

HE DOES WHAT HE WILLS

Bob Faulkner

DEDICATION:

TO ALL MY ARMINIAN FRIENDS...
(I.E., JUST ABOUT EVERYONE I KNOW)

...SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

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1. INTRODUCTION

Meet an Arminian.

Not by choice or even knowledge, mind you, but an Arminian nonetheless.

So what's an Arminian anyway? A follower, whether or not he knows it, of Jacob Arminius, late 16th century theologian.

The doctrines then being preached by John Calvin and most other reformers that involved predestination and such, were being challenged. They didn't sound fair. Somehow it couldn't all be true. God needed some explaining. Calvin must be a false teacher, etc. etc.

I mean, if God could and did convince some to come to Him, why not all? (Why not universalism?)

In England, the ideas of Calvin produced not only other reformers, but the solidness of the Puritans. Later as the fire and zeal went out and other ideas were allowed in, Presbyterianism was established. Arminian thinking came in too, bringing the church there and elsewhere half-way to Universalism. Finally, Universalists took the baton and so much of the past was decimated.

Similar things had happened during the days of Augustine well over 1000 years before. Augustine championed what today is known as Calvinism but was, earlier than Augustine, called Pauline. Against him came Pelagius, who taught that man had a lot to do with saving himself, a teaching soundly condemned in later councils.

Arminius too was condemned, by the Calvinists, though his way seemed to fit in well with Roman Catholic teaching.

In later years there would be and are great men of God on both sides of the issue. Wesley would popularize Arminianism, as would Moody and Graham later. The great bulk of modern evangelical thought is decidedly Arminian.

But, on the side of Sovereignty, predestination, and similar doctrines were Luther, Calvin, Huss, Ridley, Cranmer, the early church of England, the Waldensians, the original Baptists, the original Presbyterians, Fox, Bunyan, Edwards, Toplady, Whitefield, Wycliffe, the Puritans, Spurgeon, and men of this age such as MacArthur, Sproul, and Chicago's Erwin Lutzer.

So I landed on the Arminian side, spouting off free-will verses and admitting that there surely were some troublesome passages, but that they surely could not be saying what Calvin said they said. Nearly every Christian in my nation espouses Arminius' views without knowing it. I assumed that free will was God's "norm" and that those "difficult" passages were just, well, difficult. I mean, even Peter had a problem with Paul, right? And who has known the mind of the Lord? There are just a lot of things we'll not know until Jesus comes. That's the standard line, anyway. Keeps people from digging a whole lot farther than they have already dug.

Recently, within the last few years, I could stand it no more, I declared that both sides are right. I thought I had heard somehow that Spurgeon believed that. Anything good enough for Spurgeon, it seemed, well you know...

Now I find that Spurgeon drank deeply at the Puritan springs, that he was immersed in what is called Calvinism, though he refused to call it that. He called it Bible.

That wasn't the reason I had to keep thinking this thing through, but it didn't hurt the cause any.

When I began to go deeper, I made an awful discovery. It wasn't just Paul who wrote "hard sayings." I found a whole stack of comments from John. Dear old apostle-of-love John seemed to be firmly in agreement with John Calvin! Or was it the other way around?

It got worse. I began collecting verses, even sweeping the entire New Testament. To my amazement, virtually every book recorded passages that sounded very "Reformed" and "Puritan." I was about to share my New Testament findings, when the Old Testament fell apart too. Or rather, came together! In nearly unanimous voice, the Spirit-filled writers of Holy Writ declared that God does what He pleases, that what He pleases is good, and that it doesn't really matter how I feel about it. And no theologian of whom I am aware was consulted in the Heavenly Board Room about these doctrines.

The verses can all be called Calvinism if we please, but it's probably not proper to attribute to a mere mortal the thought processes of Almighty God.

I do not swear by Calvin or Luther or Augustine. Especially Augustine (sorry). Have you ever read all that Augustine believed and taught? No, please, no human source for me. But these men were tied to the origins in many ways. They were not afraid to say the difficult unpopular things. Those who assailed them on the basis of their own preferences and prejudices did so to their own hurt, and the damaging of the church of God. Election still stands. God's choices are God's choices.

When I make wonderful discoveries like this, I am compelled to pass them on, to put all the fragments of my thinking together and share the treasure with whomever will listen.

It was so when I first discovered Babylon. Mystery, Babylon. Then, I was overwhelmed with the prophecies of the end times. These teachings are indelibly marked on my soul. The gifts of the Spirit likewise, and the need to seek God with all of our heart to have an experiential religion, not only one of the brain, that too I researched and put into book form.

Now this. I find it difficult to imagine which pigeon-hole people will arrange for me to be cast into now.

Anyway, I said you should meet an Arminian. I guess you've figured out by now that true Arminians will have a bit of trouble with me. But though I change beliefs, my salvation is still intact. The thief on the cross had no leanings toward Calvin or Arminius. He was in Paradise that very day and is now. Not that doctrine is not important. It simply is not defining of one's position in Christ.

Romanists who have not yet come out of Rome but who have believed in and trusted Christ will also be there in Paradise along with a whole host of other folks we were not expecting to see.

Nevertheless, I rejoice in what I have found. Chosen of the Lord. I love to say it now. Well, we all know that *Jesus* is chosen. That does not seem to bother anyone. We know He deliberately chose each of the twelve. Is that a problem? I think not. Why do we stop here?

We would all call ourselves "a chosen generation" because Peter did. But in all these "choosings" we cling to the possibility/probability that each choice God made had to do with *human meriting*. We believed. We submitted to baptism. We repented. We, we, we (Pardon my French).

The only correction that Calvin (whom I have almost never read, by the way) and the rest would have us make, ultimately, is to change the pronoun to He, He, He. It's all about Jesus, the Father, the Spirit. All the glory. All the work. All the meriting.

My challenge to all readers is the same as Arthur Pink (have you read him?) to his, Let God be what He is. Release Him from your mould. Read the Scriptures as they really are. It is frightening, but worth the shock.

You may as well know that on whatever side of this struggle you land there are going to be Christians, maybe even real ones, who will put you on the outside of their circle. Best not to worry about circles any more. I had to stop that game when I first decided that the gifts of the Spirit are available today. It's happened several times since. And it's okay. Run *your* race, not your brother's. Be free to experience all that God has for you. It's a true adventure.

I am still running into troublesome verses, though now they are on the "Arminian" side. Some are just undecipherable, and the great scholars still don't know what to do with them. Best to do nothing, I suppose. I mean, what did Paul really mean when he said that people are "baptized for the dead" ? Are we sure we know the meaning of the unpardonable sin?

Other problem verses threaten to upset our status quo. Have you figured out what it means to worship "in Spirit and truth" and why the Scriptures admonish us not to keep "tongues" on ice, and to encourage all to prophesy?

Not like that in my church, I hear you say.

Still others challenge our whole way of thinking about our salvation and that of others. There is quite a collection of these verses in my Bible. I imagine they are in yours too. I have learned not only to "wince" at the appropriate places, but to allow that wincing to become so habitual as to form a callous on my wince-maker.

But God in His infinite patience has run these verses by me again. And again. And finally they are coming into focus.

I remember how I had heard the simple Gospel message itself so many times as a young person. But one night I really heard it. Tears, genuine, from the depth of my innards, flowed for many minutes, followed by a hilarious joy that let me know it was all real and wonderful.

