

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

paul mallison

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A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

7. God's Sovereignty

Composed by Paul Mallison

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites out of Egypt and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.
- Answers need not be limited to only what is mentioned in the material.
- The group should feel free to diverge from the study if related issues arise.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. God's Supreme Authority

As the one and only God, God reigns supreme in the world. He has supreme power over all things. As such, God defeats his enemies and he fulfills his plans. A realization of this produces submission to and worship of the one and only God.

a) The LORD Is God – the Only God

Note that God stated that the “LORD” was the name by which he was to be known (cf. Ex 3:12–15).

The Lord is God

Ps 100:3A *Know that the LORD is God.* NCV™

2SAM 7:28A *Now, O sovereign LORD, you are the true God!*

The Lord is God of heaven and earth . . .

DEUT 4:39 Today realize and carefully consider that *the LORD is God in heaven above and on earth below* – there is no other!

. . . As such, he is God of all people

JER 32:27A *I am the LORD, the God of all humankind.*

2KI 19:15A Hezekiah prayed before the LORD: “LORD God of Israel, who is enthroned on the cherubs! *You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth.*

The Lord is the true and living God . . .

JER 10:10 *The LORD is the only true God. He is the living God and the everlasting King. When he shows his anger the earth shakes. None of the nations can stand up to his fury.*

. . . He is the one and only God

ISA 45:21B–22 [GOD:] *And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.* ^{22c}Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! *For I am God, and there is no other.* ESV

God’s deeds show that he is the only God

Ps 86:10 [DAVID:] *For you are great and do amazing things. You alone are God.*

DEUT 32:39 [GOD:] *See, I am the only God. There are no others. I kill, and I make alive. I wound, and I heal, and no one can rescue you from my power.* GW

What right does God have to lay claim to being the God of heaven and earth – and of all people?

What evidence does the Bible give that the LORD is the only God?

How should God being the only God affect our attitudes and thoughts?

b) God Reigns Supreme

God reigns

Ps 96:10 *Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns! The world is established, it cannot be moved. He judges the nations fairly.”*

God rules over all – over all the earth . . .

1CHR 29:11–12 O LORD, you are great, mighty, majestic, magnificent, glorious, and *sovereign over all the sky and earth! You have dominion and exalt yourself as the ruler of all.* ¹²You are the source of wealth and honor; *you rule over all.* You possess strength and might to magnify and give strength to all.

Ps 47:2 For the sovereign LORD is awe–inspiring; *he is the great king who rules the whole earth!*

. . . As such, God rules over all nations and authorities

Ps 22:28 For the LORD is king and rules over the nations.

1TIM 6:15A The glorious God is the only Ruler, *the King of kings and Lord of lords.* CEV

God will reign forever

LAM 5:19 But you, O LORD, reign forever; *your throne endures from generation to generation.*

God will impose his absolute rule on all

REV 11:15–17 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying: *“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”* ¹⁶Then the twenty–four elders who are seated on their thrones before God threw themselves down with their faces to the ground and worshiped God ¹⁷with these words: *“We give you thanks, Lord God, the All–Powerful, the one who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and begun to reign.*

The proclamation in v. 15 and the final phrase “have begun to reign” (v. 17) may mean that at this point God has begun to impose his rule on all – the actualization of the kingdom (v. 15) implemented with the imposition of God’s great power (v. 17). Alternatively the past tense may be used here to indicate the certainty of God doing so in the future.

Note: All things belong to God

1CHR 29:11A Greatness, power, splendor, glory, and majesty are yours, LORD, because *everything in heaven and on earth is yours*. *GW*

All things belong to God – as he made all things – and it is because of this that God has the right to his sovereignty over all things.

What makes you think that God reigns supreme in the world?

Why does not God fully impose his absolute rule now?

Write down at least a couple of phrases/clauses from the verses that you could use in a prayer of praise to God.

c) God Has Power over All Things

➔ *God's Power (I): Ultimate Power, in 1. God's Being*

God has power over the forces of evil

COL 2:15 *God stripped the spiritual rulers and powers of their authority. With the cross, he won the victory and showed the world that they were powerless.* NCV™

ROM 16:20A [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *The God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet.*

God has power over death, to raise the dead

2COR 1:9 [PAUL, SPEAKING OF HIS TRIALS:] *Indeed we felt as if the sentence of death had been passed against us, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.*

God has power over all aspects of nature, including: the earth; the skies; . . .

