

# Sovereignty & Comfort

[Genesis 45:1-8](#)



**T**ruth Matters! That is the name of our radio broadcast, which, by the way, is now being broadcast live on the Internet at 10:00AM Monday thru Friday at [www.wwip.org](http://www.wwip.org). We named the radio broadcast that, because it is a strong conviction of ours—truth really does matter. And no more so than when it comes to God. It is imperative that what we believe about God is true. What we believe about God— theology proper—affects how we live. Theology is very practical, it touches our lives every day; worry, anxiety, fear, and depression can all be the result of faulty theology. A proper view of God is what strengthens us in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances.

The solution to our fear and anxiety is not a psychologist, counselor, or self-help book. Our solution is theology proper—a study of God. We must come to know the God of the Bible. Martin Luther said to Erasmus, “*Your thoughts of God are too human.*” I think that most of us fall into this same category; our thoughts of God are too human. A.W. Pink said, “*The God of modern religious thought no more resembles the supreme sovereign of the Bible than does the dim flickering of a candle resemble the glory of the noonday sun.*”



Only as we come to know the God of the Bible will we know what it is that He expects from us. Does He expect anything? I would have to say that most Christians live as if God expects nothing from them. What does God want from us? We could name a lot of things, but what is number one? What does God want from us more than anything else? It is a one word answer—faith. He wants us to trust Him:

***And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6 NASB)***

The God who created us wants us to trust Him. The writer of Hebrews lays down an axiomatic truth. He uses the aorist tense in the infinitive “*to please.*” The statement is universal in its application, and timeless. The idea is: without faith it is impossible to please Him at all.

It is not belief in the existence of “a god” that is meant, but in the existence of “the God” of the Bible. The God of the Bible is Holy, Just, Good, Loving, Wrathful, Merciful, and He is Sovereign. In order to live by faith, we must believe that God is who He says He is.

I think that it should be obvious that we can’t live by faith unless we understand what faith is. Do you know what faith is? If someone asked you, “What is faith?” could you explain it to them? I would dare say that most of the people involved in churchanity could not give you a Biblical definition of faith.

Biblically defined, **FAITH IS: UNDERSTANDING AND ASSENT TO A PROPOSITION.** If you were to ask me, “Where is my money?” and I said to you, “The check is in the mail,” you are either going to believe me, which is faith, you are trusting in what I said, or you are not. Notice what the Bible says about Abraham:

***In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE." (Romans 4:18 NASB)***

God made a promise to Abraham; He promised him children. He promised him that he would be the father of a great nation. Now, Abraham was about 100 years old, and his wife Sarah was 90, and she was barren. Look at Abraham's response to the promise:

*And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; (Romans 4:19 NASB)*

Notice that Abraham's faith was not weak. The Greek word used here for "contemplated" is *katanoeo* [katanoew]. It means: "to consider attentively, fix one's eyes or mind upon." The four oldest manuscripts of the New Testament do not have the negative. Abraham **did consider** his own body and Sarah's dead womb. The Scriptures verify this:

*Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (Genesis 17:17 NASB)*

Abraham faced the facts; he didn't deny them. He looked at the facts as they were, at their very worst, but having looked at them, he believed the promise of God. He believed God in the face of all opposition. Faith does not close its eyes to reality. He knew physically that it was impossible for him and Sarah to bear children, but he believed God's promise:

*yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,<sup>21</sup> and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. (Romans 4:20-21 NASB)*

We see from verse 21 that **faith is believing a promise**; it is understanding and assent to a proposition. You can't trust God for what He never promised. Abraham believed what God told him; that is faith. No matter what the subject, whether it be God or Botany, the psychology or linguistics of belief is identical in all cases. Believing that 2+2=4 is Arithmetic. Believing that asparagus belongs to the lily family is Botany. Botany is not Mathematics, but the psychology or linguistics of believing is identical. Believing is always thinking a proposition is true.

The difference between various beliefs lies in the **objects** or **propositions** believed, not in the nature of belief. Faith must begin with knowledge; you can't believe what you don't know or understand. I understand the teaching of evolution, but I do not assent to it. **Belief is the act of assenting to something understood.** But understanding alone is not belief in what is understood. I understand the theory of evolution, but I do not believe it.

The Christian life starts with an act of faith. We believe that Christ will give us eternal life if we trust in Him alone for our redemption:

*"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NASB)*

That is a promise: When I believe in Christ, I am given everlasting life. When I come to the living God as a guilty sinner, trusting in Jesus Christ and Him alone to do for me what I cannot do for myself, I am engaged in an act of faith. I've never seen God. I've never seen this place called heaven. I've never seen Jesus Christ. But by faith, those things which I cannot see become realities to me. They take on substance for me. And by faith, I gain assurance and conviction about things that my eyes cannot behold. That is what faith is all about. But trusting God for my eternal salvation is only the beginning. It is the start of a journey that cannot be traveled successfully in any other way but by faith. Thousands of believers have trusted Christ for their salvation but are not living in faith, trusting God in each and every area of their lives.

