

Who Is God?: Lesson 4 *God Is Sovereign*

Learning to know and love God for who He is, His character, attributes and being

Lesson 4: God Is Sovereign (Day One) *Ruler of All*

In *Lesson 3: God Is Love*, we learned that God's love comes from His heart or being. He deeply cares about you, me and every person He created. God is interested in us and everything in the world that affects or involves us. He also has the power and authority to direct, change or influence anyone in heaven and earth. God is sovereign (Pronounced sov run).

God rules and uses His power in union with all of His other attributes. Therefore, God governs the universe in love, goodness and mercy. God is also incomprehensible (beyond understanding). It is impossible for mankind to always understand why God allows or brings about events in our world. We need to trust God to work out everything for our good because we love Him and have been called according to His purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:28-29).

Definition: As a noun, the word sovereign means a supreme (highest, ultimate) ruler, especially a king. As an adjective, sovereign is defined as possessing or having supreme or absolute power.

In terms of the Bible, the sovereignty of God means that He is *the* Supreme and Ultimate Ruler of the universe. God is the source of all creation and all things depend on Him. Nothing, including evil and suffering, can occur without God's permission or authorization.

Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. ¹² Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. ¹³ Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. 1 Chronicles 29:11-13

Read 1 Chronicles 29:11-13 and answer questions 1-5:

1. Is there anything in heaven and earth that does not belong to God (v.11a)? Yes No (Circle One)

****See end of lesson for repeat of questions and blank spaces for you to write your answers.**

When all the questions have been completed, return your answer sheets to CLI. You may keep this lesson for your own study or review. You may also pass it on to another or discard.

2. Who is exalted (praised, honored, glorified) as head over all (v.11b)?

3. Who is the ruler of all things (v.12a)?

4. Who has the power to exalt (raise in rank, power or character) and give strength (v.12b)?

5. Give God thanks and praise (admire, honor) His glorious name (v. 13). Write your praise:

God is all-powerful (omnipotent). No one has more power than God. There is no one in the physical or spiritual world outside of His control or influence. God is invincible and unconquerable. He is unstoppable and unbeatable. Power is another of God's attributes and goes hand in hand with His sovereignty, as well as His other attributes.

Nothing is impossible with God (Matthew 19:26). He has unlimited power. God can do whatever He pleases. However, He will not act against His character. For example, God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2).

Definitions: Universe is defined as all of space and everything in it, including stars, planets and galaxies. A galaxy is a system of millions or billions of stars held together by gravity. The earth's galaxy is known as the Milky Way and our planets rotate around the sun. The phrase, the heavens and the earth, is the same as referring to the entire creation or universe.

"Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you." Jeremiah 32:17

6. Read Jeremiah 32:17. How much power do you think it took to make the universe?

"But he stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases." Job 23:13

7. Read Job 23:13. No one can resist or defeat God. He does whatever He _____.

"For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?" Isaiah 14:27 (Thwart means to stop or prevent.)

8. Read Isaiah 14:27. No one can stop God and His plans. When He decides to do something, no one can turn it _____.

Joseph (Genesis 37-50) was the first son born to Jacob and Rachel. However, Jacob had ten older sons by other women. Jacob loved Rachel more than his other wife and concubines (mistresses). He also loved Joseph more than his older sons and did not hide his favoritism and affection.

God gave Joseph a dream that indicated he would be ruling over his brothers one day. When Joseph told his brothers about the dream, their jealousy finally exploded. While they were in the fields tending the flocks, they decided to kill him.

Judah, one of the brothers, convinced the others not to kill Joseph. Instead, he suggested they sell him to the people (Ishmaelites) passing by. After the caravan (group) left with 17-year-old Joseph as their slave, the brothers slaughtered a goat. They took Joseph's richly ornamented robe that his father had given him and dipped it into the blood. When they reached home that evening, they gave it to their father. Jacob immediately thought a ferocious animal had killed Joseph and mourned for his son many days.

9. Did God allow Joseph to be rejected and abused by his brothers? Yes No (Circle One)

10. Have you ever been rejected and abused by family? Yes No (Circle One)

God did not intervene or step in right away. He allowed the brothers' evil act to stand. Joseph was cast off by family members who were supposed to love him and look out for him. But God had not abandoned Joseph; He was with him.

Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me. Psalm 27:10
(The Hebrew word translated receive, also means to gather, take up, accept or hold close)

11. Read Psalm 27:10. Who receives you and holds you close, even if others, including your mother and father leave or desert you?

When Joseph reached Egypt, he was sold to Potiphar, the captain of the guard. The LORD God was with Joseph and gave him success in everything he did. Potiphar saw this and put him in charge of his household and everything he owned.

Potiphar's wife noticed Joseph because he was well-built and handsome. When her husband was not around, she tried to get Joseph into her bed. Joseph refused, saying, "How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9)

The woman did not like being rejected, so she lied. She told her husband that Joseph tried to sleep with her. Potiphar burned with anger and put him in prison. This was the place where the king's prisoners were kept.