JOB 9:5–7 *Without warning he moves mountains and in anger he destroys them. ⁶God sends earthquakes and shakes the ground; he rocks the pillars that support the earth. ⁷He can keep the sun from rising, and the stars from shining at night.* GNT

. . . and the waters

PS 107:24–25, 29 *They witnessed the acts of the LORD, his amazing feats on the deep water. ²⁵He gave the order for a windstorm, and it stirred up the waves of the sea. . . . ²⁹He calmed the storm, and the waves grew silent.*

God has power over nations . . .

DAN 4:35 *All who live on the earth are nothing compared to him. He does what he wishes with the heavenly armies and with those who live on earth. No one can hold back his power or say to him, 'What did you do?'* ISV

HAB 3:6, 12 *He [God] takes his battle position and shakes the earth; with a mere look he frightens the nations. The ancient mountains disintegrate; the primeval hills are flattened. He travels on the ancient roads. ... ¹²You [God] furiously stomp on the earth, you angrily trample down the nations.*

This poetically portrays God's vastly superior power over nations.

. . . and God can destroy nations

ZEPH 3:6 [GOD:] *I destroyed nations; their walled cities are in ruins. I turned their streets into ruins; no one passes through them. Their cities are desolate; no one lives there.*

HAG 2:22A [GOD:] *I will overthrow royal thrones and shatter the might of earthly kingdoms.*

Likewise, God has power over rulers and can bring them down

ISA 40:23 *He brings down powerful rulers and reduces them to nothing.* GNT

Choose a verse that impresses on you the supremacy of God's power. Why did you choose it?

In what things on the world stage do you consider God's overriding power to be evident?

Paul speaks of not trusting in himself "but in God who raises the dead" (2Cor 1:9). Is there anything for which you need to stop relying on your own resources and trusting in the all-powerful God?

d) God Defeats His Enemies

No one can effectively oppose God . . .

JOB 23:13 *But he alone is God, and who can oppose him? God does as he pleases, . . .* CEV

JER 49:19B [GOD:] *For there is no one like me, and there is no one who can call me to account. There is no ruler who can stand up against me.*

. . . The plans of God's enemies cannot succeed against him

PS 21:11 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Though they plan evil against you, though they devise mischief, they will not succeed.* ESV

PROV 21:30 *There is no wisdom, understanding, or advice that can succeed against the LORD.* NCV™

God takes vengeance on his enemies . . .

NAH 1:2 *The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.* ESV

. . . God repays his enemies for their deeds

ISA 59:18 *The LORD will pay back his enemies for what they have done. He will show his anger to those who were against him; he will punish the people in faraway places as they deserve.* NCV™

God destroys his enemies

DEUT 7:10 *But he will pay back those people who hate him. He will destroy them, and he will not be slow to pay back those who hate him.* NCV™

1SAM 2:10A *The LORD shatters his adversaries; he thunders against them from the heavens. The LORD executes judgment to the ends of the earth.*

Who are God's enemies and how do they oppose him?

With the Bible's assurance that God's enemies will be defeated, is there any situation in your society or in the world that you should view differently? If so, what situation and how should you view it differently?

What do you think of God being described as "jealous and avenging... and wrathful" (Nah 1:2)? Is there anything positive about this?

e) God Fulfills His Plans

God carries out his plans . . .

ISA 14:24 The LORD who commands armies makes this solemn vow: *“Be sure of this: Just as I have intended, so it will be; just as I have planned, it will happen.*

. . . God's plans, which he fulfills, were determined long ago – from the beginning

ISA 25:1 [ISAIAH:] O LORD, you are my God! I will exalt you in praise, I will extol your fame. For *you have done extraordinary things, and executed plans made long ago* exactly as you decreed.

ISA 46:10 [GOD:] *From the beginning I revealed the end. From long ago I told you things that had not yet happened, saying, “My plan will stand, and I’ll do everything I intended to do.”* GW

When the time comes, God's plans are promptly fulfilled

HAB 2:3 [GOD, TO HABAKKUK:] For still *the vision awaits its appointed time*; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. *If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.* ESV

The reference is to the fulfillment of a prophetic vision from God.

God does not change his plans, . . .

