

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL

STUDY FOUR

Another Deep Mystery: God's Sovereignty

Romans 11:33–36

His way is always right. It doesn't always make sense to us. It won't always be explained for us. It isn't always pleasurable and fun for us. But it is always right.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE world is a confounding and frightening place.

Powerful politicians promise to resolutely lead in national affairs, but they only seem to bite and devour one another while lying and caving to cultural pressure. Many expert investors promise consistently solid returns, but portfolios take a dive with every economic hiccup. Accomplished educators promise to prepare our children to become critically engaged thinkers, but many teachers indoctrinate students with poisonous perspectives.

In this careening world, we seek clarity, peace, and stability but find confusion, anxiety, and unpredictability. Where do you turn? Who is in charge? Whom can you trust? Looking to the mighty, the expert, or the knowledgeable for answers often proves unhelpful—dangerous even! Looking to ourselves for answers proves just as fruitless.

Surely, there is one in charge—at all times and in all ways.

There is, and this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study explores the mystery of God's sovereignty, including what it means and doesn't mean and what practical difference holding this conviction makes in your life.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare your heart to engage with His Word today, join the psalmist David in offering this prayer to God from Psalm 9:1–2, 7–10.

*I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart;
I will tell of all the marvelous things you have done.
I will be filled with joy because of you.
I will sing praises to your name, O Most High. . . .
But the LORD reigns forever,
executing judgment from his throne.
He will judge the world with justice
and rule the nations with fairness.
The LORD is a shelter for the oppressed,
a refuge in times of trouble.
Those who know your name trust in you,
for you, O LORD, do not abandon those who search for you.*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Before we search the Scriptures on the weighty matter of God's sovereignty, it's helpful to first fashion a brief definition. Take a few minutes to get an overview of the biblical use of "sovereignty" by reading a Bible dictionary entry for this concept. For a free, online option, check out the *Holman Bible Dictionary* at studylight.org. Record insights that stand out to you.

Now consider Pastor Chuck's simple definition of *sovereignty*:

Our all-wise, all-knowing God reigns in realms beyond our comprehension to bring about a plan beyond our ability to alter, hinder, or stop. . . . There is a smaller word in the heart of that term . . . *R-E-I-G-N, sove-reign-ty*.

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How does *Proverbs 21:1* present a concrete example of God's sovereignty.



Observation: Boasting . . . Questioning . . . Acknowledging

The Old Testament books of Daniel and Job relay powerful truths about God's sovereignty. King Nebuchadnezzar was brought to his knees because of his prideful boasting, while Job's questioning of God ultimately resulted in his settled acknowledgment of God's wisdom.

Observation is the first phase of *Searching the Scriptures*. Simply read very carefully what the passage says.¹ Use your observation skills to answer the following questions about four passages.

King Nebuchadnezzar

After experiencing a disturbing dream of impending judgment, the king summoned Daniel for interpretation. Read *4:24–37*. A striking contrast is found between 4:25 and 4:26. What similar phrase did Daniel repeat which posed a choice for the king?

After God judged Nebuchadnezzar according to prophecy and the humbled king was returned to sensibility, Nebuchadnezzar spoke. In *Daniel 4:34–37*, how many times did he say "his," "he," and "him" when referring to God, and what truths did he express in this admission?

Job

In the account, God permitted Satan's testing of Job's faithfulness. After monumental loss and censorious counsel from friends, Job pleadingly challenged God's character and sovereignty.

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Beginning in Job 38 for four chapters, God revealed, in question format, His litany of divine actions. Read [Job 38:1–15](#). What type of activities illustrate God's sovereignty?

[Job 42:2, 6](#) captures the extent of God's sovereignty. What did Job acknowledge?

Paul

[Romans 11:33–36](#) forms a doxological crescendo on God's sovereignty. In 11:33, Paul employed two phrases. How is God "deep"? How is God "unsearchable" and "unfathomable"?

In [Romans 11:36](#), Paul highlighted three consequential aspects of God's sovereignty. What are they?