Again the LORD was with Joseph and showed him kindness. God granted him favor with the prison warden, who put him in charge of the other prisoners. The LORD continued to give Joseph success in whatever he did.

12. Share a time when God gave *you* success or granted *you* favor?

God could have shown Joseph favor earlier. God could have moved or stirred the brothers' hearts so they would not have sold him into slavery. He could have also opened Potiphar's heart to see the evil in his own wife. Or God could have blinded Potiphar's wife to her desires for Joseph.

Similarly, God could have moved in your life in a thousand or more different ways. But God had a plan for Joseph and He has a plan for you. This is called God's providence. He is faithfully guiding everything He has made toward His purposes.

Joseph was rejected, falsely accused and forgotten. Yet, here we are reading about a man who lived 500 years before Christ. God was working in Joseph's individual life and also for the purpose of saving many lives. God had not rejected, accused, forgotten or abandoned Joseph.

Note: God's sovereignty and providence does not mean that humans have no part or responsibility for their actions. The Bible is clear that God has given us free will. We are answerable and accountable to God for our choices. We will look deeper into this subject later.

Personal Application:

13. Memorize Psalm 33:11. *But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.*

Lesson 4: God Is Sovereign (Day Two) *God wants to be Known*

Twelve years passed since Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery. While he was in charge of the prisoners, he met two of the king's officials. They had offended the king of Egypt (Pharaoh) and were put into prison. They each had dreams while held captive but did not know what they meant. God gave Joseph the explanation of the dreams and he shared it with the two men. Just as Joseph said, one of the men was hanged and the other one was restored.

Joseph told the restored official that he had been forcibly carried off and did not deserve to be in prison. He asked the man to take his case to the king. But when he returned to the palace, the king's worker forgot Joseph.

Two years later Pharaoh had a disturbing dream and no one could explain it. Joseph is now thirty years old. The restored official remembered Joseph and told the king about his ability to interpret (explain meaning) dreams. Joseph was then called into the presence of the king of Egypt.

God's sovereign plan was about to unfold. It was now 14 years since Joseph had been sold into slavery and then imprisoned. He had not done anything wrong, but he suffered through unfavorable circumstances.

When God's plan is not revealed right away, we get impatient. Unlike Joseph, we can grumble, complain and accuse God of being unfair. We need to remember: God is patient and not limited to human timing (Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8).

14. Do you think being upset with circumstances in your life is the same as being upset with God? Yes No Maybe (Circle One) Explain your answer:

Joseph entered into Pharaoh's presence humbly with one goal. He wanted to make sure God got the glory. He told Pharaoh that only the LORD could give the meaning of the dream. Joseph did not want to take credit in any way.

God wants to be known by the people He created. He desires to be known by individuals and by nations. In this case, God was revealed through the favor or blessing He gave to Joseph. He gave Joseph the gift of dream interpretation.

The king had a dream about seven fat cows and seven skinny cows. The seven skinny and ugly cows ate up the fat ones. God revealed to Joseph that Egypt would have seven years of great abundance and seven years of famine (shortage of food). Joseph went on to say, "*The matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.*" Genesis 41:32b

15. Name three ways the sovereign hand of God was at work in Joseph's life:

God had not only given Joseph the meaning of Pharaoh's dream, He also gave him wisdom. Joseph told the king to collect and store up food during the seven good years of harvest. In this way, the nation could use the stored food during the seven years of famine.

The plan seemed good to the king, so he put Joseph in charge of the whole land of Egypt. All the people were to submit to Joseph's orders. Only Pharaoh would be greater.

When the seven years of famine happened, Egypt was the only country with food. The countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph. When Joseph's father learned there was grain in Egypt, He sent ten of his sons to buy food.

The brothers bowed down to Joseph with their faces to the ground. They did not recognize Joseph. He was dressed in Egyptian clothes, spoke the native language and had an Egyptian name. However, Joseph recognized them.

Joseph wanted to see if his brothers' hearts had changed, so he did not reveal himself right away. He tested them in several ways before he made himself known. God also tests our hearts and although He is present, we may not always be aware of it (Psalm 11:5, 13:1, 26:2; James 1:3).

God wants to be known in the right way. He desires to be known in truth and not through someone's imagination. Today, the only way to truly know God is through Christ Jesus, His Son.

Like Joseph, Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:5). He was rejected by His neighbors (Luke 4:16, 28-29) and ultimately killed by the religious leaders. Like Joseph, Jesus suffered because of other people's sin. Like Joseph, Jesus suffered without complaining or blaming God. Both remained faithful pointing others to the LORD. Notice also that both were in the sovereign plan and will of Almighty God.

Of course, there are major differences between Jesus and Joseph. Jesus is the Son of God, fully human and fully divine. He was sinless and came to save us from everlasting spiritual famine.