Everyday and in every way we should be trusting God in our daily lives. But are we? Do we really trust God? When you are hurting and your life seems to be coming apart at the seams, do you trust God? When we fail to trust God, we doubt His sovereignty and question His goodness. God views our distrust as seriously as He views our

disobedience. When the children of Israel were hungry, they spoke against God:

*Then they spoke against God; They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?"<sup>20</sup> "Behold, He struck the rock, so that waters gushed out, And streams were overflowing; Can He give bread also? Will He provide meat for His people?"<sup>21</sup> Therefore the LORD heard and was full of wrath, And a fire was kindled against Jacob, And anger also mounted against Israel; (Psalms 78:19-21 NASB)*

Why was it that God was so angry with them?

*Because they did not believe in God, And did not trust in His salvation. (Psalms 78:22 NASB)*

In order to trust God, we must always view all of our circumstances through the eyes of faith. Faith pleases God.

Your faith in God is the bottom line in your ability to deal with difficulty—let's just say with life, because life is difficult. A knowledge of God is essential in the matter of trust.

The Bible is the revelation of God, so that in knowing Scripture, we come to know God. And in knowing God, we come to trust in Him. It's hard to trust someone that you really don't know. I believe that the first and foremost thing we must know about God is that He is **sovereign**. But most of the church today denies the absolute sovereignty of God. Christians speak of accidents, or of things just happening by chance.

One of the major problems in the church today in the matter of spiritual instability is the wide acceptance of [Arminian](#) theology. Calvinism and Arminianism are at opposite ends of the theological spectrum. Traditional Calvinism, or Reformed theology, says *"God is sovereign over everything!"* To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in heaven and on earth, so that **none** can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will.

*But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. (Psalms 115:3 NASB)*

Can you do whatever you please? No, of course not. You can't do whatever you please, because too many things are out of your control. But God can do whatever He pleases, because He controls all things.

The Bible clearly teaches that **God is sovereign**:

*"Thine, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O LORD, and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all. <sup>12</sup> "Both riches and honor come from Thee, and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone. <sup>13</sup> "Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name. (1 Chronicles 29:11-13 NASB)*

God did not simply create the world and then walk away. He constantly sustains that which He created. Seventeenth-century deism constructed a god who created a universe and then walked away to leave it running according to its natural laws and man's devices. Many Christians are practical deists. They act as if God has left the world to run on its own.

*"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup> Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; <sup>11</sup> Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it. (Isaiah 46:9-11 NASB)*

To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so

that no one can defeat His counsels, thwart His purposes, or resist His will. The sovereignty of God is absolute, irresistible, infinite. God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases; whatever takes place in time is but the outworking of that which He decreed in eternity.

One commentator writes, *“The Bible teaches that God is all-powerful. And He has complete authority over everything that happens. But we must never forget that He also chose to give us free will. And He does not use His power to overrule our freedom to choose the direction we go in life.”*

Like this commentator, many of us are prepared to grant God's sovereignty over nature and impersonal circumstances, such as a mechanical failure in an airplane. After all, nature does not have a will of its own. God is free to operate through His physical laws as He pleases. But the concept of divine sovereignty over people can seem to destroy the free will of humans and make them no more than puppets on God's stage. Yet, the Bible repeatedly affirms God's sovereignty over everything, including people. It speaks of God making the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the Israelites:

*Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; <sup>36</sup> and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. (Exodus 12:35-36 NASB)*

The Bible tells us of God moving the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, to fulfill His word:

*Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, (Ezra 1:1 NASB)*

The Bible also tells us of God causing King Nebuchadnezzar's official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel:

*Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials, (Daniel 1:9 NASB)*

One of the strongest such assertions is in:

*The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes. (Proverbs 21:1 NASB)*

The general truth of God's sovereignty over the hearts of all people is taught by the strongest illustration—His uncontrollable sway upon the most absolute of all wills—the *“king's heart.”*

In our day of limited monarchies and figurehead royalty, it may be difficult to appreciate fully the force of this statement. But in Solomon's time, the king was an absolute monarch. There was no legislature to pass laws he did not like; no Supreme Court to restrain his actions. The king's word was the last word. His authority over his realm was unconditional and unrestrained.

Yet, this verse teaches that God controls the heart of the most powerful monarch on earth as easily as the farmer directs the flow of water in his irrigation canals. The argument, then, is from the greater to the lesser—if God controls the king's heart, surely he controls everyone else's. All must move before His sovereign influence.