But now I learn, through that same long-term process, that my salvation did not begin on that night at all. It was a thought in the heart of the Creator long before there was even an Adam and Eve, and a Garden for them to inhabit. "Saved from the foundations of the Earth." Nice ring to it. A ring of truth.

Let me share with you, from nearly every book of the Bible, the rest of that clarion ringing I am hearing lately. Many of the "greats" of Christian history have heard this joyful sound. Great theologians, great preachers. I will quote few of them. Every one of them made mistakes somewhere in their theology. No mere man is to be the bedrock of what we believe.

Let me give you the Holy Spirit's words through the Holy Spirit's men. Those who have read my other books know that this is my standard way. Track a truth through the words of Scripture until there can be no other conclusion but the one the text screams out.

The questions before us : What does God want us to know about His part vs. our part in the salvation of His people? Were we as a group known to God? Did He make an unalterable plan for those whom He foreknew? What does it mean to be "chosen" or "elected" ? Is this merely an intellectual argument or does it make a difference to believe in a Sovereign God?

You will not find an outline whereby each of these questions are answered one at a time in this book. But little by little, verse after verse, light will dawn. The subject will be covered. You may have to take it farther yourself, but I believe this will be a good start. Remember not to lean on your own understanding of life. That never works. Let God speak, and keep in mind the basic principles:

- God does what He wants. His ways are beyond ours and we need not like or agree with them. His will *will* be done, not ours.
- He chose us. Elected us. Predestinated us. He called us. Justified us. Sanctified us. Will glorify us.
- He caused us to come to Him.
- We are eternally secure in that call.
- He allows others to perish because of their own choices.

- He died for us and only us.

The few problems this system of belief (and we all have one) causes in some passages cannot be compared to the flood of Scriptures that broadcast it.

2. SOME SERIOUS PROBLEMS and QUESTIONS

Why don't we do the hard part first, and then end with the pure statements of Scripture. Here are the questions that come immediately. And do I have all the answers? Please!

1. Why did God make a platypus?

So you think I'm being facetious? That I'm taking too lightly these ultra-serious matters? No, don't judge me that way. I imagine that the person who can answer this question about platypuses, (or is it platypi?) properly is well on the way to understanding the heart of God.

Well, you've had time to think about it. Was this particular creation made because he knew that one day it would confound evolutionists?

Not a bad guess. But more to the point of our current discussion, my speculative answer is: Because He could. Because He wanted to. Because of purposes that I don't need to know.

Don't mean to cut you off or be cold here, but the fact is, there will be quite a few times in the coming discussions when we will throw up our hands and say just this.

Remember that, next time you see a platypus.

2. What about everyone's favorite verse, John 3:16?

You may be surprised to know that the sentiments of this verse are not found all that often in the Scriptures. We have assumed that when Jesus said to Nicodemus that His Father loved the world, He meant every single member of the human race, past, present, future.

But by the time Jesus spoke these words, millions of people had already gone to their eternal destiny, justly, the abode of the damned, for having defied this God.

So not everyone.

The vast majority of the inhabited world of that time did not know of the coming of a Messiah who would take away sin. Huge amounts of people in every generation since Christ and even today do not have the opportunity of hearing of a Saviour. Though one day this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world, surely this is not the case today.

Have we considered this fact?

Is it not more sensible to assume that Jesus did not mean everyone here? Then whom?

Nicodemus was a Jew. When these words were spoken to him by another Jew, One Who claimed to be a teacher in Israel, it must have sounded strange. Since when is the God of Israel in love with an entire planet?

Nevertheless, so it was. Not only at the Day of Pentecost, (Acts 2) but in the Last Day (Revelation 5:8-10), every nation, tribe and people are represented in the Kingdom of God.

God so loved the world because He had chosen an uncountable (to us, not to Him!) number of Gentiles from it, a sweet smelling savour. Here He would live amongst His people forever.

God sent Jesus into the world to save the world, to set it straight, to make atonement for His friends, the ones who would believe in Him.

Isn't that what the text says?

In verses 14-15, we find that Jesus is going to be crucified, that believers will be saved. In 16, God loved the world so much that He gave Jesus to die, and *believers* will be saved. In 17-18, we learn that He is not sent to the world to condemn it: it was already condemned! He was sent to save believers (called elsewhere, the elect).

The Father gave Jesus that those who believe will be saved. Then the "world", the whole world, will be saved too, *when all the wicked are removed*.

Let me ask, where else does it say that God loved the whole world?

I can help you with that: John, the writer of the Gospel, also wrote a letter. His message has not changed in those 60 plus years since Jesus has gone. In I John 4:9, John says again: In this the love of God was manifested *toward us*, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, *that we might live through Him*.

Not every member of the human race is suggested here, but every member of the elect race, the peculiar chosen people of God...

God loved the world (Greek "cosmos") . Did he love it in the sense that he wanted to make it right? He told us, also through John, *not to love the cosmos* but to love the brothers.

Creation is awaiting the finished work of God's love on the cosmos. It's not exactly lovable now, but is the source of much of our grief and temptation. John emphasizes in several other places that the "world" is enemy territory, as in I John 5:19:

"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. " Now, while we were yet

sinner in this system, Christ died for us. He chose His own out of the world, John 15:19, and 17:6,9. But nowhere is it stated that Jesus died for everyone in the entire cosmos.

To be consistent, we would also have to look at I John 2:2 in the same way. "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the *sins of the whole world*." This salvation is international. Just a couple chapters later, John interprets himself (4:10): "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved *us*, and gave His Son to be the *propitiation for our sins*."

And John 1:29, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." One day there will be no sin in the world. And it will be because of Jesus. First He will give His life for His people, then he will come back in judgment on all unbelief. In these two steps, sins will be dealt a fatal blow.

So this is where theologians like Calvin and others have discovered the idea of "limited atonement." We all believe that Jesus' sacrifice will only *eventually* save those who believe. All that the "limited atonement" folks have done is take the "eventually" out. For them, Jesus' blood was shed for you and me, not for those who defy the living God.

3. That leads to yet another question.

Did Jesus pay for Judas' sin? If so, why is Judas now paying for it? Or anyone in Hell right now...

Atonement is payment for sin. If sins are paid for, then all get into Heaven free. This is universalism, and it is why the Reformers were so strongly against it.

True, Arminians say that everyone is "potentially" saved. But the Scriptural support for such a position is lacking in comparison to the verses that tend the other way.

4. Is John 3:16 the only event in Jesus' life where He seemed to be all-inclusive in His invitation and statement?

This is actually more difficult than the previous question. I want to be as honest as possible and say that there are some situations of Jesus' life that still cause me thought in this regard.

For example, His blanket forgiveness of those who crucified Him. Had God chosen them?

Then there is His unique love for the one we call the rich young ruler. Was he in fact an elect believer who came back to Jesus later? Things like that happen, you know. Consider John Mark's turn-around in Acts 15.

And what about His reputation as "friend of publicans and sinners"?

Those who object on the basis of the fact that Jesus had an elect in mind may be forced into the position of saying that Jesus' knowledge while here was limited. Did He not seem to be a bit surprised when it was revealed to Him that Judas was to be the traitor? Does it not seem more likely that He would not have chosen a traitor on purpose, but rather chose whom the Father had chosen, without knowing all the details until it was necessary to know them?