Do you want to know who's in charge? The One who called space into being, the One who put the clouds in place, the One who established the atmosphere in which we're able to live, the One who put the seas and the dry land, who gave you breath for your lungs and the ability to think. The One who placed you here, now in this time, for His purpose, and the One who will call you from life into eternity. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Interpretation: A Deeper Look at Sovereignty

Return to [Daniel 4:24–37](#). After Daniel gave Nebuchadnezzar his sentence, Daniel pled with him to turn from his ways (4:27). Twelve months passed before the sentence was executed (4:29). What does this deferment teach about God's character and His desire for the king?

After the judgment, Nebuchadnezzar “raised [his] eyes toward heaven” (4:34). What does that phrase teach about the king's transformation, and what key principle from that transformation applies to us today? While God faced no obligation to restore the king, He did so. What does [Daniel 4:36](#) teach about God's character?

After Job's severe testing and questioning, he exclaimed, “I repent” (Job 42:6 NASB), humbling himself before his sovereign King. What twofold honor did God grant Job in [Job 42:7–10](#)? What timeless principles do you draw from these verses for Christ-followers today?

Return to [Romans 11:33–36](#), comparing the NLT and NASB. What verb tenses did Paul use in [Romans 11:36](#), and why are those tenses significant for us to understand God's sovereign activity?

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God's sovereign plans are perfectly consistent with His character. His way is always right—"How great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge!" (Romans 11:33)—whether we face good times or hard times, joy or sorrow, clarity or confusion.

No purpose of His can be thwarted. When God says it shall be done, it will be done. . . . He possesses the ability to bring everything to a purposeful conclusion and an ultimate goal. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: God's Sovereignty Incorporates Human Responsibility

Once we come to grips with God's sovereignty, it might be tempting to shrug our shoulders and think, *What's the use in doing anything if God does it all?* But the doctrine of sovereignty should motivate us to action, not to inaction. God wants it to energize us! He wants to fill our tanks with spiritual fuel rather than empty them.

After wrapping up his doxological crescendo of Romans 9–11, whom did Paul address in [Romans 12:1–2](#), and what did he urge them to *do*? While God empowers believers, who is *responsible* for holy living?

Move on to [Romans 12:6–10](#). After his opening charge, Paul gave specific commands addressing *individuals*. Who is the giver, what was given, and what is expected?

Paul continued his exhortations in [Romans 13:1](#); [14:1](#); and [15:1](#). What pattern do you observe in his statements?

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The apostle Paul grasped the biblical balance of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Read his words in *Philippians 4:11–13* and record how he personally upheld those two convictions.

God's sovereignty does not mean I am released from responsibility, does not mean I have no interest in today's affairs, that I cannot be bothered about decisions, or that I need not concern myself with the eternal destiny of other people. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Walking the Path

Scripture paints a clear portrait of two parallel truths. God has fashioned our path through His sovereign will, and He calls us to walk that path with wisdom, persistence, and faith. God's sovereignty offers freedom—freedom from *anxiety*, from the need to *explain*, and from *pride*.

In what area of your life might God's sovereignty replace anxiety with peace and rest? How might the Holy Spirit help you experience freedom from the need to explain the unfathomable?

Reflect on Nebuchadnezzar, on Job, and on Paul's exclamation: "Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge!" (Romans 11:33). Is there one passage which really spoke to you in a fresh way? How so? What truth or principle or application are you taking from it?

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How can Paul's perspective, "I have learned how to be content with whatever I have" (Philippians 4:11), shape your perspective when you encounter life's inevitable challenges?

ALL things to work together for good in God's sovereign, good plan.

Heaven's door will read, "God is all in all!" Even in tragedy? Even in loss? Even in joy and sorrow? Yes. We don't know how. We don't know why. But that's the last line of the Book. God rules. God reigns. And His way is right. It leads to His glory. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study by making Pastor Chuck's prayer your own.

Our Father, I pray that You would minister in a very special way to those of us who are struggling with coming to terms with Your right to rule over us. Bring glory to Yourself as a result of whatever is occurring. And may Your name be lifted up, almighty, sovereign God. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1987, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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