Read Isaiah 53:10-11 and answer questions 16-18:

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. ¹¹ After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities (sins). Isaiah 53:10-11 (This is a prophecy about Jesus. Prophecy is inspired words of God's will.)

16. Was it the LORD's sovereign plan and will for Jesus to suffer (v. 10a)? Yes No (Circle One)

17. The LORD makes Jesus' life an offering for _____ (v. 10b).

18. How will the LORD's sovereign plan for Jesus, the righteous servant, be successful (v. 11)?

God is made known through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for our sins. Jesus suffered so we may have everlasting life. Joseph suffered so the people of his time could continue in their earthly life without starving to death. God was also using Joseph to save the Hebrews, His chosen people. Jacob, Joseph's father, was the grandson of Abraham. God promised Abraham that He would make him into a great nation (Genesis 12:2-3). God told Abraham that *all peoples on earth will be blessed through him*. All people are blessed through knowing God through Christ Jesus. Our Savior was born into a Jewish (Hebrew) family, Abraham's descendents (offspring, children).

We become spiritual children of Abraham and heirs to the promise when we trust Jesus as Lord and Savior (Galatians 3:6-9). This was and is the plan of our Supreme Ruler. Our Sovereign

chose the Hebrew (Jewish) people to make Himself known. Now God chooses believers, Jews or Gentiles (non-Jewish), to make His name known.

19. How are you sharing or telling others about Jesus?

We are a blessing to individuals and nations by sharing the truth about Jesus. We share about Jesus in love because everything we do must be in love. It is the greatest and most important commandment (Matthew 22:36-40). Jesus died on the cross for our sins because of love: His love for His heavenly Father and His love for us.

Our sins were given to Jesus on the cross and in return, His righteousness was given to us. He rose from the dead and lives to intercede for believers (Hebrews 7:25). Interceding for us means that Jesus is actively pleading our case before God. Satan accuses us, but Jesus defends us. In fact, Jesus is the only one who can mediate (go between, intervene, arbitrate) on our behalf (1 Timothy 2:5).

Read Genesis 50:18-20 and answer questions 20:22:

His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Genesis 50:18-20

20. Why did Joseph's brothers fall down before him and say, "We are your slaves" (v. 18)?

21. What does Joseph mean when he asked, "Am I in the place of God?"

22. Write out v. 20 and then share how this verse encourages you:

God allows, and may even cause, suffering (Lamentations 3:31-33; Isaiah 53:10; Amos 3:6). He has a holy purpose and everything He does is right. Jesus and Joseph are prime examples of suffering that accomplished the saving of many lives.

Read Daniel 4:35 and answer questions 23-24:

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" Daniel 4:35

23. God does as He pleases with the _____ of _____ and the _____ of the _____.

24. Does anyone have a right to question how God runs the world? Yes No (Circle One)

Personal Application: Meditate (think deeply) about God being sovereign.

25. How does this attribute of God affect (shape, influence) your relationship with Him?

Lesson 4: God Is Sovereign (Day Three) Blessing and Judgment

Experiencing pain, illness, injury or anything unpleasant is extremely difficult. Most people do not like to suffer and avoid it at all costs. However, we should not be surprised when we are called to suffer. It *is* part of our earthly existence.

Take Job for example. He suffered through many hardships and heartaches. While on earth, Job never learned that God was testing him through Satan. In the end, it did not matter. Through his emotional and physical suffering, Job came to see the true majesty of God.

Then Job replied to the LORD: ² "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted." Job 42:1-2

26. Read Job 42:1-2. Can any plan of God's be thwarted (stopped)? Yes No (Circle One)

Read Job 42:3-6 and answer questions 27-29:

You (God) asked, 'Who is this that obscures (hides, conceals) my plans without knowledge?' Surely I (Job) spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. ⁴ "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.'⁵ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. ⁶ Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:3-6 (Parentheses added for clarity by author of study)

27. God wants to know who would dare question His plans with such limited understanding. How does Job answer (v. 3b)?

28. God then told Job to listen while He spoke. God would question Job, and he was expected to answer. How did Job respond (v. 5)?

Note: Job says, "but now my eyes have seen you." We are not exactly sure how Job saw God, but we do know he did *not* see God's face. No one can see God's face and live (Exodus 33:20, 23). Job may have seen a form of God or the pre-incarnate Christ. Pre-incarnate means before Christ was born on earth. Incarnate means in the flesh or in human form.

Job's words about seeing God may also be in the symbolic sense of knowing God better. Job comes to know God through his suffering. His faith becomes real through his experiences and he will now trust God in His supreme plan, even if it means suffering.

Note: Dust and ashes were placed on one's head as a sign of sorrow, mourning and humility.

29. Why does Job despise himself and repent in dust and ashes (v. 6)?

Definition: Repent means to sincerely turn from sins to God. Turning to God means to follow and obey Him. Repentance also includes being truly sorry for wrongdoing.

