



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The LORD Almighty--Sovereign (Isaiah 40:21-24)

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Weekly Bible Study Schedule

- **Tuesday, February 14, 7 AM in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, February 14, 8:30 PM in Room #301**
(Speaker Pro-Tem's office)

ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY!! Not in this country. The USA has three branches of government. These are set up to keep the others in check so that no one branch--let alone no one person--has absolute power in this country. The idea of someone with all power and no accountability to anyone else is an anathema to Americans. Yet, absolute sovereignty is what the Bible attributes to God (and that makes many of us quite squeamish).

This attribute of God is highlighted on the day in which His Son was crucified. Jesus, the Son of God, had been questioned, lied about, beaten, mocked, scourged with a rope whip, and had a crown of thorns shoved down on His head. As He stood before Pilate, for the second time, He was a bloody mess. He stood silently; He did not answer Pilate's questions--until Pilate made the foolish remark, "Don't you know I have the power to free you or have you killed?"

Jesus responded, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above..." (John 19:11a). Our passage today of Isaiah 40:21-24 declares this truth about God--that He is absolutely sovereign over the universe.

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah continues in his instruction of Theology Proper describing Yahweh God to God's people who will have spent 70 years in a land of multiple gods and religions. This passage fleshes out the previous verses. Isaiah described the "creation" of an idol (40:19-20) and then proceeded to describe the Creator (40:22). He talked about the "less than non-existent" nations (40:15,

17) and then went on to show that the leaders of those nations are also nothing in comparison to Him (40:23-24).

Isaiah 40:21-24 Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? 2It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. 3He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless. 4Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, but He merely blows on them, and they wither, and the storm carries them away like stubble.

After he describes the delicate care and expense paid by the idol makers and worshippers, Isaiah rattles off four rhetorical questions in verse 21,

- #1 Do you not know?
--Implied answer "You should..."
 - #2 Have you not heard?
--Implied answer "You should have..."
 - #3 Has it not been declared to you from the beginning?
--Implied answer "Yes, it has been..."
 - #4 Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
--Implied answer "You should have understood because it has been clearly and continually proclaimed since the beginning."
- What has been declared? What should they have understood since the beginning?

The idols are nothing—God is Sovereign.

I. GOD'S SOVEREIGN RULE OVER CREATION (40:22)

In defining God's sovereignty, A.W. Tozer writes, "God's sovereignty is the attribute by which He rules His entire creation, and to be sovereign God must be all-knowing, all-powerful, and absolutely free."¹ A.W. Pink notes that God is "Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him."²

The songwriters in Scripture penned "...our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3) and "For I know that the LORD is

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, ROOM #301

TRUMAN BUILDING: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, 4THFLOOR CAFETERIA

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great, And that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps” (Psalm 135:5-6).

So what is meant when the Bible teaches that God is sovereign? Basically, two things:

#1 God is the King of the Universe. He has both the control of everything and the authority of kingship. In His control, “God has the power to direct the whole course of nature and history as He pleases.”³ NOTHING happens outside of His reign and control. This includes all things in the past, all things happening now, all things that will happen in the future. And His authority means that he has the right to do with His creation as He pleases. No one has taken it from Him and He has not been disqualified from holding the position. There is no one above Him to whom He is accountable; no one to whom He must explain His actions.

#2 He does whatever He wants. Anything that God decrees He can accomplish (Isaiah 46:10-11). The other side of that coin is true as well—anything that may happen is, in some way, decreed by God.

It is concerning this sovereignty that Isaiah asks “Do you not know? Have you not heard? Look at verse 22:

It is He who sits (which could also be translated and is definitely implied as “enthroned”) ***above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants*** (those whom dwell on the earth) ***are like grasshoppers*** (compared to their Creator), ***Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain*** (or a “veil.” The sky pictured here is something quite thin; it is as if God pulls the blue sky of the day and the moon and stars of the night like someone who would pull some lightweight drapes across his or her window) ***and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.***”

God is King over His creation. First of all, He created it (Genesis 1-2). Isaiah covered this truth in proclaiming God’s great power and wisdom (Isaiah 40:12-14). Secondly, God is the One who sustains it (Job 38:12-41; Matthew 6:26-30). He did not get it started and then just sit back and let it go. It is He who continues to uphold it.

Thirdly, God exercises His sovereignty over creation by doing with it as He pleases in order to accomplish His plans. This is seen in the ten plagues He

brought on Egypt (Exodus 7-13), the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14), the providing of water, manna and quail for the Israelites in the desert (Exodus 16-17), the opening up the ground to swallow up rebels (Numbers 16), in making the sun and moon stand still (Joshua 10), and making a virgin girl have a baby (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2). The “laws of nature” are not binding or a hindrance to God. He has the right and ability to step in and move His creation as He pleases to accomplish His good work (Lamentations 3:27-28; Romans 8:28).

GOD DOES WITH HIS CREATION AS HE PLEASES TO ACCOMPLISH THE PLANS THAT HE HAS DECREED. NOTHING HAPPENS IN HIS REALM THAT HE HAS NOT PLANNED.

Jesus Christ exercised His command over nature as a proof of His deity. He calmed the raging storm (Mark 5:35-41), cured lepers and paralytics with a word or touch (Mark 1-2; Luke 5), opened blind eyes (John 9), walked on water (Mark 6:45-52), and raised the dead (Matthew 9:18-31; John 11); including Himself (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20).

God does with His creation as He pleases to accomplish the plans that He has decreed. And nothing happens that is not a part of His plan.