NUM 23:19 God is not a human being, and he will not lie. He is not a human, and *he does not change his mind. What he says he will do, he does. What he promises, he makes come true.* NCV™

. . . though God may have reason to relent from something he proposed

ISA 38:1–5 In those days Hezekiah was stricken with a terminal illness. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz visited him and told him, *“This is what the LORD says, ‘Give instructions to your household, for you are about to die; you will not get well.’”*² *Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD,*³ *“Please, LORD. Remember*

how I have served you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion, and how I have carried out your will.” Then Hezekiah wept bitterly. ⁴The LORD told Isaiah, ⁵“Go and tell Hezekiah: ‘This is what the LORD God of your ancestor David says: “I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I will add fifteen years to your life, ...

No one can thwart God’s plans, . . .

ISA 14:27 Indeed, *the LORD who commands armies has a plan, and who can possibly frustrate it? His hand is ready to strike, and who can possibly stop it?*

. . . nor can anyone alter what God does

ECCL 3:14 [A WISE TEACHER:] I also know that *whatever God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken away from it.* God has made it this way, so that men will fear him.

Note that in such general usage, “men” contextually is intended to be inclusive of women.

God works everything for his plans

PROV 16:4 *The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.* ESV

EPH 1:11 In him [Christ] we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of *him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ...* ESV

These verses appear to indicate that God works all things that exist or occur for the fulfillment of his plans.

What plans has God carried out - in the world and/or in the lives of people you know?

What reason/s would lead to God relenting from carrying out something he had proposed?

In what way/s does the teaching on God's plans give us hope?

II. God's Control over the World

God has power over everything. This includes control over evil powers, nature, the nations of the world and each person's life. Comprehending this is vital to having a sound understanding of God and of his relationship to the world – including his relationship with ourselves.

a) God Has Control over Evil

(⇒ *But Satan can only tempt and afflict as God and Jesus Christ permit, in 5. Angels, Satan and Demons*)

God exerts control over evil

GEN 31:7 [JACOB, REFERRING TO HIS GREEDY UNCLE LABAN:] Yet he has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. *But God did not let him harm me.* GNT

1COR 10:13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] No temptation has overtaken you that is unusual for human beings. *But God is faithful, and he will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. Instead, along with the temptation he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to endure it.* ISV

God has control over and limits any temptation, whether it originates from Satan or from our own sinful nature. This is indicative of God's control over evil.

God can even use evil . . .

1SAM 18:10A *The next day an evil spirit from God suddenly took control of Saul, and he raved in his house like a madman.* GNT

It would appear that the evil spirit was sent by God as a punishment for disobedient King Saul.

. . . God can use evil to fulfill his plans and purposes

ACTS 2:23 [PETER, TO A CROWD LARGELY OF JEWS:] *Jesus was given to you, and with the help of those who don't know the law, you put him to death by nailing him to a cross. But this was God's plan which he had made long ago; he knew all this would happen.* NCV™

REV 17:17 *For God has put into their minds to carry out his purpose by making a decision to give their royal power to the beast until the words of God are fulfilled.*

This speaks of kings or world powers of the end times cooperating with the beast or anti-Christ, to unwittingly accomplish God's purpose.

God may use evil and wrongdoing to punish

ISA 10:5–7 God says, “How terrible it will be for *the king of Assyria*. I use him like a rod to show my anger; in anger I use Assyria like a club. ⁶I send it to fight against a nation that is separated from God. I am angry with those people, so I command Assyria to fight against them, to take their wealth from them, to trample them down like dirt in the streets. ⁷But Assyria’s king doesn’t understand that I am using him; he doesn’t know he is a tool for me. He only wants to destroy other people and to defeat many nations. NCV™

Verse 7 shows the Assyrian king to have been wicked. Despite this God used him to punish the godlessness of other nations (vv. 5–6).

God may even use evil for the benefit of people

GEN 50:20 [JOSEPH, TO HIS BROTHERS:] *As for you, you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose, so he could preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day.*

2COR 12:7–9 [PAUL:] *To keep me from becoming conceited because of the exceptional nature of these revelations, a thorn was given to me and placed in my body. It was Satan’s messenger to keep on tormenting me so that I would not become conceited. ⁸I pleaded with the Lord three times to take it away from me, ⁹but he has told me, “My grace is all you need, for my power is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I will most happily boast about my weaknesses, so that the Messiah’s power may rest on me. ISV*

God – or Christ – used Paul’s affliction, which apparently came from Satan, to both keep him from becoming conceited (v. 7) and make him receptive to Christ’s power working in him (v. 9).

Should the teaching that God has control over evil affect our perception of or the way we respond to events that are apparently evil? If so, how?