The account of Job is especially used today for people going through difficult times. We can read about Job in the Bible and know our suffering is not in vain. Our patient suffering brings glory to God and thwarts (prevents) the plans of Satan.

Job was not being judged and then punished for wrongdoing. Recall Jesus' teaching about the man who was born blind. **Read John 9:1-12.** His disciples wanted to know who had sinned, the man or his parents. They felt someone was to blame for the blindness.

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." John 9:3

30. Read John 9:3. How were the works of God displayed in the blind man (v. 7)?

Joseph, Job and the blind man were not being punished for wrongdoing. Nevertheless, God does make Himself known through punishment. God will judge and punish evil doers to make His name known.

"I will display my glory among the nations, and all the nations will see the punishment I inflict and the hand I lay on them." Ezekiel 39:21

31. Read Ezekiel 39:21. How is God displaying His glory?

The nation of Israel knew God through blessing and judgment. In Ezekiel 39:21 the LORD is talking to the Israelites. They were unfaithful to Him and He handed them over to their enemies.

God makes Himself known through blessings or favor. We are told that God blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. He was given wealth, sons, and daughters and lived to be 140 years old (Job 42:12-17). Joseph was also given wealth and a powerful position in Egypt. And the blind man was blessed with a miraculous cure by the Son of God.

32. How did God make Himself known through the blessings He gave to Job, Joseph and the blind man?

The story of Joseph and his father Jacob (Israel) displays God's sovereignty in all of its supremacy and command. After the brothers told their father that Joseph was alive, God spoke to Jacob in a vision at night. He told him not to be afraid to go to Egypt for, *"I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again"* (Genesis 46:3-4).

As God promised, the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly. But after Joseph and his generation died, the new king became concerned about the Israelites. He was afraid they would become even more numerous and turn against the Egyptians. He enslaved them and gave them over to hard labor. Just as God had raised up Joseph, He raised up Moses to deliver His people.

Through Moses, God performed many miracles, including parting the Red Sea. The enslaved Israelites walked on solid ground between two walls of water to safety. When the Egyptians followed on their horses and chariots, the giant sea walls collapsed over them and they died.

Personal Application:

33. Think about Joseph, Job and the blind man. Pray and ask God to use you to make His name known. Share any impressions (ideas, feelings) you have about God's answer:

But for the sake of my name, I brought them out of Egypt. I did it to keep my name from being profaned in the eyes of the nations among whom they lived and in whose sight I had revealed myself to the Israelites. Ezekiel 20:9 (Profaned occurs when God is disrespected or ridiculed.)

34. Read Ezekiel 20:9. God acts to protect His identity and His _____

The LORD wants to be known correctly. He wants people to know that He is good, merciful, loving, righteous, just and holy. This is why the LORD makes Himself known through blessings and judgments. Both reveal His Being and character. Both reveal His power and sovereignty.

Sixty-five times in the book of Ezekiel, God says in some form or variation, *“Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD”* (37:13). His people will experience His punishment and favor and realize everything comes from God’s hand. Then they will submit (yield, be subject) to their sovereign King.

God did not create us to ignore, disrespect or rebel against Him. He created us for a love relationship. But our relationship with God is on His terms. It is based on His character and He will do whatever is necessary to bring us into this truth.

After the Israelites were miraculously delivered from slavery, they rejoiced and praised God. Three months later, God called Moses to meet Him on Mount Sinai. God wanted to make sure His people had His laws and rules for living. This is the time *God gave Moses the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God* (Exodus 31:18). We know the tablets of Testimony as the Ten Commandments.

Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights, and the people grew restless. They decided to make a god for themselves. So they took the gold jewelry they had received from the Egyptians and cast it into the shape of a calf. *Then they said, “These are your gods O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”* (Exodus 32:4)

God told Moses exactly what the people were doing. They were worshipping and sacrificing to a golden idol. In addition they were engaging in immoral activities. God was angry and wanted to destroy them. He told Moses that He would make him into a great nation. God was saying that He would take Abraham’s blessing (Genesis 12:1-3) and give it to Moses. Instead of accepting the offer, Moses humbly sought God’s favor. He spoke to God about the situation. This is the same when we go to the Lord in prayer. Yes, God is sovereign, but He still wants us to pray and He wants to answer.

“Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’” Exodus 32:13

35. Read Exodus 32:13. In asking God not to be angry with the Israelites, who does Moses want God to remember?

Moses reminded God of His word or promise to Abraham, Isaac and Israel (Jacob). Moses was praying according to God’s will. When praying, use God’s word (Bible) to remind Him of certain promises in Christ Jesus, our Lord. This does not mean that God has forgotten, but that

you know and believe. It also does not mean there is a magical formula. God will answer as He decides is best.

God showed Moses favor by answering his request. That is, God decided not to destroy the Israelites. He relented. Read Amos 7:1-6 and Jonah 3:1-10 for other times of God relenting because of prayer or intercession. Intercessory prayer is the act of speaking to God on the behalf of others. Relent means to abandon, change or to soften in one's intention.