This concept would explain all His dealings with men who would one day be lost forever. It is also an explanation and model for our own dealings with mankind. We have no clue

who is and who is not chosen of God. Therefore we freely evangelize all. God takes care of the rest. We are looking for those whom God has called, but we must not be selective in our search.

5. Are you still there? Is this too much? Try this one. Maybe you should pray first:

Does the Bible say that God loves everyone? I'm not talking about John 3:16, just generally. Is it your conception that God loves all equally?

When did He start loving the world? At creation, when He said that all was good? Genesis one?

Then why, just a few chapters later, is all destroyed? Why did He change His mind? Did He love them as they were being destroyed? Drowning? Or did he only love His own, Noah, and the family, and the ones who would come from them?

But the world is slated for destruction again. Does God love this unregenerate part of the world that has defied His every move and in many cases hates Him viciously?

I know you want to scream at me, OF COURSE HE DOES! What if I could show you only one person that He hated, and that one is not the Devil?

Remember, Malachi 1:2? "Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated."

But "hate" here doesn't mean "hate." Oh? Why has no translator picked up on your novel idea?

Hate means hate. It means hate in Psalm 5, too. "You hate all workers of iniquity." Oh my, now what have I done?

I've quoted Scripture, that's all. Can we deal with it? The Bible as it really is? A God who is identified as love that can also hate?

We love to say, "Hate the sin, love the sinner." We assume God says that too. But He doesn't. That's not a Bible verse. He hates the sinner, too. That makes your salvation something wonderful, doesn't it?

Besides, what is there in a sinner but sin?

It would not be appropriate to leave this answer without speaking of verses like Ezekiel 18:23 and 33:11:

"As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?"

God is love. God hates sinners. God does not rejoice when a sinner is damned. Yet in Revelation a great multitude in Heaven rejoices as God destroys, with no more mercy, the entire system - which includes multitudes of people - of Babylon.

Because He could. Because He is. Because He does what He wants. We throw up the hands in total confusion and also in praise, admitting that no one has known the mind of the Lord. John Calvin did not know it, nor did Jacob Arminius. No Puritan ever saw it, nor any Wesleyan. I don't get it, and you don't either.

But we keep seeking and finding and rejoicing in what we find.

6. What other Scriptures would cause trouble for a Calvinist?

II Peter 3:9. "The Lord is... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

That's a bit of an unfair quoting. That's the part you hear all the time, but it's not the whole verse, and it's definitely not the whole context.

The context is as follows:

a. We were warned that in the last days people would laugh at the whole notion of a second coming, since it has been so long a time.

b. These people who laugh have forgotten that this world was already judged once. Another judgment is definitely not out of order, and is coming.

c. Though it seems like a long time to us, in the Lord's way of reckoning it is not all that long.

d. This extended period of time has to do with the calling out of His people ("us", v.9). He has a people who are elected, chosen, in every generation. He will not bring the curtain down until all of them have come into the fold.

e. When they have all come in, it will be quitting time. Until then, the Father waits a long time for us, not willing that any of His own should perish but that all would come to repentance.

"All", like "world" above, is a word that lends itself to many meanings in Scripture. David said that "all men are liars." Was he including himself? Then is the statement true? When Paul was told he would be a witness to "all" men (Acts 22:15), was it every single man of all time? Obviously not.

Sometimes "all" includes every class of men, rather than all individuals. Which leads us to I Timothy 2.4-6...

"[God] desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth... Jesus Christ, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time..."

Comparing these words of Paul to those in Titus 2:14 gives us a bit of a different flavor...

"[Jesus Christ]... gave Himself for *us*, that He might redeem *us* from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His own special people*, zealous for good works.

So who *did* Jesus give Himself for?

Then there's II Corinthians 5:14-15.

"For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if one died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him Who died for them and rose again."

This passage is a little more transparent now, don't you think? Who is the "all"? Is it not the same as the "them" ? And who are "they"? The same as "us" . Jesus died for *all of us* who believe, and all of us must learn not to live for ourselves because of what He did for us.

One more "all" passage: I Timothy 4:10.

"...God, Who is the Saviour of *all men* , especially of those who believe."

I don't think any of us believe that Jesus will take all to Heaven. This verse does not even mention the Saviour from sin, but is about "God" who saves and preserves all people for His purposes. His eye is especially on His own people, of course.

Verse 8 talks of the life that now is and of that which is to come. Our living God cares about all men in the life that now is, and in particular will care for His own in the life that is to come.

7. What about the "warning" passages of Hebrews? If Calvin and the others got it right, why is it suggested that we can lose our salvation? And then there's Paul, saying we can be cut off from the "tree". Just how secure is this salvation?

I remind you that I am giving the difficulties first. When I come to the constant flow of passages that talk of our security, you will see just how secure we are!

But since you asked, let's look at the tough words of Hebrews, like in chapter 2...

2:3 "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

Answer. We won't. If we neglect it, we won't.

But, the elect will not neglect it. And herein is a piece of the puzzle overlooked by most. There is nothing "automatic" about the call of God. He uses what the scholars called "means" to get us from here to there. He places in our hearts all the desire, and in our pathway all the circumstances, and in His Word all the power we need to fulfill His calling. We will make it. We will not neglect it. Because if we would, we would not escape.

Then why is this passage even here? Again, it's here as a part of the plan of God for your holiness and perfection. As the elect, you will read this word and repent of any foolishness that is in your life. Those who are not His own may read right over

such a passage or not read it at all. The Word is just one of the "means" He uses to bring you along the way to Heaven.

Hebrews 6 gets a little more intense...

vs 4-6. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance..."

As the man in the parable of the sower, who heard the word, and loved it so much! *Tasted of the heavenly gift*, that is, read the Word, enjoyed the moving of the Spirit in the meetings, frequented prayer groups. *Partakers of the Holy Spirit*: "Did we not do many mighty works in your Name?" Saul of old shows us it is possible to have "manifestations" without fruit. *Tasted the word of God and the powers of the age to come*: Heard the exciting sermons about the coming of Jesus, loved the promises of Heaven.

These people were close, oh so close. But not His own. Not the elect.

See verse 9: "We are confident of better things concerning you, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner."

Things that accompany salvation: Christ is Lord of all my life. I abide in the vine every day and bear fruit from the Holy Spirit. I am sanctified, set apart by that Spirit. I do not love this world.

This was a different class of people altogether. There was a bunch, and still is, who love the externals, but do not want this message to touch and change the heart. The first group is not

saved. The second is. But they are all in "church" together, and warnings like this come to the whole assembly to divide sheep from goats, wheat from tares. Perhaps some elect in the first group are stirred by this letter to get to the second group post haste. This would then be another "means" of them getting there.

How about 10:26?

"If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment..."

If there is a person in the assembly who has come close to plunging in, based on the knowledge he has acquired since his beginning with them, but, again as the person in Jesus' parable of the soils, he doesn't go deep enough to be fully one of Christ's, and he is choked out by the cares of this life before any fruit can be born, where shall he go? There is no other sacrifice for sin. He almost was persuaded by Jesus, but no, he turns away and continues in his sin.

We'll discuss Paul's "tree" question when we get to the book of Romans.

8. What about evangelism? If everyone's position is already secured, why bother telling anyone anything?

Remember above our mention of means. What God has decreed, He has decreed to be done by the methods He gave us.

The Spirit and the Bride(the church) say come. The Spirit persuades while men preach . All that the Father gives to the

Son will come to the Son. The one who hears agrees, is made willing.