All of us at times find ourselves and our future, immediate or long range, in the hands of others. Their decisions can determine the success or failure of our plans. A government official can deny a visa to enter a country. A professor can determine the academic success of a graduate student. A supervisor can block a career.

In reality, though, we are not at their mercy, because God sovereignly rules over those decisions and actions. God moves people to do His will and restrains people from accomplishing the evil they would normally carry out. A striking illustration of this is found in what appears to be an almost passing comment:

***"Three times a year all your males are to appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. <sup>24</sup> "For I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your borders, and no man shall covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the LORD your God. (Exodus 34:23-24 NASB)***

Let's apply this passage in our present setting. What God commanded Israel to do was equivalent to commanding our nation to shut down all its commerce, close all its educational institutions, furlough all its military personnel simultaneously, and gather all those people into one giant Christian assembly three times a year. Think of how vulnerable our nation would be during those occasions.

Yet, that is what God commanded Israel to do. But along with the command, He promised them that no one would even covet their land during those times, let alone invade. God could make that promise because in His sovereignty, He had the power to restrain people from even desiring to harm them. God is sovereign over not only our actions, He is sovereign even over our desires.

If we are going to trust God, we must understand that He is in control of every aspect of our lives. The doctrine of God's sovereignty clearly affirms that we can trust Him:

***Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it? <sup>38</sup> Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth? (Lamentations 3:37-38 NASB)***

No one can act outside of God's sovereign will or against it. Rather than being offended by the Bible's assertion of God's sovereignty in both good and ill, believers should be comforted by it. What ever it is that we are going through, we may be sure of two things:

1. God is controlling it.
2. If you are His child by faith in Jesus Christ, He loves you.

How comforting is it that the God who loves us controls every event in time. We need to learn to trust God even when we don't understand, because faith pleases God. Do you know Him well enough to trust Him no matter how painful or fearful a situation may be?

God controls everything that happens, everything! If a business man has a total financial collapse—this is an act of God. If a loving Christian parent loses a child through sickness or murder—this is an act of God. Now I know that when I say that, most people who call themselves Bible believers have a fit. The response of most would be, "You are crazy, God is good, God is loving, God is kind, He would never do that." Really, is that what the Scriptures say? Notice what Job says:

***And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21 NASB)***

Job was a real man, not a mythological figure. He is mentioned by Ezekiel, and he is classified as one of the three great men of the *Tanakh*, along with Noah and Daniel. He is mentioned also by James, who refers to Job's patience and steadfast endurance. He was a contemporary of Abraham, most likely, so this book goes back to the very beginnings of Biblical history.

After a total financial collapse and the death of his ten children, Job says, "***The Lord has taken away.***" Is that what the Scripture says? Yes, it is. Look it up in any translation; they all say the same thing. Job is saying, "God did this! God destroyed me financially, and He killed all my children." Most Christians today would go crazy over this and

say that Job is demon possessed. They would say that Job is blaspheming. But they are the ones who are blaspheming, because the Scriptures say that Job was worshipping:

***Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. (Job 1:20 NASB)***

Job is not angry and attacking God, he is worshipping when he says, ***“The Lord has taken away.”*** Job not only recognizes God’s sovereignty, he rejoiced in it. Job trusted God because he knew God. He knew that God was sovereign, and in this he rejoiced.

Just in case you still think that Job is wrong in saying that God did this, the inspired writer of the book makes a comment to avoid a misunderstanding. Lest anyone say that Job should not have attributed Satan's work to God, he writes:

***Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God. (Job 1:22 NASB)***

Does this fit your theology? God killing and destroying? If not, you had better work on making some changes in your theology, because God is not going to change.

Job's rock of refuge and hope when everything else seemed to be crumbling was the absolute sovereignty of God. Most of our grief and pain does not come as a clear punishment for sins. Most of it comes out of nowhere and baffles our sense of justice.

That's why the book of Job is so relevant. Job's suffering seems to come out of nowhere and have no connection to his character. His story is recorded for us so that we will have some help in living through these calamities.

In the midst of life’s worst circumstances, Job worships:

***Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped [hx#]. (Job 1:20 NASB)***

When you hear the word "**worship**," [shachah] what picture comes to mind? Do you think of a service with instruments, songs and hymns, and, of course, preaching? That can be worship. The word “worship” means: ***“Honor paid to a superior being.”*** It means: ***“To give honor, homage, respect, adoration, praise, and glory to God.”***

The Hebrew word for worship is a powerful one. It describes the physical act of actually prostrating yourself on the floor before a Sovereign; someone who has complete control over you.

I think that a simple and working definition of worship is: ***“Aligning ourselves with God’s will, both written and providential.”*** Worship is not a spiritual "warm fuzzy" on Sunday morning. It is God’s people actively responding to Him.

Recognizing God’s sovereign rights (***The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away***), Job praised the Lord. It is truly remarkable that Job followed adversity with adoration and woe with worship. He could do this because he knew his God. He knew that God was sovereign, and he trusted Him and praised Him.