If God is sovereign and answers according to His will, why pray? We pray because this is one of God's ways of communicating with us. It is a means of building a relationship with us. We get to know God in His many attributes when we pray.

Through answered prayer, we come to know God in His goodness, mercy, love, righteousness, etc. Righteousness means that God is pure and will not answer in any way that compromises His holiness or ours. For example, if God does not answer your prayer, will you still love and serve Him? Jesus and Joseph did. They did not love God for what He would give them or how He would answer their prayers. They simply loved God and accepted whatever came to them from His sovereign will.

You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. James 4:2-3 (Also read Matthew 7:7-12)

36. Read James 4:2-3. We do not have because we do not _____ God. When we do ask, we do not receive, because we ask with _____ motives (reason for doing something). Our prayers are selfish and we want things that give us personal _____.

Prayer helps us recognize our dependence on God. We rely on Him alone for our every breath. All that we have and do is a result of God. By praying, we place our trust in God's divine sovereignty. We accept His answer and go forward as the Holy Spirit leads. In addition, God may withhold blessings until we seek Him in prayer and acknowledge our dependence on Him.

Talking with God about the Israelites helped Moses to see things from God's perspective (viewpoint). He did not really understand God's anger at the Israelites. However, when Moses went down from Mount Sinai and saw the evil firsthand, then *he* burned with anger. He immediately threw the golden calf into the fire. Afterward he ground it into a fine dust and scattered it on the water.

Moses stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "*Whoever is for the LORD, come to me.*" (Exodus 32:26) Those who were for the LORD strapped a sword to their side and went through the camp killing those determined to be against God. These instructions were from the LORD and ones Moses willingly carried out.

Today, those who are determined to be against God will be punished after they die. Our job is to pray and tell people about Jesus so they may have their sins forgiven. In evangelism (giving the message about Jesus), we also depend on God, for only He can draw someone to Himself (John 6:44).

Sadly, the next generation of Israelites continued to turn their back on God. Even after they were living in the Promised Land, they worshipped idols, disobeyed God's commands and mistreated people. They even sacrificed their sons and daughters to idols (Ezekiel 16:20-21). They were wicked and they alone were responsible for their evil. Still, God was merciful and sent prophets to warn them.

Definition: In the Old Testament, a prophet was a person who received and gave a message from God. In the New Testament, a prophet speaks for God or Christ. In both cases the prophet may speak through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Prophecy is to speak the words the Lord has given. Prophecy also means to foretell or predict the future. It is speaking with assurance on the basis of what God has said.

"For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments-- sword and famine and wild beasts and plague-- to kill its men and their animals!" Ezekiel 14:21

37. Read Ezekiel 14:21. What are four judgments that the LORD may send?

"You will be consoled when you see their conduct and their actions, for you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause, declares the Sovereign LORD." Ezekiel 14:23
(Note: You is plural and refers the exiled Israelites in Babylon)

38. Read Ezekiel 14:23. The Sovereign Lord does nothing without _____

39. Will *you* be judged and punished for all *your* sins? Yes No (Circle One) Why or why not?

I (author) will not be judged and punished for my sins because Jesus accepted the judgment and punishment for my sins. Although I still sin, I do not enjoy sinning and agree with God about my wrongdoing. I seek God's help and turn away from my sins. If you are a believer and follower of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven also. We are blessed!

Read Ezekiel 33:11 and answer questions 40-41:

Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?' Ezekiel 33:11 (Also read Lamentations 3:32-33)

40. Does God take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Yes No (Circle One)

41. What does God want for the wicked?

Read Ezekiel 36:33-36 and answer questions 42-43:

"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt.³⁴ The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it.³⁵ They will say, "This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited."³⁶ Then the nations around you that remain will

know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.' Ezekiel 36:33-36

42. Will God resettle the destroyed towns and desolate land (vs. 33-34)? Yes No (Circle One)

43. With God's blessings on Israel's towns and land, what will the nations know (v. 36)?

Lesson 4: God Is Sovereign (Day Four) Responsibility for thoughts and actions

The word of the LORD came to the prophet Jeremiah. The LORD told him to go down to the potter's house where He would give Jeremiah a message. The potter was in his shop making a pot out of clay. However, the pot was marred (spoiled, flawed). So he *formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him* (Jeremiah 18:1-4).

The potter would begin his work by preparing the clay. He had to work the bubbles or air pockets out of the clay so the piece would not collapse later. He banged it on a table or kneaded it like dough. After the bubbles were removed, the clay was placed on a spinning wheel to shape it into the form the potter desired. Potters could also form clay into bowls, plates and cups.

Today, we have many options to buy dishes, but that was not the case in the time of Jeremiah (626-586 BC). The potter was a necessary part of life for these items. Pottery making was also a well-known craft. Everyone was familiar with pottery making. God was giving Jeremiah a message so that all could understand.