If God truly planned to save all, He could have devised a plan whereby all would hear. In fact all have not heard. Many will not hear in the future. But the Gospel will be preached in all the world, though not to every individual. We are led of the Spirit to preach where God has many people ordained, as was Paul.

God uses means: warnings, Scripture, prayer, circumstances, friends, enemies, all to accomplish His will.

As to method of evangelism, sinners need to hear of God's holiness and wrath first, and their need of a Saviour, not undefined unqualified "love."

We must remember that all are condemned already, have broken God's law, deserve to die. Without an elect race called out, all will perish!

The Gospel is a proclamation. not just a begging invitation. We preach to all because God's elect are scattered everywhere. This is how God divides the world's wheat from its chaff, this is how a restraining power is placed on earth's sins, and this preaching, and men's responses to it, demonstrates the evil hearts of men.

We simply go and preach. Just obey!

9. Is God not a "respector of persons" if He chooses some and does not choose others? No , He chooses all kinds of people.

3. EVEN HARDER QUESTIONS.

Soon we will go to the Word, cover to cover, table of contents to concordance, and find what we can find of the sovereignty of God, His plan, His secure promises, His decrees. But before we do, let me challenge even my own thinking, lest I become too over-confident that my way is right and there is no more searching to do. Maybe there is a reader or two in this same condition.

Consider these questions, some from Arthur Pink, brilliant scholar of the last century, some from my own curiosity. Do you know the answers?

1. Are God's will and decree dependent on mine?
2. Did God decree first, then foresee?
3. Does foreseen/foreknown imply fore-planned, designed, decreed? Meaning the only way God could know something for sure is if He willed it to be so?
4. Why does God overcome the will of some but not others? Many are called but few are chosen. Are we ever told why? Do we need to be told? Is human merit ever a part of the choice? God shows his anger when Israel is bad, and judges them. Would not His election have anything to do with works?
5. Why did God call Noah and Job? Were they not righteous in their own way? Or did God make them righteous after He called them?
6. If God knew some would be damned, why create them in the first place? (This question applies to Calvinists and Arminians both.)

7. If men are compelled to action by God, how are they responsible? How can a sinner be held responsible for doing what he is unable to do because of total depravity?
8. How can God decree men shall sin, hold them responsible, and then call them guilty because they sin?
9. How is a sinner held responsible to receive Christ, then damned for rejecting Him, when God foreordained him to condemnation?
10. Can men resist the outer words of prophets etc, but not the inner workings of the Spirit?
11. Is "hardening" judicial (punishment), or simply based on His will?

In spite of all these difficult scenarios and seemingly incomprehensible ways, the Scriptures I will now share with you cause them all to be asked, regarding the nature of our God. We must not allow our own flawed judgment to interfere. Somehow we must put aside our cultural past, our theological past, and so much more. This is a monumental task, but in Christ it is possible.

4. THROUGH THE BIBLE, OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis

From the beginning, God had a plan. His heart was not to have a people who would reject Him. But He willed to let them do that anyway. Then in His mercy He called out a people for Himself. A remnant. The elect. Otherwise, all would be lost. Why these and no others is the mystery. But as you will see later, their works is not the answer to that mystery, since God has created their works along with their faith.

There follows from my simple summary of this deep matter two streams of thought, seen in the rest of our searchings. You will see a God Who is not willing to lose anyone, yet hardening multitudes. A God who does not delight in the death of the wicked, who is angry with the sinner every day and will ultimately cast sinners into a lake of fire forever. A God who will be hailed forever as perfectly just and perfectly merciful.

The plan. But soon in Genesis we see counter-plans by Satan and humans. Is that plan separate from the holiness of God or has God placed it in their thinking? If it is separate, God has incorporated it into His own plan, so that ultimately His will will be done.

Let him that hath wisdom answer that one. Perhaps after we have examined the pertinent Scriptures, we will have that wisdom.

God knew the first humans would partake of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. He knew of the untold suffering

and eternal damnation of billions of earthlings. Something compelled Him to go ahead with His Plan anyway. That something is within Himself. His glory. His purposes.

So did God determine to allow them all to be condemned, or did He actually decree their condemnation in advance? A harsh question that seems to have a harsh answer. Paul seems to have responded to this enigma in his epistles.

Paul. There's a man who knew his Bible. But not like we have learned it. His insights remind us of Calvin. That is, Calvin reminds us of Paul.

Questions, questions, as we progress in Genesis. Why did God not stop Adam from sinning? Or anyone, for that matter? Hitler, Stalin, and all the rest.

We read of some interferences in Genesis, actually. Abimelech (Genesis 20) was kept from sin with Sarah's wife. Why him and not the others? God's purposes, dear reader, always God's purposes.

It seems easy for us to guess why God chose Noah. The text tells us he was a just and blameless man. A good man. So God chooses good men? Not so fast. That line of thinking will not work for long. Later we will read that there are no good men in the ultimate sense. Noah himself seems to slip a bit after the flood.

But, assuming that righteousness that God saw in Noah, that favor that Noah found in God, do we know for sure that it was not God that placed His goodness in Noah to begin with? Was not Paul an obnoxious sinner who likewise found favor with God, mercy for the chief of sinners (I Timothy 1:6)? Why

do we assume Paul's righteousness was of God but Noah's was of himself?

Nevertheless, Job also is introduced to us as a good man. By the end of the book of Job we realize what Job realized. "I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:6)." The original goodness may have been from God, indeed, but the book of Job is a description of an ever greater grace upon a man who might have died trusting in his own right-ness, or thinking it was his own.

In Psalm 18, David is convinced God loves him because of his righteousness. God does love right living. But David had some lessons to learn. He has a fuller picture of himself after the Bathsheba debacle. Psalm 51:5, "I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me..."

Back to Noah. It is hard to ignore the fact that God totally decimated an entire world population, with the exception of a handful of believers who "found grace."

We don't get too much information about "Abram" before he becomes the leading character in the first portions of Genesis. Raised amidst pagan idols. How did he meet God? How did he know His voice? Why did God choose this one pagan man and call him His own?

But wait. Though he lived amongst pagans, his ancestry is traced back to the "good line" of Shem, son of Noah, namesake of the "Semitic" people. But were all those folks godly? Had they passed along the faith of the one true God, the God who sent the flood to judge earth's wickedness?

Was Abraham a good man or a bad man when God first dealt with him? We know he surely had a lot to learn, most of it

very painful. But God chose this disciple first for His own purposes. And forget not that all the other millions of pagan Mesopotamia were left behind without a call.

And so it goes on in the narrative. Choosing some, letting others go. Until we come to the story of Jacob and Esau, a story that has caught the attention of a prophet and an apostle. And it grabs our attention too. It is a difficult concept, yet it will be repeated time and again in the Word God has given us. God does choose some people over others, and we just don't know why.

Isaac and Rebekkah (Genesis 24 and 25) are childless. Isaac prays, and two children come to Rebekkah at the same moment. God tells her that one child is to be stronger than the other. That one child will actually serve the other.

Malachi puts it less delicately (Malachi 1:2-3). God tells Israel, in declaring His passion for them, that he loved Israel (Jacob) but hated Esau (Edom), and demonstrates that hatred by laying "waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness."

