

How Sovereign is God?

William H. Gross, www.onthewing.org April 2023

God says, 'I form the light **and** create darkness, I make peace **and** create calamity; I, the LORD, do **all** these *things*.' (Isa 45:7) And yet, when we experience pain, calamity, and evil, we are tempted to think, "My loving God would never do such a thing to me." That begs the question, then, *who would?* Is there another god that is sovereign over a domain of evil, who is independent of God's control? That's dualism, heresy. *Let God be God.*

God's sovereignty is absolute and all-encompassing. Whatever He wills, He ordains; and whatever He ordains will be done. It is impossible to resist His will, or to avoid the ends that He has decreed. Don't confuse the ultimate *cause* of all things (God), with the intermediate *means* of accomplishing them. God *allows* evil and sin. That doesn't make God evil or sinful. It doesn't diminish His perfect holiness and justice, nor deny His love for His people. *God is absolutely sovereign; and we are absolutely responsible.* Both are true at the same time.

Abraham interceded with God, on Lot's behalf, not to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah:

Gen 18:25 "Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (he is called "righteous Lot" in 2Pet 2.7)

But there's a difference between what is *right* and *just* in God's sight, and what is desirable from our own perspective. Below are God's claims about Himself — who He is and what He does. *Notice there is no mention of an intermediate or secondary cause. We are commanded to fear **God**, not evil men.* (Mat 10.28). Don't blame Satan, fate, bad luck, or a fallen world.

Deu 28.28; The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart.

Deu 28.48; Therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you.

Deu 28.65; And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul.

Deu 32.39; Now see that I, *even I, am* He, And *there is* no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; Nor *is there any* who can deliver from My hand.

Exo 4.11; So the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? *Have* not I, the LORD?"

Jos 23.15; Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the LORD your God promised you, so the LORD will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

1Sam 2.6-7; The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. ⁷ The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up.

2Chr 7.13; When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people...

Job 2.6-7, 10; And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life." ⁷ So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head... [*and Job responded*], ¹⁰ Shall we indeed accept good from God,

and shall we not accept adversity?" (lit., "If the good was received from the Lord's hand, are we not to endure all things that come to pass from it?" LXX).

Pro 16.4; The LORD has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.

Isa 19.22; And the LORD will strike Egypt, He will strike **and** heal *it*;

Isa 54.16; Behold, I have created the blacksmith Who blows the coals in the fire, Who brings forth an instrument for his work; **And** I have created the spoiler to destroy.

Jer 33.5-6; I will slay in My anger and My fury, all for whose wickedness I have hidden My face from this city. ⁶ Behold, I will bring it health and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth.

Lam 1.5; Her adversaries have become the master, Her enemies prosper; For the LORD has afflicted her Because of the multitude of her transgressions. Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy.

Lam 1.12; Behold and see If there is any sorrow like my sorrow, Which has been brought on me, Which the LORD has inflicted In the day of His fierce anger.

Lam 3.38; *Is it* not from the mouth of the Most High That woe and well-being proceed?

Eze 17.24; And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the LORD, have spoken and have done *it*.

Amo 3.6; If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done *it*?

Amo 4.6; "I brought hunger to every city and famine to every town. But still you would not return to me," says the LORD. (NLT)

Mic 1.12; For the inhabitant of Maroth pined for good, But disaster came down from the LORD To the gate of Jerusalem.

Hag 2.17; "I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not *turn* to Me," says the LORD.

Mat 4.1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

1Pet 4.19; Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God, commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

All these things, even the tempting of Christ by the devil, are "according to the will of God." How then do we reconcile God's holiness, justice, goodness, and love, with the corruption, injustice, evil, and hatred that we see? Is God the author of evil? Does He **cause** it? Did He **cause** Adam to fall? "Why does He blame us, for who can resist His will?" (Rom 9.19) Like Adam, we would deny our responsibility, and blame God instead (Gen 3.12).

To explain this paradox, reformed theologians say that God has **two wills**, variously described as efficient (direct or causative) and permissive (indirect or passive), sovereign and moral, secret and revealed, decretive and preceptive. These aren't just logical or theological deductions to avoid impugning the character of God. They are as prevalent in Scripture as the Trinity, or the dual nature of Christ. God declares, without qualification, "I, the LORD, do **all** these *things*. I am the LORD, and **there is no other**." So we must admit that, whatever it is, "*This too is from God*. How then shall I respond in a way that honors and glorifies His holy name?" Otherwise we will confess with Job, "I uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." (Job 42.3)