

# Sovereignty of God

**SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD** Biblical teaching that God possesses all power and is the ruler of all things (Ps. 135:6; Dan. 4:34–35). God rules and works according to His eternal purpose, even through events that seem to contradict or oppose His rule.

**Biblical Teaching** Scripture emphasizes God's rule in three areas: creation, human history, and redemption. Scripture testifies clearly to God's rule over His creation (Gen. 1; Mark 4:35–41; Rom. 8:20–21), including Christ's sustaining and governing of all things (Heb. 1:3, Col. 1:15–17). The Bible affirms also that God rules human history according to His purpose, from ordinary events in the lives of individuals (Judg. 14:1–4; Prov. 16:9, 33) to the rise, affairs, and fall of nations (Ps. 22:28; Hab. 1:6; Acts 17:26). Scripture depicts redemption as the work of God alone. God, according to His eternal purpose, takes the initiative in the provision and application of salvation and in enabling man's willing acceptance (John 17:2; Rom. 8:29–30; Eph. 1:3–14; 2 Thess. 2:13–14; 2 Tim. 1:9–10).

Five issues seem to be at odds with the claim of God's absolute rule: evil, free will, human responsibility, evangelism, and prayer.

**Sovereignty and Evil** The Bible does not explain the relationship between divine sovereignty and evil. Scripture does teach that God neither does evil nor approves of evil (Hab. 1:13; James 1:13); rather, though He allows it, He also restrains it (Job 1:12–2:7), judges it (Isa. 66:3–4; Acts 12:19–23; Rev. 20:11–15), uses it for the good of His children, and the fulfillment of His purposes (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28–29).

**Sovereignty and Free Will** Some see contradiction between divine sovereignty and human free will, an often misunderstood term. Man's will is free in that he makes willing choices that have actual consequences. Yet man's will is not morally neutral; rather, it is in bondage to sin, and without divine grace he chooses freely and consistently to reject God (Rom. 3:10–11; Eph. 2:1–3; 2 Tim. 2:25–26). Scripture affirms both divine sovereignty and man's willing activity. Pharaoh's rise to power was entirely in accordance with his own will; it was also entirely by the hand of God (Exod. 9:16). The crucifixion of Christ was fully the free act of sinful men, and at the same time fully the purpose of God (Acts 2:23; 4:27–28). Conversions are reported in Acts in a manner consistent with both concepts (Acts 13:48; 16:14).

**Sovereignty and Human Responsibility** Though God is sovereign, man is still accountable to God for his actions (Rom. 2:5–11; 3:19). The relationship between these two concepts is mysterious but not contradictory. Paul raises the issue but, rather than resolving the tension, simply affirms both (Rom. 9:19–29).

**Sovereignty and Evangelism** Jesus affirmed the absolute sovereignty of God and in the same context invited sinners to Himself for salvation (Matt. 11:25–30). Paul began his profound treatment of divine sovereignty by expressing his burden for his lost kinsmen (Rom. 9:1–5); in the same context he expressed his heartfelt prayer for their salvation (Rom. 10:1), and affirmed the promise of salvation to “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord” (Rom. 10:12–13). Thus an affirmation of divine sovereignty is consistent with evangelism, with missionary labors (2 Tim. 1:12; 2:10), and with desiring and praying for the salvation of any lost person or people.

**Sovereignty and Prayer** God’s sovereignty means for the believer that “if God is for us, who is against us?” (Rom. 8:31). Scripture declares abundantly God’s willingness to grant the believer’s requests (Rom. 8:32; 1 John 5:14–15). The believer can pray with confidence that his prayers will be heard and answered. See *God; Providence*.

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Brand, C., Draper, C., England, A., Bond, S., Clendenen, E. R., Butler, T. C., & Latta, B. (2003). *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (1523–1524). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.