

UNIT I
OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATIONS

Lesson 1

THE SOVEREIGNTY
OF GOD

Related Scriptures:

- Daniel 4
- Psalm 66:1-7; 103:19
- Deuteronomy 32:1-43
- Jeremiah 43:7-13
- Isaiah 44:24—45:13

Lesson Aim

To see God as sovereign over man and the nations.

All doctrine has its source in God. If we would understand what God has to say on any subject, then we must first know Him. For by our knowledge of God, our comprehension of what He says is made credible. Any truth of the Scriptures, when held up to the character of God, finds harmony. Not only does it find harmony with the character of God, truth from God agrees with all truth. Any doctrine that cannot find credence in the character of God and that does not mesh with His truth is false doctrine.

Many have viewed the doctrine of nonresistance as a contradiction to or a reversal of the Old Testament practice of justice, civil government, and warfare. It is true that Old Testament and New Testament practices are different in these

matters. But there is a place where Old and New, yes, even warfare and nonresistance, mesh. The same God instituted both Testaments and outlined both economies. And this God is altogether right, steadfast, and unchanging in all His ways.

The civil changes that came about with the change of the Testaments do not reflect a change in the God who commanded them. They simply reflect the greater revelation of God. The change in the Testaments, in other words, is part of an *unfolding* plan, not a new plan. And above and behind this unfolding plan is our Sovereign God.

Seeing God's sovereignty is the key to understanding His ways. Being sovereign, God is bound to no one but Himself. He may do and command, set up and put down, give life and kill—wholly as He wills. He is free in a way beyond our mortal comprehension. He is the Most High God whose power and wisdom and authority have not one limitation or lack or restraint.

This is the God who commanded Israel to kill and commands the church to avenge not. He is the same God. Our dim grasp (*dim* describes our comprehension; *grasp*, our faith) of God's sovereignty will position us to catch glimpses of an Almighty Majesty who supersedes both Testaments, so that He is revealed in each. Both Testaments were necessary, including both warfare and nonresistance, to make our understanding of the character of God complete. To understand this, we must begin by believing God is sovereign.



I. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND RULERS

Daniel 4:17. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy

ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

35. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

The words of verse 17 were spoken by a “holy one” whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, saw in a vision. The matter presented is the judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar for his pride. He would be, by the word of the watcher, cast out to live among the beasts until “seven times” (seven years) had passed over him.

This action against Nebuchadnezzar was specifically intended to testify to the sovereignty of the Most High. To catch the impact of this express purpose, we must take a look at the setting. Israel was in captivity to Babylon—that great, spreading world empire. From man’s viewpoint, a pagan ruler had conquered the people of God, and by the then-known beliefs of war and gods, this meant the Babylonian gods were supreme.

What Nebuchadnezzar did not know and needed very badly to learn was that his dominion over the people of God was not due to the supremacy of his gods, or to the superiority of his armies. His dominion had come by the sovereign will of God.

Adding to God’s glory and Nebuchadnezzar’s insignificance, the Holy One adds, “and setteth up over it the basest of men.” The Chaldean word for *base* means “low, mean, or

contemptible.” What a way to teach us that the ways and wisdom of men are beneath the lofty ways of God! By the understanding of men, Nebuchadnezzar was not base. He was most noble; he was monarch of the grandest success; and he was worthy of the highest honor.

There is no greater demonstration of the superior wisdom and sovereignty of God than when He arranges the boasting works of the wicked to effect His own purposes. When God wished to prepare His people to leave Egypt, He used Pharaoh’s oppression and resistance to help them leave. Moses’ father-in-law commented, “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them” (Exodus 18:11). When the Lord chose to provide redemption, He used the rejection of His Son to provide salvation. And in the case before us, Nebuchadnezzar’s military ventures were simply God’s way of punishing His wayward people.

The basest of rulers, by even the most heinous of their crimes, perform God’s divine will because, and only because, God is wholly sovereign. His foolishness is wiser than the wisest of men, and His weakness is stronger than the strongest of men.

Few base rulers ever had the privilege of learning what Nebuchadnezzar learned. Verse 35 contains his declaration of the sovereignty of God. This wisdom was only learned by seven wet, cold years beneath the unveiled hand of the Most High God.

II. GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY AND NATIONS

Deuteronomy 32:8. When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people

according to the number of the children of Israel. 9. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.

39. See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. 40. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. 41. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. 42. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy. 43. Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.

The sovereignty of God is made known not only to rulers, but also to nations; not only to the wicked, but to the righteous as well. *God declares His sovereignty at every level of existence in every age for all time.*

We must confess, then, that although we see God's infinite knowledge at work when He separated the children of Israel from among the "sons of Adam," His sovereignty was there as well. God *chose* Israel for His own. Without crossing sacred wires in trying to give God humanly credible reasons for choosing Israel, we may safely say God chose Israel because He wanted to. While there were likely reasons from the human standpoint why God wanted to, the ultimate cause of election is with God, not with man.