People are still making pottery and have been since 3129 BC (Before Christ). In fact, there is a community of potters in Seagrove, North Carolina. My family and I have driven there and visited various shops. Although still functional, many of their pieces are unique works of art. We have soup bowls we use regularly and decorative vases we display in our home.

Some of the potters were actually working with the clay when we arrived at their shop. It was fun to watch them spinning the clay and forming it into some kind of vessel or container. Although it may look easy, it takes a lot of skill and patience. One potter was especially patient and kind. Our children, John and Christine, were young at the time and crowded around his wheel. They asked a "zillion" questions, which he answered patiently.

Before we left, he gave the children a small piece of pottery he had made previously. It had already been through the firing process. In other words, it had been placed in a kiln (oven) to harden. They were thrilled with the whole encounter!

Like the potter, God is patient and kind. He invites our questions and answers on our level of understanding. Like the potter, God also has the right to give gifts as He chooses. And like the potter, God has the right to shape His clay (us) into whatever He desires.

The marred or spoiled pot indicated sin in the life of the Israelites. The pot was not useable in its current condition. Neither were the Israelites pleasing or useful to God in their sinful condition. As the potter makes a choice about the flawed pot, so God makes a decision about the sin of the Israelites. This is the lesson God wanted Jeremiah to give to His people.

God was preparing disaster and devising a plan against Israel (Jeremiah 18:11). But, as we will see, He was also giving them an opportunity to turn from their evil ways (repent). God alone has the right to destroy or remold nations and individuals as He chooses. This is still true today.

Read Jeremiah 18:5-6 and answer questions 44-46:

Then the word of the LORD came to me. ⁶ He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel. Jeremiah 18:5-6

- 44. Who did God call to declare or proclaim His message (v. 5)?
- 45. How does God help the people understand the meaning of His words (v. 6)?
- 46. What was God's message to Israel and how do His words speak to us today?

Read Jeremiah 18:7-10 and answer questions 47-48:

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, ⁸ and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. ⁹ And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, ¹⁰ and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it. Jeremiah 18:7-10

- 47. Name one reason God will change His mind about sending *disaster* He has planned (vs.7-8).
- 48. What is one reason God will reconsider the *good* He had intended or planned (vs. 9-10)?

God is the Supreme Ruler. He has absolute control over every person, place or thing. Therefore, in His sovereignty, He has chosen to respond to people. He has given humans free will. We can choose God or we can choose evil. If we have chosen evil, we can repent and choose God. God has set up conditions for pardon and restoration based on our actions. The little word *if* alerts us to God's conditions. Here are two examples in the New Testament:

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9 (Emphasis and underlining by author of study)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (Confess means to agree with God and admit wrongdoing)

In Romans 9, the apostle Paul tells the story of Israel. He clearly talks about God's choice and purpose for people. He gives the example of God choosing or electing Jacob over his twin brother, Esau, before they were even born. Jacob was chosen before he or his brother had done anything good or bad.

Definition: In election, God determines to bring about His will by His plans and choices. The word election means to choose for oneself. The objects of divine selection are the elect ones. God's overarching plan is to bring salvation to His people and His world. See Ephesians 1:4-14.

Paul goes on to ask the question, "Is God unjust?" He exclaims, "Not at all!" God has the right to have mercy and compassion on whomever He chooses (Romans 9:14-18).

The Bible is clear. God is sovereign, but we are responsible for our actions. God chooses to show mercy to some and not to others. Sometimes it seems that God's election and human responsibility are in conflict. They do not seem to go together.

Nevertheless, both concepts (ideas, thoughts) are in the Bible. It is best to live with the tension (uncertainty, strain) and understand that God has it worked out. The problem arises when we try to build a case for one or the other. If we just want to believe that we are elected to salvation, then we will ignore all the Bible verses that clearly state the responsibility we have for our actions. If we choose to believe everything is up to us, then we will ignore the Scripture on election or predestination (God's foreknowledge and ordering events).

Lesson 4: God Is Sovereign (Day Five) *God is always Right*

Read Romans 9:19-21 and answer questions 49-50:

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?"²⁰ But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?
Romans 9:19-21

49. Do we have the right to talk back to God and accuse Him (vs. 20-21)? Yes No (Circle One)?

50. Does God have the right to make people in anyway He chooses (v. 21)? Yes No (Circle One)

God has the right to form or use us in anyway He chooses. We may have an honorable job in kingdom work or one that is disrespected or even maligned (criticized). If we are not obedient to do the work God has called us to, He may get someone else to do it. God will have His way.

Whether a special job or a common job, our lives will have challenges. Sometimes we may even feel like the clay being beaten and banged on the table. It is during these difficult times that we may question God's plan and purposes. These are the times we need to cry out to God to increase our faith. *Keep us faithful, O Lord Jesus.*

51. Share any difficulty or challenge you are going through now? How might we pray for you?

It is also during these difficult times that we must remember: *God is good, God is mercy and God is love.* God does nothing without cause or reason. He judges and punishes justly.