And Paul, in Romans 9, makes a point using this same pair of brothers. The children had not been born. God chose Jacob over Esau simply because God chose Jacob over Esau. We can speculate, Well, he chose Jacob because He knew what he would become. But it was God that made Jacob become what he became. God gave the prophecy to his mother. His mother protected him from the rage of his brother. Angels directed his way to a new life with his relatives. God led him to Rachel, and Leah, and the children that would make spiritual history. God

literally fought with him until he - Jacob - lost, but won a blessing. A new name. A new people.

Was any of this attributable to Jacob? Could Jacob ever say, "Look what I did?" Towards the end of his life he humbly declared to great Pharaoh that his days had been few and evil. He hardly even knew what had happened in the heavenlies.

But he was chosen. Used for God's purposes. Could not Esau have done all those wonderful things? His father loved him. His father was Isaac, the very son of the friend of God himself. A great provider. A man's man.

But God did not elect the great man. As seems to be his norm, God chose the weak one. This pattern will repeat.

One of Jacob's boys was Joseph. Beloved, but a dreamer. Great dreams, but the young one. Not ready to be a leader yet. So much to learn.

But God chose the unlikely dreamer to save Egypt, and Israel from extinction. In his own words (Genesis 45:7) "God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance."

To God goes all the glory, in life after life, story after story. God chooses, God enables, God provides. He has a plan, He has the people to carry it out. Everything has been arranged.

Exodus

No clearer example of the Sovereign choices of Jehovah, His power, His ability to harden, His preoccupation - if you will - with carrying out His own plans and not yours or mine, no clearer example, I say, and I think I have Paul in my amen

corner, is given in Scripture than that of the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The attempts to explain all of this decision-making away and to somehow come up with Pharaoh in the driver's seat... well, it's pretty common. And looking back, it seems pretty awful. The text is clear.

But let us not rush to Pharaoh at the expense of a hard look at the man Moses.

Remember? Youngest in the family. Speech impediment. Convictable murderer. Reluctant excuse-maker. Comfortable shepherd of Midian serving under the priesthood of his Midianite father-in-law. That Moses.

I know, when we think Moses, we think Charlton Heston, MGM, romance, power, the miraculous. None of that Moses. The glory stuff is Hollywood. The miraculous is God. God promised to be with His mouth. God gave him signs and wonders he could use in Egypt. God spoke the law on tablets and in his own tongue. God gets all the glory and credit. What does Moses add to all of this?

Nothing.

We cannot add to the grace of God. Once we do, it is not the grace of God any longer.

So here is the pattern again. Unlikely man chosen by the God Who does what, and chooses whom, He will.

But I speak nothing radical so far. Most believers, on both sides, agree that God uses unlikely folks to be leaders of His people.

But should not another thought be creeping in by now? If God chooses leaders, does it not follow that he chooses their

disciples, too? Did not Jesus say, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16)?

All leaders and all their followers, chosen. The chosen people. The elect. But, you say, that has nothing to do with salvation, and eternity, and the lost... No? Let's bring in Pharaoh and his interpreter, the Spirit-filled apostle Paul, who himself had a miraculous "choosing" , you will recall, one which we must discuss later.

Let's see Moses' account first. We'll start in 3:19. God knows that the King of Egypt is not going to let the people go, at least at first.

Foreknowledge. God knows what is coming. All agreed, I am sure. Question is this: Does his foreknowledge imply His own decree of that future, or is this a future totally concocted by evil, and some good, men, with God just looking on and adding drops of mercy here and there?

Let's go to 4:21. I am taking these verses in the order they appear in Exodus so you will see something you have perhaps not seen before: namely, God did all the hardening. The standard line here is that Pharaoh, as God foresaw, was a bad man, and hardened his heart against Moses. After this bad man had hardened his heart for so long, God just took over the hardening process himself. Paul has a word for you who believe that, later. For now, look at this verse.

"When you go back to Egypt [he hasn't confronted Pharaoh yet] , see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go."

Foreknowledge, coupled with a decree, is nothing less than predestination. Right? Clay in God's hand, yes?

Chapter 5: Sure enough, Pharaoh is hardened. From the beginning. As God said he would be. And God said why he would be: God hardened him.

A faltering Moses is told in 7:3 once more that God will harden Pharaoh. In 7:13, that heart grew hard "as the Lord had said." Remember, the Lord not only foretold the action of Pharaoh, but was the reason for it.

God makes the declaration in 7:14, "Pharaoh's heart is hard." Should be no surprise by now as to what is going on. So when in 8:15 we read that "Pharaoh hardened his heart," we must not revert back to the thinking that puts man in control. God has already done the work in his heart, and from here until the end of the episode it is clear that man is not working his own will, but the will of the Father. An empowered Moses confronts a hardened King. It's all God. He receives the credit, the glory.

You can read the following passages on your own, if you wish, but the Word is sufficiently clear: 8:15,19,32, 9:7,12, 35, 10: 20,27, 11:10, 14:5,8.

In 14:17, the entire Egyptian nation is said to be hardened.

Three more Exodus passages are dealt with or implied in Paul's writings. Let's go there.

We were in Romans 9 when dealing with Jacob and Esau. God favors Jacob. Someone says, "That's not fair!" (Earthlings' favorite three words.) God is not being righteous! Wrong. Correct your thinking, not His.

Example 2 Paul gives is the whole Moses-Pharaoh episode we just covered. He introduces it by quoting Exodus 33:19:

"...I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Period. End of argument. I'll do what I want with whom I want. Stay out of this. I know what I'm doing.

Paul's own statement to follow has also become a classic: (Romans 9:16)

"So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy."

Suddenly Paul is not in the 15th century B.C., talking about a prophet and a Pharaoh. He's talking about here and now and you and me. And he's saying things we need to hear, if we have ears to hear.

You cannot will yourself into the heart of God. You can't work yourself into the plan of God. The plan is all His. The will is all His. His mercy will be shed on those whom He chooses. That's God speaking, via Moses and Paul. What more do we need to hear?

But Paul goes on. Another quote. Exodus 9:16.

"Even for this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be declared in all the earth."

The plan of God is to glorify Himself. His Name. His power. Let every knee bow.

You're still complaining? Paul anticipated it, especially after he said this:

"Therefore, [Paul's conclusion of the whole Pharaoh affair] He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens."

Truly a hard saying. Surely this was what Peter was talking about when he mentions in his letter that brother Paul says some difficult things sometimes.

Difficult it is, and I shall not make it easy. Hard it is, but I will not make it soft. Let us read it as it is.

If God wants to save an elect out of the world, and make all the choices by Himself, He is God and will do it, whether I give Him theological permission or not.

If God wants to leave the rest of the world in the sin that it chose for itself, and assign them all to eternal damnation because of the hardness of their hearts, I step aside, I say, "God, do as you will. Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. There are no hardened sinners there, only those you have chosen. Lord have mercy on me!"

Objection! Humans have hard sayings too. Hard question for you, God: If it is Your sovereign will, and of course I cannot resist your sovereign will, how can you find fault with me if my heart is hard? Did you not harden it?

But here the discussion ends. Here we have attempted to go beyond the veil. Yes, there is still a veil of sorts. There are still things we cannot and will not understand until that day, and maybe not then, either.

Paul shuts the door to the mystery in our faces. Let it stay shut. "Who are YOU to reply against GOD. You're from the dirt. You are a created being. How dare you question your composition. Your very soul was created by God. Cannot God

deal with His creation in any way He pleases? Stop these questions!