How should the teaching that God has control over evil encourage us?

Do you have a “thorn” like Paul (cf. 2Cor 12:7–9) – a chronic affliction or perhaps an ongoing difficult situation in your life? In what way could God use it to benefit you or others – and/or to advance his kingdom?

b) God Has Control over Nature

(⇒ *God Maintains Creation*, in 6. *God's Creation*; *God has power over all aspects of nature, including: the earth; the skies; . . . , p. 6; . . . and the waters*, p. 6)

God directs nature . . .

JOB 37:11–12 *He loads the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through the clouds.* ¹²*The clouds go round in circles, wheeling about according to his plans, to carry out all that he commands them over the face of the whole inhabited world.*

PS 147:15–18 *He sends his command through the earth; swiftly his order reaches its destination.* ¹⁶*He sends the snow that is white like wool; he spreads the frost that is white like ashes.* ¹⁷*He throws his hailstones like crumbs. Who can withstand the cold wind he sends?* ¹⁸*He then orders it all to melt; he breathes on it, and the water flows.*

. . . In fact, nature serves God

PS 104:4 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *The winds are your messengers, and flames of fire are your servants.* CEV

The term “flames of fire” refers to lightning.

PS 119:91 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *To this day they stand by means of your rulings, for all things serve you.* ISV

God can control the elements of nature to bring plentiful provision . . .

JOEL 2:23B–24 *Citizens of Zion [Jerusalem], rejoice! Be glad because of what the LORD your God has done! For he has given to you the early rains as vindication. He has sent to you the rains – both the early and the late rains as formerly.* ²⁴*The threshing floors are full of grain; the vats overflow with fresh wine and olive oil.*

. . . and God can control nature so as to bring deprivation

HAG 1:10–11 [GOD, TO HIS SELF-CENTERED PEOPLE:] *This is why the sky has held back its dew and the earth its produce.* ¹¹*Moreover, I have called for a drought that will affect the fields, the hill country,*

the grain, new wine, fresh olive oil, and everything that grows from the ground; it also will harm people, animals, and everything they produce.

God has control over all creatures

JER 27:6 [GOD, TO VARIOUS KINGS:] I have at this time placed all these nations of yours under the power of my servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. *I have even made all the wild animals subject to him.*

GEN 7:15–16A *Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life came into the ark to Noah.* ¹⁶*Those that entered were male and female, just as God commanded him.*

God caused two of every kind of creature to come to Noah, as God had said (cf. 6:19–20).

God can even perform miracles of nature

JUDG 13:3, 24A *The LORD’S angelic messenger appeared to the woman and said to her, “You are infertile and childless, but you will conceive and have a son. . . .”* ²⁴*Manoah’s wife gave birth to a son and named him Samson.*

1KI 17:12–16 She [a widow] said, “As certainly as the LORD your God lives, I have no food, except for a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. Right now I am gathering a couple of sticks for a fire. Then I’m going home to make one final meal for my son and myself. After we have eaten that, we will die of starvation.” ¹³Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go and do as you planned. But first make a small cake for me and bring it to me; then make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴*For this is what the LORD God of Israel says, ‘The jar of flour will not be empty and the jug of oil will not run out until the day the LORD makes it rain on the surface of the ground.’”* ¹⁵*She went and did as Elijah told her; there was always enough food for Elijah and for her and her family.* ¹⁶*The jar of flour was never empty and the jug of oil never ran out, just as the LORD had promised through Elijah.*

Is there anything that makes you conscious of God's control over nature? If so, what and why?

What is one way that nature serves God or serves his purposes?

How might God use the worsening climatic conditions in the world today for his purposes?

c) God Has Control over the Nations

God is in control of the nations . . .

Ps 67:4 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] Let foreigners rejoice and celebrate! For you execute justice among the nations, and govern the people living on earth. (Selah)

ISA 14:26–27 [GOD:] *This is the plan I have devised for the whole earth; my hand is ready to strike all the nations.*” [Isaiah:] ²⁷*Indeed, the LORD who commands armies has a plan, and who can possibly frustrate it? His hand is ready to strike, and who can possibly stop it?*

What God determines for the whole world does take place, for God “controls every nation” (CEV) – none can prevent him from implementing his purposes concerning them.