Many years ago a military officer and his wife were aboard a ship that was caught in a raging ocean storm. Seeing the frantic look in her eyes, the man tried unsuccessfully to alleviate her fears. Suddenly she grasped his sleeve and cried, "How can you be so calm?" He stepped back a few feet and drew his sword. Pointing it at her heart, he said, "Are you afraid of this?" Without hesitation she answered, "Of course not!" "Why not?" he inquired. "Because it's in your hand, and you love me too much to hurt me." To this he replied, "I know the One who holds the winds and the waters in the hollow of His hand, and He will surely care for us!" The officer was not disturbed because he had

put his trust in the sovereign Lord.

As we grow in our faith, we will learn to trust God in the worst of circumstances, understanding that all occasions of pain and sorrow are under His absolute control. Faith has the confidence that our suffering is under the control of an all-powerful and all-loving God; our suffering has meaning and purpose in God's eternal plan, and He brings into our lives only that which is for His glory and our good.

Job knew and trusted in God, which allowed him to worship in the worst of circumstances. Joseph also understood the sovereignty of God and thus trusted Him through the worst of circumstances. [Genesis 37](#) tells us that when Joseph was 17, his brothers hated him and wanted to kill him, but instead of killing him, they sold him as a slave to Ishmaelites. That sure would cause anxiety and fear in most people. How do you think you would feel if it happened to you? Talk about rejection!

[Genesis 39](#) tells us that Joseph is sold as a slave to [Potiphar](#), who was an Egyptian. As he was working for Potiphar, Potiphar's wife tried to get Joseph to sin by committing adultery with her. Joseph did what was right, he would not sin against his God, so he literally ran away from her. So Potiphar's scorned wife had him put in prison, because he wouldn't go along with her plan. Joseph did what was right, he would not sin, and because of this, he was put in prison. How would that make you feel?

After thirteen years of living as a slave, Joseph interprets a dream for Pharaoh, and because of this, Pharaoh promotes Joseph to the number two man in the most powerful nation on earth at that time. Because of his position in Egypt, he is able to take care of the very brothers, who hated him and sold him into slavery, during a severe famine.

Joseph had no bitterness or unforgiveness toward his brothers, because he knew that God had sovereignly ordered the events of his life. In other words, God's sovereignty was very practical for Joseph. Notice what Joseph told his brothers:

***"And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. (Genesis 45:5 NASB)***

Joseph saw the hatred of his brothers as God's sovereign hand:

***"And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. (Genesis 45:7 NASB)***

Joseph saw God as the one who put him in slavery for thirteen years:

***"Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. (Genesis 45:8 NASB)***

Three times he stresses this idea, "God sent me here." Joseph had the divine viewpoint; he saw things from God's perspective. He saw his brothers as instruments in God's providence to get him into Egypt. It was his brothers who sold him into slavery, but Joseph says, ***"It was not you who sent me here, but God."*** Joseph's strength and comfort in adversity came from his knowledge of God. He trusted in his sovereign God.

Many years later, Joseph's father died, and his brothers were afraid that Joseph would try to get revenge on them for selling him as a slave. Look with me at Genesis, chapter 50 to see Joseph's response to them:

***When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph should bear a grudge against us and pay us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!"<sup>16</sup> So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying,<sup>17</sup> 'Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you***

*wrong." "And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. <sup>18</sup> Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? <sup>20</sup> "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. (Genesis 50:15-20 NASB)*

Joseph tells his brothers that he is not in the place of God, meaning that he would not take vengeance against them. Joseph knew that vengeance belongs to the Lord. Notice very carefully what he tells his brothers in verse 20, ***“You meant evil against me.”*** He knew that, and yet he had no anger or bitterness against them because he knew that *“God meant it for good.”* Because of all that happened, he was in a place to save the lives of all of his family. For thirteen years, things didn’t seem too good to Joseph, but in the midst of his suffering, he trusted God. Thirteen years is a long time to sit in prison for thirteen years, Joseph had no idea why his brothers hated him. For thirteen years, Joseph trusted his God when he couldn’t see any light at the end of the tunnel. He knew God was sovereign, he knew God controlled all things so he rested in Him.

Believer, there is great comfort in Theology proper for our daily lives. The hurts in your life are controlled by God for your good. The way that you handle problems, temptations, trials, and difficulties is a reflection of your view of God. If you know God, if you know that He is omnipresent, omniscience, all powerful; and if you understand that He loves you, why would you ever worry? He’s Sovereign, and He’s working everything out for your good and His glory. Everything that happens is for His eternal purpose:

***And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28 NASB)***

Believer, no matter what happens to you, God meant it for good, trust Him.

This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on January 13, 2008. Media #398.



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