When God had decided to free His people from slavery, He chose Moses for the job. Certainly, God would have received glory if the most powerful king at the time had released all his slaves. They numbered over one million people. Everyone would have been talking about it!

But Pharaoh chose not to release the Hebrews. God sent Moses to tell the king to let His people go. But Pharaoh said to Moses, *"Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go."* Exodus 5:2

Pharaoh had a number of choices. He could have been open to hearing and learning about the LORD. He could have studied the issue and sought wise counsel. And he could have obeyed the LORD and released the Hebrews. Instead of these choices, he increased the work load of the Hebrews and would not let them go.

Read Exodus 6:1 and answer questions 52-53:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country." Exodus 6:1

52. What five words does God use twice in this verse to describe His sovereign power?

53. How did Pharaoh's choice *not* to release the Hebrews affect God's plan to free His people?

Pharaoh's action in this case is an example of human choice and God's sovereign power. This king had the responsibility to obey God. At the very least, he should have gathered information about the God of the Israelites. But Pharaoh was proud and arrogant. He actually thought he had control over the situation. However, God's plans will never be thwarted.

The LORD told Moses He will use His mighty power and supreme rule to release His people. We know the outcome because it is recorded in the book of Exodus. The LORD performed great miracles, signs and wonders throughout the land of Egypt. He even parted the Red Sea.

Read Exodus 7:3-5 and answer questions 54-56:

But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in Egypt, ⁴ he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites.⁵ And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it." Exodus 7:3-5

Definition: In biblical language, the heart is the center of one's mind and personality. A soft heart is open to God. A hard heart is not. It lacks faith and godly wisdom. Sin and especially unrepentant (no change) sin causes hearts to harden.

54. What does God say He will do to Pharaoh's heart (v.3)?

55. After the LORD hardens Pharaoh's heart, will he listen to Moses (v. 4)? (Yes No Circle One)

56. Through the judgments God brings upon Egypt, what will they come to know (v. 5)?

This account of Pharaoh is also an example of God having the right to have mercy and compassion on whomever He chooses (Romans 9:14-18). Pharaoh initially chose to harden his heart by not even considering the LORD and His instructions. Therefore, the LORD hardened his

heart further so that even when he saw the miracles, signs and wonders, he would still not believe.

This is a good lesson for us. God may give some people excessive amounts of mercy or opportunities to know and follow Christ. Or He may give some people only one opportunity. We should not bank our eternal life on God’s mercy for our hard heart. If God has called, we need to answer. It is not wise to think, “I can live my way and follow Jesus later.” Neither you nor I, nor anyone else, may have another opportunity. Pharaoh did not.

We should continue to pray for the lost because we do not know the sovereign mind of God. We have no idea who will be saved with his or her last dying breath. God is patient and He does not want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9).

Read Deuteronomy 30:19 and Joshua 24:15 and answer questions 57-59:

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.
Deuteronomy 30:19

But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." Joshua 24:15

57. Write the meaning of these verses in your own words:

58. Did the Israelites have the choice to choose who they would serve? Yes No (Circle One)

59. Do you have a choice who you will serve? Yes No (Circle One)

God is sovereign over individuals and sovereign over nations. Jesus, the Son of God, is also sovereign (Jude 1:4). They are one. We know from Scripture that no one knows God the Father except through Jesus (Matthew 11:27 and John 14:6).

God rules in men and women’s hearts to affect one or many. But we still have responsibility for our actions. We are responsible for choosing to follow God (John 3:36). On the other hand, He enables us to choose, believe and follow (Philippians 2:13).

60. How will understanding God is sovereign and yet *you* are still responsible for *your* choices and actions make a difference in your life?

Personal Application:

The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights. Habakkuk 3:19

61. Memorize Habakkuk 3:19 and write it without looking at the verse or notes:

-End of Lesson Four-

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS Lesson 4

CLI Who is God?: God is Sovereign

Fill out your contact information and answer each question. Return your answer sheets to CLI, Box 97095, Raleigh, NC 27624. Your answers will be reviewed and returned to you with helpful comments.

Name: _____ Number: _____ Date: _____

Name of Institution: _____ Street address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Lesson 4: God Is Sovereign (Day One) *Ruler of All*

1. Is there anything in heaven and earth that does *not* belong to God (v.11a)? Yes No (Circle One)

2. Who is exalted (praised, honored, glorified) as head over all (v.11b)? _____

3. Who is the ruler of all things (v.12a)? _____

4. Who has the power to exalt (raise in rank, power or character) and give strength (v.12b)? _____

5. Give God thanks and praise (admire, honor) His glorious name (v. 13). Write your praise:

6. Read Jeremiah 32:17. How much power do you think it took to make the universe?

7. Read Job 23:13. No one can resist or defeat God. He does whatever He _____.

8. Read Isaiah 14:27. No one can stop God and His plans. When He decides to do something, no one can turn it _____.

9. Did God allow Joseph to be rejected and abused by his brothers? Yes No (Circle One)

10. Have you ever been rejected and abused by family? Yes No (Circle One)

11. Read Psalm 27:10. Who receives you and holds you close, even if others, including your mother and father, leave or desert you? _____