God is the potter (Romans 9, continuing in verse 21). You are the clay. Have you not sung it often, "Have Thine own way, Lord" ? Sing it now. Believe it. The Potter must have His way with the clay.

Some pieces of pottery are made to hold the garbage. Some to hold the Bread of Life. Some will be destroyed. Some will be put in places of honor in His House, for all to see. Some will be put in less visible places, but yet in the House. Some will be taken out back to the fires and burned.

That's God's business. Leave it with God.

Thankfully, Paul interjects the pronouns "we" and "us" as he winds up his message. We are the vessels of His mercy. He has seen us from the beginning and prepared us for glory. We are the called, the called from Jews and Gentiles...

Paul the Reformer, with a new message from Heaven. No wonder those other Reformers hung on his every word. If we are to reform the church of our own day, we must come back to the image of the Potter who does His own will.

Leviticus

Quickly, but with significance, we look at the entire priestly system of sacrifice, and realize that it was all for Israel only. Sins could be pushed ahead, forgiven after a manner, in Israel alone. The chosen people. Why not offer forgiveness and sacrifice for all nations in 1400 B.C.? It is a question we must deal with honestly and fairly. We want John 3:16 to avail for us today. But

how does John 3:16 deal with 4,000 years of human history where redemption was not possible?

Remember we are talking about a God Who makes sovereign choices. Who loves and hates. Who does what pleases Him. In Leviticus 20:23 we see Him saying to His chosen people Israel:

"And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you [the Canaanites]; for they commit all of these things [the evils mentioned in the preceding verses] *and therefore I abhor them...*"

That's plain enough. No interpretation needed. Not talking about sin, but sinners. There can be no sin without a sinner to commit it. The two are inseparable, and God hates it all.

But there is a people God loves, the ones He foreknew (v. 24):

"But I have said to you, 'You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.' I am the Lord your God, *who has separated you from the peoples.*"

Hates sinners. Loves his people. Separates them. Makes a plan for them. This is Sovereignty.

Numbers.

In Numbers we confront the man Balaam. God had many true prophets. The difference between the true ones and the false Balaam is the attitude of the heart. Balaam wanted to make some money on his ministry to the King. He would have

cursed Israel in a minute, left to his own devices. But God overruled his will. In his own words:

"The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak (Numbers 22:38)."

"But God would *never* come against a man's will. God is a gentleman. He gives us perfect liberty to...."

And so on goes the argument. But this way of thinking simply does not match with the actual facts of Scripture. When all is said and done, God will say and do all.

Numbers 17 tells us of the sovereign choice by God of Aaron. Why Aaron? Didn't he allow the people to make a golden calf? Didn't he criticize his brother's choice of a marriage partner? Didn't two of his sons exhibit profane choices in their worship? This man will lead all of Israel in the worship of the one true God?

If you are asking this question and making the list I just made, you are doing exactly what Israel did, a sin which drove the Lord to demonstrate publicly this miracle of chapter 17, the budding rod. Aaron is God's choice. God doesn't say why. He does not have to.

And why you? And why me? What wondrous grace is this!

Deuteronomy

As Moses recounts the travels of the past 40 years, he tells them of one Sihon, the king of Heshbon. Sihon refused to let the people of Israel pass through his land. Humanly speaking we can understand why he would not want 3,000,000 people of

an alien nation, about whom he had been hearing some pretty strange things, traipsing through his territories.

But the human reason is not the one accounted by Moses. Moses tells his people that it was the Lord their God who "hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that He might deliver him into your hand... (Deuteronomy 2:30)"

Another "Pharaoh." Another opportunity for God to show Himself strong on behalf of His people Whom He called. His will be done.

Chapter seven is even more to the point. Look at verses 7 and 8. Moses here describes a God who simply sets His love on people because He loves them, and once love is set, it is set! All He wants is for that love to be returned. He did not choose Israel "because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all people."

Definitely the least. Seventy souls entered Egypt by invitation of Pharaoh's assistant, Joseph. Seventy. Not a lot to work with. And as we have seen, a hard-hearted bunch in the face of constant miracles. But God's love was set... We will see later how even to this day God has not forgotten His promises to Israel.

Why does He set His love on certain ones? Moses says, "...because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers..."

So the "God of the Old Testament" is a God of love! Why did we think otherwise? He changes not. Love from start to finish. And also Holy and Just from start to finish. Hater of sin and those who commit it from start to finish.

The question begs to be asked, "If God sets His love on me, simply because He loves me, then why that love and why me?"

That question is not to be answered. Not in this life. I do not wish to indicate that there is no answer. God has reasons for everything. All we know for sure is that the answer to that question is in the deep and abiding purposes and counsel of God, and is *not* about how wonderful you are or think you are. Just ask any sinner who has been saved by this grace.

In chapter nine, one more non-reason for God's choice of Israel: their righteousness. Three times in as many verses the Lord through Moses devastates their pride, letting them know that the only reason they get to come into the promised possession is that their manner of life is a notch above the Canaanites they are replacing! He calls them stiff-necked, rebellious God-provokers.

Two chapters before, love talk. Now, the rest of the story. This love is pure mercy.

Again, we can relate.

Joshua

When God sets His love, that is one thing. But when God sets His judgment, it is quite the other, but no less definite. The summarizing of Joshua's conquests is in the book by that name, chapter 11, verses 18-20.

First, there was a long war. Next, virtually no city was exempt from the judgment of God. And finally, the reason:

(v. 20) "For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly

destroy them, and that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them, as the Lord had commanded Moses."

Yes, and as the Lord had spoken through Noah, "Cursed be Canaan (Genesis 9:25) ."

When men curse, the curses may or may not stick. When God curses, the end can be told from the beginning. One man, the son of Ham, sinned. All of his progeny cursed. Well, not all. Mercy was shown to the family of Rahab.

One man, the creation of God, sinned. All of Adam's race is cursed. Well, not all. God showed mercy, perhaps, to you? And to me. And many more.

Not that He owes it to anyone, you understand. God is in no man's debt. We are the debtors, for His amazing grace, a grace that in our day has become less amazing as we take so much for granted.

Judges

Choices, always choices. Not man's, but God's, and for God's reasons. Turn to Judges 7:3-7, read the story of how Gideon's men were chosen, and tell me if this is a standard military policy that ought to be sent to our generals in the wars they must fight in our own day.

Send home anyone who has fear in their heart.

Send home anyone who drinks water a certain way.

What's the lesson we must see hear? "His ways are not our ways," for one. And secondly we will see the pattern over and over repeated that God delights to take what is weak and through His own power and nothing else, make it mighty.

Who has bragging rights in this story? Gideon was so afraid of the odds that God had to send him to the enemy camp in the middle of the night to hear a dream a frightened soldier was having.

They were afraid. Midian was afraid of Israel!

Only God will receive the glory, and that is exactly what He wanted. See verse 2: "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' "

To me He speaks along similar lines: I didn't make you all that smart or all that strong or all that anything. I put you in a family that had no chance of raising you properly. I allowed you to walk in poverty, so that a simple bag of groceries from the local church would be enough to get you to attend a service. Once you heard about Me, you never wanted anyone else, though your utter lack of character has been a challenge..."

Guess who gets the glory in my life?

The Reformers claimed this point as a serious part of their creed. "To God alone be the glory." It was placed at the end of the list often, but the fact is, this was the beginning of the return of the church to its heritage.

God, and God alone, gets all the praise, all the glory, now and forever.