II. GOD’S SOVEREIGN RULE OVER THE RULERS (40:23-24)

Isaiah goes on to declare that God’s sovereignty includes His authority and control over those whom rule the nations of earth. There is no ruler, no judge nor nation who can rise up so high with strength that God cannot bring down to nothing. With a mere breath, God can dry up and blow away the “greatest” of men. He has total rule over them.⁴

This truth of God’s sovereignty over the rulers of nations is illustrated all throughout the Old Testament:

- Judges 3:9—God raised up the judges to deliver Israel
- 1 Samuel 9-10—God chose Saul to be king of Israel
- 1 Samuel 16—God chose David to be the next king
- 2 Kings 9:3—God anointed Jehu as the next king of Israel
- Hab. 1:6—God said "I am raising up the Chaldeans" to punish Judah
- Daniel 1:1-2—God gave Judah over to Nebuchadnezzar

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- o Ezra 1:1-2—God stirred up the heart of King Cyrus and Cyrus stated "All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given to me."

And it can be seen in the New Testament, as mentioned in the beginning of this study, when Jesus responded to Pilate's question by saying, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:11a).

Two passages explicitly teach this doctrine. The first in is Daniel as gives thanks to God when God revealed to him the meaning of the King's dream. Daniel praised and prayed, *Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding* (Daniel 2:20-21).

THERE IS NO PERSON IN A POSITION OF AUTHORITY THAT GOD HAS NOT APPOINTED.

This is the lesson King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, whose dream Daniel answered, had to learn as he admired the great empire he claimed he built (Daniel 4). Shortly thereafter, he began living like an ox—eating grass and living wild—until he came to the realization...*that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes* (Daniel 4:25; cf. 4:17, 32).

The second passage is the Apostle Paul's discussion of godly conduct in his letter to the Christians living in the capitol city, Rome: *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves* (Romans 13:1-2). The plain truth presented is that there is no person or no system in positions of authority that God has not appointed.

Friend, no one is going to sneak by God and get into office without God's knowledge and consent. Our president, governor, senator, congressman, legislator, attorney general, county assessor and administrator have all been chosen by God.⁵ This truth is a great source of comfort for the believer when it is combined with the attribute that God is good and wise.⁶

Would God place in authority someone who seems to be against everything that seemed to be biblically right and godly? Possibly!! He has done it in the past, and He may do it today and again in the future. Why? Only He fully knows!! And He is not under obligation to discuss His actions with His creation. God is the only complete sovereign in the universe and He places people and systems in positions of authority as He desires for His purposes.⁷

APPLICATION/CONCLUSION

Obviously, this leads to a number of unanswerable questions—Why does God allow natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, tornados where thousands of people can be killed and lives displaced? Or what about small disasters—where a family loses a baby, a job, a son at war, etc? What should one do when facing this type of question?

The honest answer to these things is: I don't know. But there are things to recall when faced with these tragic events. Remember that God is a Sovereign who is good and wise. While He does all things for His glory, it is also for the good of His people . Recall His promise of Romans 8:28: *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

This may sound weak, incomplete or unacceptable to some people. But think of the other options. Was God is too weak to stop it? Is He really not in control? Maybe, He is not good? Or perhaps He did not know about it and therefore could not do anything about it? Or what of the option that there is no God? None of these are biblical (or even desirous) options. Instead, the Bible tells us that God is good and God is sovereign and God is wise. The question becomes: Do we still trust Him and praise Him (Habakkuk 3:16-19), in spite of the circumstances?

Secondly, one should not pretend to know why God allowed these things happen. Was New Orleans flooded because it is such a sin-laden city? Some have said as much; but in reality, we do not know and we should not say. This was the problem with Job's friends. They claimed to know why the disasters and trials wiped out Job. But they were far from the truth (Job 42:7).

Thirdly, let the disasters and trials serve as a reminder, or possibly a warning, that one day the end will come and this world will be destroyed.

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An understanding of this truth about God also leads us to the wise application to lean on the Eternal God and not upon those who “Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He merely blows on them, and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble.”

Since God alone is sovereign (“dual sovereignty” is an oxymoron), He is the only one to be fully trusted. Only He can make promises and then show Himself faithful in keeping them. Only He can give true peace for He is the only One who can keep it. Only He can give true hope for there is nothing that can cause Him to fail in His plans for His people.

Hebrews 13:5b-6 ...*He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"*

This Sovereign One can and is willing to forgive your sins--are you interested?

¹ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1961), 108.

² A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1975), 54.

³ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2002), 80.

⁴ The Hebrew word translated “meaningless” is the same word found in Genesis 1:2 describing the earth before God created. In other words, God has the power and authority to reduce these “mighty” men to a state of nothingness similar to the world before God brought it into existence.

⁵ Now this does not erase the importance of a believer in the election process. The Christian person should vote. If one desires, he or she should run for office, or support a candidate of their choosing, or put up a sign in their yard. Ultimately though, the winner is not determined by the amount of money raised and spent or work put into the campaign, but by the sovereign choice of God. As stated in last week’s study, we are to carry out our duty, but leave the results in God’s hands for He is the one who is good and wise. He knows what is best for His people and will perform it.

⁶ A side to note to our elected officials who are reading this: I hope you realize that you are in office now according to God’s plan and purpose. It is true that you are to go out and campaign—just like we all need to be diligent in our jobs and duties—but ultimately, it is all in God’s hands. Let this teaching be a source of humility. Always remember, God is sovereign over all things and God is good in all ways. Therefore, He can be fully trusted even though we cannot understand or see the outcome.

⁷ God’s concern is not primarily on the kingdoms of the world. His first concern is with His Kingdom and people. He puts people in positions, and raises up kingdoms and tears down kingdoms, so as to benefit His Kingdom and to accomplish His purposes.