. . . God has been in control of the nations throughout history

ACTS 17:26 *From one human being he created all races on earth and made them live throughout the whole earth. He himself fixed beforehand the exact times and the limits of the places where they would live.* GNT

God appoints times for events affecting the nations

Ps 75:2 God says, *“At the appointed times, I judge fairly.*

God’s judgment spoken of here may well primarily be judgment on the nations (cf. v. 3); it is at least inclusive of this. As such the verse speaks of God choosing the times for his judgments of nations – presumably primarily the times of their downfall.

DAN 11:27–29 The two kings will both plan to do evil. They will sit at the same table and tell lies. But they will not succeed, because *the end must wait until the appointed time.* ²⁸The northern king will return to his country with a lot of wealth. He will be determined to fight against the holy promise. He will take action and return to his own country. ²⁹*“At the appointed time he will again invade the south, but this time will be different from the first.* GW

The kings referred to here are Ptolemy Philometor of Egypt and Antiochus IV Epiphanes, with the events concerned eventuating

around 170–168 B.C. In v. 27, “the end” seems to be speaking of the end of Antiochus’ plans to expand his dominion into Egypt.

God has control over the outcome of conflicts between nations

PROV 21:31 *You can get the horses ready for battle, but it is the LORD who gives the victory.* NCV™

God can thwart the plans of the nations

PS 33:10 *The LORD frustrates the decisions of the nations; he nullifies the plans of the peoples.*

God establishes all ruling authorities

ROM 13:1 Let every person be subject to *the governing authorities. For there is no authority except by God’s appointment, and the authorities that exist have been instituted by God.*

God has control over rulers . . .

PROV 21:1 *The LORD can control a king’s mind as he controls a river; he can direct it as he pleases.* NCV™

. . . and God can use rulers in order to accomplish his purposes

2CHR 36:22–23 In the first year that Cyrus of Persia was emperor, *the LORD made what he had said through the prophet Jeremiah come true. He prompted Cyrus to issue the following command and send it out in writing to be read aloud everywhere in his empire:* ²³“This is the command of Cyrus, Emperor of Persia. *The LORD, the God of Heaven, has made me ruler over the whole world and has given me the responsibility of building a temple for him in Jerusalem in Judah. Now, all of you who are God’s people, go there, and may the LORD your God be with you.*” GNT

To what degree does God impose his control over the nations? What does he do?

How should the teaching in this section influence our perception of world events?

Should Romans 13:1 (cf. *God establishes all ruling authorities*) affect how we respond to bad governing authorities? If so, how?

d) God Has Control over Each Person

God has control over people's hearts and minds

1SAM 10:9A When Saul turned to leave Samuel, *God changed Saul's heart.* NCV™

EX 12:36 *The LORD caused the Egyptians to think well of them, and the Egyptians gave the people everything they asked for. So the Israelites took rich gifts from them.* NCV™

God has control over people's actions . . .

DAN 5:23B [DANIEL, TO KING BELSHAZZAR:] But you have not glorified the *God who has in his control your very breath and all your ways!*

ECCL 9:1A [A WISE TEACHER:] In light of all of this, I committed myself to explain it this way: *the righteous and the wise, along with everything they do, are in the hands of God.* ISV

God has control over (cf. CEV, GNT, NCV) that which is said to be in his "hands". Here this would encompass what the righteous actually do, along with the success and effect of these deeds.

. . . Despite people's plans, their steps are directed by God

PROV 16:9 *A person plans his course, but the LORD directs his steps.*

God controls the good and bad things that happen to people

LAM 3:38 *Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that everything comes – both calamity and blessing?*

ECCL 7:14 *In times of prosperity be joyful, but in times of adversity consider this: God has made one as well as the other, so that no one can discover what the future holds.*

God determines the length of people's lives . . .

JOB 14:5 [JOB, TO GOD:] *Since man's days are determined, the number of his months is under your control; you have set his limit and he cannot pass it.*

Ps 139:16B [DAVID, TO GOD:] *All the days ordained for me were recorded in your scroll before one of them came into existence.*

... and God finishes people's lives

Ps 90:3, 5A [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *At your command we die and turn back to dust, ...⁵You bring our lives to an end just like a dream.* CEV

Note: The life of every person is in God's hands

Job 12:10 *The life of every living creature and the spirit in every human body are in his hands.* GW

To what extent are people's plans subject to God's will?

Is every good and bad thing that happens to us caused by God? What part does God "play" in such things?