Ruth.

I was unable to withdraw a particular quote from this book, but certainly the unlikeliness of this story is a testimony

to God's sovereignty. God here shows early on, once again, His love for the unlovely and/or helpless. The Gentiles. Women. The poor. A Gentile female is brought into the House of God by a series of awful circumstances. But the ending is happy.

Need I make the application? "We must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God," says Paul to his converts and us. Most of the time we have no clue what God is doing long term for us, as I am sure Ruth could testify, but He gets it done.

All according to plan. His plan.

I Samuel

Chapter 2, verses 6-7. Hannah is so happy. God has given her a son, and she has given that son back to God. In her rejoicing she reminds all future generations that it is the Lord who kills and makes alive... who makes poor and makes rich.

Why are some people poor and some not? Hannah believed it was a sovereign God who was behind all of this. When He wants to send poverty to a nation, for his own reasons, He can do that. When He wants to single out this or that family for poverty, or for wealth, for His own reasons, He can do that. You can say, some are lazy, some work hard. But what do you do with lazy rich people and poor hard-working folks?

Somehow it always goes back to the plan of God , the intricacies of which, having originated in the mind of that Wonderful Being, we cannot comprehend *at all*.

Saul. One thing we learn early on about the first legitimate king of Israel is that he was not a man who sought after God. God chose him. God arranged for the need of a miracle (the lost donkeys), the meeting of a man of God (Samuel) and the fellowship with a band of prophets whose ministry changed his heart.

None of this had anything to do with Saul. Saul, at first, was not even interested. And he never did get the point of why men should be lifted up over God's people. But I note him here as an example of God doing what He needs to do in the affairs of men, to get His own plan carried out.

One other interesting sidelight to the coronation of Saul is found in his visible selection. It's recorded in chapter 10. Lots were thrown. The tribe of Benjamin was chosen. Saul's very family is next singled out. Then Saul himself. Yet the choice had already been made in the heavenlies.

So you were convicted in a meeting. You came forward. You confessed Christ to be Lord. You were baptized. And all the people looked on you with favor, maybe even thinking you had done something to save yourself. You had made a "decision" for Christ, right? Let Christ look you in the eyes and say as he said to His 12, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you."

Another choice to make, 16:10-12. Need a king for Israel, to replace disobedient Saul.

Conjecture: Saul is made king first to make the people understand that they need a man of the Spirit, not of the flesh. But then, they could say that God chose Saul, not themselves.

True enough. Choosing is His prerogative and He uses it, or rather has already used it, in manifold ways. And now He must choose the man after His own heart. He must be one who loves the Lord, one who is young and weak and unlikely in the eyes of men to amount to much. Musician. Low-class. Like Joseph, not too well liked by his brothers.

David fits all of that. After awhile, it seems that God's choices start to make a little sense? Do we see a little of the mind of God now? The flesh would have chosen another Saul, Jesse's first-born, or let's by-pass Jesse's low family altogether and find a more dignified, noble clan.

Bethlehem? Smallest village of Judah? And why Judah? The last great leader of Israel was from Ephraim. The center of worship is there too. Ephraim, son of Joseph.

Anyway, the point keeps being made that every important - and we must assume all the unimportant too - decisions being made for Israel are being made in Heaven. God has chosen the seed of Jesse. David must be king. Period. Decreed. Live with it, Israel.

And church, live with the decrees of your own life. Acknowledge that it is all from Him, and not from you.

II Samuel

More of the choosing of David is discussed by David himself in 6:21, as he speaks to a decidedly disgusted Michal, his wife. She sees his utter abandon when it comes to praising His God. One wonders about her own god, a household idol she had used to fool her father, when the King was trying to kill

David. David remarks in passing that the reason He is so delighted in God, and so willing to abandon self-respect, is that "the Lord chose me above your father and all his house."

There are those who are chosen who know they are chosen, and many, laboring perhaps under some false theology, who are chosen and do not know it.

David knew. You see what happens when you know. Ecstasy. Joy of the Lord. Singing. Dancing. Direction.

In the very next chapter, we see David in a more reflective mood, as God has just told him that his house and his kingdom "shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."

How did God know this? Because He planned it. He decreed it from eternity that His Son would be of the seed and Kingdom of David.

So where is that Kingdom today? In waiting. In exile. But King Jesus did appear once and will appear again. No word of God can ever fail.

This is why we pray "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Imagine how many have prayed those words since they were first given. This, added to the Decree, is the way, the means, by which God will act: our constant prayers.

I Kings

Elijah. The man himself is a study in God's Sovereignty. As James points out, he is a man who is a lot like us. Strong

sometimes, weak sometimes, but God's man all the time. Chosen for God's purposes.

But fast forward his life to Carmel, and after. You recall that the great prophet is running for his life, is discouraged, is complaining.

Rather than coddle him, the Father gives him more work to do. Partly in response to Elijah's suggestion that he is the only man living who cares about the true God, that true God gives him a message to be delivered in person to two kings and a prophet. He is told that a great slaughter is coming, and that his successor will be a part of it. But as to Elijah being the only man of God in Israel, God quotes the number as seven thousand (19:18).

Seven thousand. And how did they get there, or how will they get there? There are as many versions of this verse as there are versions of the Bible, it seems. Some have it as a future action of God, some as a past. Some want to use the word "reserve", some "preserve", others just "left".

But the point I wish to make is that at some point, in ways known only to God, it was God who set aside those seven thousand men who had not bowed to Ba'al, and never would. When you see a remnant, it is God's remnant. Chosen by God. Elect, if you will. And the chosen by God, choose God. In that order.

Jesus will say it much later, but the concept is consistent: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you..."

II Kings

It was before the foundation of the world that our salvation was secured. Fact is, there were quite a few other things settled at that time. Some argue that everything was fixed then. The more Scripture is piled upon Scripture, the more this conclusion is warranted.

Consider 19:25 of this book, for example. The prophet is Isaiah, of whom we will speak more when we come to his book. The message is being given to Hezekiah, but it is concerning one Sennacherib, King of Assyria many centuries before Christ.

He speaks of something that He made and formed long ago, "from ancient times." Something that He now brings to pass. What? A decree. A decision. A Pre-destination, if you will.

"That you [Sennacherib] should be for crushing fortified cities into heaps of ruins..."

Purpose driven lives, we love to speak of today. But the purposes for which men live are the purposes God has laid out. Sennacherib is not the only one who knew that from experience.

Verses 30-31, in this same prophecy, speak of a remnant who escape from the slaughter to come. By chance? By sheer will power? By luck? Karma? No, by "the zeal of the Lord of Hosts." That is how things get done in our earth. We must be His willing servants to do His will, or we shall be His unwilling servants.

I Chronicles

The two books of Chronicles repeat much of the history of Samuel and Kings, but there is still new territory when it comes to the subject at hand.

David in 16:13 and 29:12 is praising God. It was a habit of his. He never forgot the God who had singled him out so unexpectedly and raised him up to such heights, after first delivering him from the murderous intentions of Saul, and later his own son Absalom.

David certainly believed in a sovereign God who made sovereign choices, as Israel itself, the "children of Jacob, His chosen ones." He recognized Jehovah as the one from whom riches come, and honour. It was of God to give strength and "to make great."

But the ones that He "made great" continued to baffle David: "... who am I, and who are my people?... we are aliens and pilgrims before You, as were all our fathers..."