12. Share a time when God gave *you* success or granted *you* favor? _____

13. **Personal Application:** Write Psalm 33:11 without looking at your Bible or notes:

Lesson 4: God Is Sovereign (Day Two) *God wants to be Known*

14. Do you think being upset with circumstances in your life is the same as being upset with God? Yes No Maybe (Circle One) Explain your answer:

15. Name three ways the sovereign hand of God was at work in Joseph's life:

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

16. Was it the LORD's sovereign plan and will for Jesus to suffer (v. 10a)? Yes No (Circle One)

17. The LORD makes Jesus' life an offering for _____ (v. 10b).

18. How will the LORD's sovereign plan for Jesus, the righteous servant, be successful (v. 11)?

19. How are you sharing or telling others about Jesus? _____

20. Why did Joseph's brothers fall down before him and say, "We are your slaves" (v. 18)?

21. What does Joseph mean when he asked, "Am I in the place of God?" _____

22. Write out v. 20 and then share how this verse encourages you:

23. God does as He pleases with the _____ of _____ and the _____ of the _____.

24. Does anyone have a right to question how God runs the world? Yes No (Circle One)

25. How does this attribute of God affect (shape, influence) your relationship with Him?

Lesson 4: God Is Sovereign (Day Three) Blessing and Judgment

27. God wants to know who would dare question His plans with such limited understanding.

How does Job answer (v. 3b)? _____

28. God then told Job to listen while He spoke. God would question Job, and he was expected to answer. How did Job respond (v. 5)? _____

29. Why does Job despise himself and repent in dust and ashes (v. 6)?

30. Read John 9:3. How were the works of God displayed in the blind man (v. 7)?

31. Read Ezekiel 39:21. How is God displaying His glory? _____

32. How did God make Himself known through the blessings He gave to Job, Joseph and the blind man? _____

33. Think about Joseph, Job and the blind man. Pray and ask God to use *you* to make His name known. Share any impressions (ideas, feelings) you have about God's answer to *you*:

34. Read Ezekiel 20:9. God acts to protect His identity and His _____

35. Read Exodus 32:13. In asking God not to be angry with the Israelites, who does Moses want God to remember? _____

36. Read James 4:2-3. We do not have because we do not _____ God. When we do ask, we do not receive, because we ask with _____ motives (reason for doing something).

Our prayers are selfish and we want things that give us personal _____.

37. Read Ezekiel 14:21. What are four judgments that the LORD may send?

(1. _____) (2. _____) (3. _____) (4. _____)

38. Read Ezekiel 14:23. The Sovereign Lord does nothing without _____

39. Will *you* be judged and punished for all *your* sins? Yes No (Circle One) Why or why not?

40. Does God take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Yes No (Circle One)

41. What does God want for the wicked? _____

42. Will God resettle the destroyed towns and desolate land (vs. 33-34)? Yes No (Circle One)

43. With God's blessings on Israel's towns and land, what will the nations know (v. 36)?

Lesson 4: God Is Sovereign (Day Four) *Responsibility for thoughts and actions*

44. Who did God call to declare or proclaim His message (v. 5)? _____

45. How does God help the people understand the meaning of His words (v. 6)? _____

46. What was God's message to Israel and how do His words speak to us today? _____

47. Name one reason God will change His mind about sending *disaster* He has planned (vs.7-8).

48. What is one reason God will reconsider the *good* He had intended or planned (vs. 9-10)?

Lesson 4: God Is Sovereign (Day Five) *God is always Right*

49. Do we have the right to talk back to God and accuse Him (vs. 20-21)? Yes No (Circle One)?

50. Does God have the right to make people in anyway He chooses (v. 21)? Yes No (Circle One)

51. Share any difficulty or challenge you are going through now? How might we pray for you?

52. What five words does God use twice in this verse to describe His sovereign power?

53. How did Pharaoh's choice *not* to release the Hebrews affect God's plan to free His people?

54. What does God say He will do to Pharaoh's heart (v.3)? _____

55. After the LORD hardens Pharaoh's heart, will he listen to Moses (v. 4)? (Yes No Circle One)

56. Through the judgments God brings upon Egypt, what will they come to know (v. 5)?

57. Write the meaning of these verses in your own words: _____

58. Did the Israelites have the choice to choose who they would serve? Yes No (Circle One)

59. Do you have a choice who you will serve? Yes No (Circle One)

60. How will understanding God is sovereign and yet *you* are still responsible for *your* choices and actions make a difference in your life? _____

61. Memorize Habakkuk 3:19 and write it without looking at the verse or notes: _____

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:9-10

Next Lesson 5: Who is God? God is Holy

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