how Joseph insists that his brothers intended evil and God intended good. God's sovereignty over the event does not reduce the brothers' responsibility, nor do their evil actions make God any less sovereign. The exact same event involved two different purposes and two different wills. Both human responsibility and divine sovereignty are assumed.

What we see in this story is there was a kind of concurrence, where the actions and volitions of more than one party were taking place, running side by side. God's will was being worked out in the life of Joseph, and God's will for Joseph was altogether righteous. And yet, at the same time the will of Joseph's brothers to destroy Joseph was also taking place. There are two different players—God and the brothers. They are both involved in the same action but with completely different motives. Through the same event, God's holy will came to pass as did the brothers' evil intentions.

##### **ISAIAH 10:5–19**

The passage in Isaiah 10 is typical of many prophetic passages where God uses a pagan nation to punish His people for their sin. Yet, as in many similar passages, God also pronounces judgment on the punishing nation. In this case, His punishment is directed toward the Assyrians because their motives were to destroy and conquer. They were proud and thought that they were conquering Jerusalem all by

themselves. Therefore, God says to Assyria, “Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood! Therefore, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, Will send leanness among his fat ones; And under his glory He will kindle a burning like the burning of a fire” (Isa. 10:15–16). God’s intent was to correct His people for their hypocrisy, and bring them nearer to Him; but was that Sennacherib of Assyria’s intent? No; he intends to gratify his own covetousness and ambition. He boasts what great things he has done to other nations by his own policy and power. He doesn’t know that it is God who makes him what he is.

In short, God was using a military superpower like an ax or a saw to accomplish His judgment, but that doesn’t mean that the Assyrians are not responsible for their actions. Their “willful pride,” their “haughty look,” (their arrogance) will be judged. They may be tools in God’s hands, but they are not absolved of their responsibility. They were not willfully acting as God’s tool to accomplish His purposes; in fact, they would have despised the thought. Rather, they had their own purposes in mind.

As Lowth says, “God often prospers wicked and tyrannical governments to be His scourge and the instruments of His vengeance upon others; and when they have done the work which God allots them, He then punishes them for those very oppressions which they have exercised toward their neighbors, and to which they were carried on purely by their own ambition and covetousness, although providence made them serviceable to better ends and purposes.”

#### **PHILIPPIANS 2:12–13**

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to work [i.e. God is the One who produces both the will to work and the working itself; cf. Phil. 1:6] for His good pleasure.”

In order to understand what Paul is saying, it helps to think about what he is not saying. He is not telling the readers to do their part in their salvation since God has done His. Nor is he telling them that God has done everything so they can be supremely passive. Rather, he tells them to work out their salvation *because* God is working in them.

Not only does God’s sovereignty extend so far that it includes our will and our actions (“both to will and to work”) but His sovereignty is the incentive for our own effort!

#### **ACTS 2:22–24**

**22** *“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know--*

**23** *this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.*

***24 "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."***

In Acts 2 Peter establishes the God-ordained significance of Jesus' death. Jesus was delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. The cross wasn't evidence against Jesus' messiahship, nor was it a tragedy that God had to pick up the pieces after it had happened, but it had always been part of the saving plan and purposes of God.

Nevertheless, Peter says, "you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." Peter is convinced that God's purposes stand behind everything that happens; at the same time, he is very direct about human responsibility. God delivered Jesus over to be crucified, but it came about "through (or, 'by') the hands of godless men." The death of Christ was particularly the sin of the Jewish nation; it was the sin of their rulers and with the full consent of the people—they were the ones who cried, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!" (Matt. 27:25).

***JOB 1–2***

In the previous study of Job 1 and 2, Satan insisted that Job only loved God because God had blessed him. Should the blessings be removed, Job would curse God to His face (Job 1:11). Satan longed to destroy Job, but he could do nothing without God permitting him to do so. Job 1:12 says that the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." Later God tells Satan in Job 2:6, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." It is beyond question that God is ultimately responsible for Job's trials for He could have prevented Satan from acting at all.

Secondly, Job saw God as the source of his trials. In Job 1:21 he says, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away." Technically, it was the Chaldeans and Sabeans, lightning and wind, that had taken everything from Job. But Job recognized that all that occurs is within God's control. He was the ultimate source of Job's trials. Later in Job 2:10, Job rebuked his wife and said, "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" Once again Job attributed the adversity he had experienced to God. Many other passages of Scripture come to the same conclusions:

- Amos 3:6: "If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?"
- Isaiah 45:7: "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things."
- Ecclesiastes 7:14: "In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider-- God has made the one as well as the other."

God is behind all things, yet God is never the source of evil.

- 1 John 1:5: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."
- James 1:13: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone."
- 1 Timothy 4:4: "everything created by God is good."

When we look at the story of Job, we can see different actors at work, each with their own motives. For example, in the loss of Job's camels we see God, Satan, and the Chaldeans.

Who is responsible? All are. God, Satan, and the Chaldeans were all involved in the loss of the camels. They were all players acting together with their own intentions and motives. There are primary causes, secondary causes and instrumental causes, each to one degree or another responsible for Job's camels being stolen.

**God:** God does not owe it to Job to let him keep his camels. It is also possible for God to orchestrate His universe so that Job loses his camels. And this is what God did. God allowed Job's camels to be stolen to vindicate His holiness and the malicious charges brought against Job.

In other words, God's purposes in allowing Job to lose his camels are:

1. To shut the mouth of Satan
2. To vindicate His own holiness
3. To vindicate Job's righteousness under the accusations of the Accuser

God's purposes were totally holy, but they are being brought to pass by the pain and suffering of Job. This gives us the most basic answer as to why we suffer; the answer is for the glory of God.

**Satan:** Satan was also responsible for the loss of Job's camels. Satan's purposes were evil.

Satan's purposes in taking Job's camels are:

1. To defame God and prove that He is less than perfect in His knowledge of Job
2. To get Job to sin and show his faith in God was conditioned upon what God had given him
3. To make himself look good rather than evil

Even so, it was not Satan who actually stole the camels. It was the Chaldeans. Were the Chaldeans innocent pawns in this cosmic drama who were forced to act contrary to their own wills? Absolutely not. Satan didn't pick upright and blameless people to steal Job's camels. The Chaldeans already had it in their hearts. They were camel rustlers from the beginning. They were thieves and murderers already. They had their eyes on Job's flocks and land for years; they couldn't wait until the hedge was removed. And once God removed the hedge, Satan tempted them to do what had been in their hearts to do. They acquiesced out of the wickedness of their own hearts, and God holds them completely accountable for their sins. Nevertheless, at the same time, they accomplish the very thing that God wants them to accomplish.

There is a relationship between suffering and sin. Suffering is a result of the fall of man. If there was no sin there would be no suffering. But there is not always a one to one correspondence between suffering and one's guilt. People suffer for many reasons: Some suffer for righteousness (Matt. 5:10; 1 Pet. 3:14). Some suffer because they need to be corrected—the Lord disciplines whom He loves (Heb. 12:4–11). Suffering is also the process God uses to sanctify us (Ja. 1:2–40).