How should we respond to the teaching that our lives and what we do are "in the hands of God" (Eccl 9:1a; cf. Job 12:10)?

e) Addendum: God's Early Dealings with Humankind

From the time he created the first people, God has ruled over them, exerting his authority and control when necessary – as evidenced throughout this section.

God's creation of the first people, in an ideal environment

GEN 2:7–10A *Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the earth and blew the breath of life into his nostrils. The man became a living being. ⁸The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east. That's where he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹The LORD God made all the trees grow out of the ground. These trees were nice to look at, and their fruit was good to eat. The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil grew in the middle of the garden. ¹⁰A river flowed from Eden to water the garden.* GW

GEN 2:22–23 *Then the LORD God formed a woman from the rib that he had taken from the man. He brought her to the man. ²³The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She will be named woman because she was taken from man."* GW

The man and the woman are of course Adam and Eve, who also are in view in the following subsection.

Humankind's original sin . . .

GEN 3:2–6 And the woman [Eve] said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ESV

Note that generally Satan is understood to be behind the serpent's action, speaking through the serpent.

... The judgment for sin – including death and expulsion from the Garden of Eden

GEN 3:22–23 Then the LORD God said, “The man has become like one of us, since he knows good and evil. *He must not reach out and take the fruit from the tree of life and eat. Then he would live forever.*” ²³*So the LORD God sent the man out of the Garden of Eden to farm the ground from which the man had been formed.* GW

Verse 22 effectively speaks of the punishment of death (cf. v. 3 ↑), with people no longer able to eat from the tree of life and live forever.

The flood and Noah: Escalated sin and judgment; righteousness and salvation

GEN 6:12–14, 17–19 *God saw the earth, and indeed it was ruined, for all living creatures on the earth were sinful.* ¹³*So God said to Noah, “I have decided that all living creatures must die, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. Now I am about to destroy them and the earth.* ¹⁴*Make for yourself an ark of cypress wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it with pitch inside and out. ...* ¹⁷*I am about to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy from under the sky all the living creatures that have the breath of life in them. Everything that is on the earth will die,* ¹⁸*but I will confirm my covenant with you. You will enter the ark – you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.* ¹⁹*You must bring into the ark two of every kind of living creature from all flesh, male and female, to keep them alive with you.*

GEN 7:1, 23 *The LORD said to Noah, “Go into the ship with your whole family because I have seen that you alone are righteous among the people of today. ...* ²³*Every living creature on the face of the earth was wiped out. Humans, domestic animals, crawling creatures, and birds were wiped off the earth. Only Noah and those with him in the ship were left.* GW

The Tower of Babel: Sinful pride and the dispersion of humankind

GEN 11:1–9 The whole earth had a common language and a common vocabulary. ²When the people moved eastward, they found a plain in

Shinar and settled there. ³Then they said to one another, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” (They had brick instead of stone and tar instead of mortar.) ⁴*Then they said, “Come, let’s build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves. Otherwise we will be scattered across the face of the entire earth.”* ⁵But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the people had started building. ⁶*And the LORD said, “If as one people all sharing a common language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be beyond them. ⁷Come, let’s go down and confuse their language so they won’t be able to understand each other.”* ⁸*So the LORD scattered them from there across the face of the entire earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹That is why its name was called Babel – because there the LORD confused the language of the entire world, and from there the LORD scattered them across the face of the entire earth.*

Verse 4 suggests that human pride was behind the building of this tower, known as the Tower of Babel. With the people’s pride fuelling their aspirations and accomplishments, God would have foreseen the potential for self-reliance and rebellion against him. As such God confused their language (v. 7), so that they did not speak the same language (v. 6). Moreover – in direct contrast to the people’s second objective for the tower (v. 4b) – God scattered them throughout the earth (v. 9b).

Why was there an issue with people knowing good and evil (Gen 3:22)?

What does this section show us about God?

What teaching or lessons in this section are particularly pertinent for us today?

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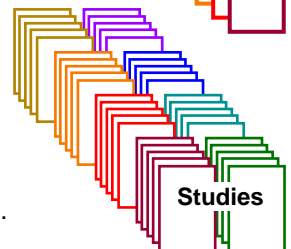
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Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local Christian leaders.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Compass Direct – www.compassdirect.org

This is a Christian news service providing news, reports, interviews and analyses of situations facing persecuted Christians.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It provides Bibles and other Christian materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/; www.ea.org.au/ea-family/Religious-Liberty.aspx

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org
Receive weekly updates by sending a blank email to join-rlpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

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