David had discovered, 1000 years before Jesus, amazing grace. Grace that loves because it loves and chooses because it chooses. This is the grace that exists to give pleasure to God, and it is the grace that has found its way to our own day, for which we rejoice.

II Chronicles

The Lord has no delight in the death of the wicked. He has made that known to us. But He has made other things known that we do not want to proclaim so loudly. That millions were

put to death anyway at the deluge of Noah. That millions more were not called out as was Abraham, to a plan of salvation. When God gave man his free will in the Garden of Eden, man promptly used it to choose against God. That is not what God "wanted" to happen, but when man chose death, death he got, and he has been inheriting it ever since. In Adam all die. He cannot even choose life any more in this fallen nature.

Like these people recorded in II Chronicles 15:13. As a part of the great reform of Asa, a reform which God liked so much that He "gave them rest on every side," a covenant was entered by which "whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman."

The classic Chronicles story of Micaiah should have let us know how God deals with Satan and sinners. We'll see this again echoed in Job.

You'll recall that the King of Judah (Jehoshaphat) has unfortunately allied himself with Ahab of Israel. Needing direction, Ahab lines up all his prophets, who with one voice urge him to the battle, with God's blessings.

These were not prophets of God, and Jehoshaphat knew it. He asked for a true man of God to come forward. Ahab then summons Micaiah. To our amazement at first, we see Micaiah lining up with the false prophets.

But he knew something they did not know. He knew from whence came their wisdom.

Micaiah then tells of a dream he has had, in which he saw the Lord asking who would entice Ahab to go to battle. A spirit

volunteers to be a deceiving influence in the mouth of all Ahab's prophets.

The Lord accepts the offer and says that not only will he deceive, but he will prosper: Ahab will believe every word of it. Why? Because God has ordained that it will happen.

Predestinated is a better word. Ahab's destiny has already been decided.

Since person after person of interest in the Old Testament is used in this way, does it not begin to occur that God has so ordained all lives to fulfill His will?

Ezra

"Who resists His will?" asks the one who complains against God's fore-ordination. No one resists His will. World rulers line up through the centuries awaiting His call, though unwittingly. We have already seen Pharaoh as clay in the Potter's hand. God raised Him up to show in him His glory. Later we will see Nebuchadnezzar, though we have passed him historically for the present.

For now it is Cyrus of Persia. How will God keep His promise to Israel that He is going to bring them out of bondage to their own land? How many nations return after they have been destroyed? How old are the oldest nations of earth, the greatest empires?

Israel is from eternity. It began on earth with the call of the chosen one Abraham and the chosen one Jacob and the chosen one Moses.

My redundancy is for my own hearing. For so long I have seen history as just "happening." God knew about it and worked in it, of course. Now it is clear that history is planned. For God to know the future there must be in existence a future to know. That future is either left up to chance and the will of man, or to intelligent Design, that Being we have assigned as the opposite to Evolution. He is also the opposite to un-intelligent historical design.

In 1:1-4, Cyrus lets the world know that our God has chosen him to build a house for the people of God. Again, where in history has a people been released from bondage and been supported by the government to rebuild its nation within the boundaries of the Empire?

The predestination does not end there. We must have some willing people to go back. Believe it or not, many Israelites were totally happy in their new situations. Why go back to that cursed Canaan land that had only brought them misery? Here our crops are growing, our house is secure, our children have friends...

Sounds rather modern.

So God would have to put His own desires in His people, a practice he has done throughout time, and does today. Yes, that is what it says. The record is clear (v.6): *"Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, **with all those whose spirits God had moved**, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem."*

Only through the Spirit of the Lord is the House of the Lord built. Later in the book (7:12-27) we read a letter from Artaxerxes fully bolstering the plan, giving support to Ezra and

his reestablishment of the reign of the Israelites in the midst of the Persian world.

Ezra's conclusion: *"Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem."*

God is all, and is in all.

Nehemiah

The fascinating story of Nehemiah's return to his land with the blessing of his adopted government is told by Nehemiah himself. In the first chapter of his book we see him weeping for Israel, confessing national sin, making himself available. Chapter two relates his being sent to Judah, and his personal viewing of what he had up until now only heard.

What strikes me as I begin to see the workings of the Almighty Designer in everything is verse 12:

"Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one *what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem...*"

God? God put this in his heart? It doesn't mention that in chapter one. There we see a hurting man. But chapter two tells us that it is a hurting God who is at work. Oh that His people could see this today. *"It is God who works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure..."* How He truly loves His own!

Nehemiah 9 records the great works of God and the evil works of the people He had chosen. It mentions specifically the choosing out of Abram, how God made a Name for Himself in Egypt, the miraculous sustaining in the wilderness, the multiplying of Israel's children, the bringing of His people into

their new land, His deliverance of them into the hands of the enemy, the almost but not quite destruction of this people after their hard hearts rebelled...

A clear picture of a God Who has made up His mind to love a people, and who refuses to relent in that love. Can we not trust that He will do the same for us, who also are His people, and have been grafted into the tree called "Israel"?

Esther

As the story of Ruth, so Esther. The entire episode is so unlikely that we know it was a God event. The climactic moment in 5:2 where she takes her chance and gains favor can only be viewed in the light of the power of God to determine the outcomes of this nation Israel.

Job

At the end of the debate of the book of Job, it is God versus Job in a predictable win for the Lord God Almighty. In 40:8-14, God asks, "Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? There are echoes of this sentiment in Paul's words about replying against God, in Romans. The doctrines of Sovereignty at first glance seem "unfair" , "unjust" .

But as Job (42:1-2) eventually concedes, "...no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You."

God will do what He pleases, for His own purposes, and if that sounds cold and hard at first, it must be balanced with the other things we know of this God, that His mercy endures

forever, that He is love, that His compassion was manifest through the Person and Life of Jesus Christ, who had a reputation for hanging around "sinners".

Psalms

The Psalms are rich in proclaiming God's sovereignty. I regularly find new instances, and the following list is probably far from complete.

We start with the famed second Psalm, where God declares a decree. Now it is the "decree" that is at the bottom of Sovereignty. God decreed day and night, sun and moon. He decreed all that we can see and all the invisible too. His decrees are what keep the planets in order and the revolving of the Earth.

Most readily agree with this assessment but begin to balk when it is asserted that He also decrees the actions of people, and His eternal relationships to them. Hopefully, no one has a problem with verse 7 and following, where God decrees that His Son is to be King over all the Earth, and that all nations will bow to that kingship.

This is predestination in its purest form. God says He will have a Son and that that Son will reign. Any arguments?

What if He said He was going to have many sons, adopted of course, and that they all should reign too? What if He could tell you their names because He chose them from the foundation of the Earth? Have I gone too far? Do the Scriptures go that far?

Let's get some help for that question in our next Psalm, 33. The publisher of this Bible calls Psalm 33 "The sovereignty of the Lord in Creation and History." That sums it up pretty well... But to some specifics: Verse 11,

"The counsel of the Lord stands forever..." Once He says it, it's going to be done. With or without our approval.

Verse 12: "Blessed... is the people whom He has chosen as His own inheritance." The Psalmist had Israel in mind, the Spirit had the "Greater Israel," which includes the true Church of Jesus.

Yes, nations, you say. I get it. General organizing of the nations and supervising history's flow, yes, that works.

Keep reading. 14-15

"From the place of His habitation He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually..."

From sun and moon we have suddenly come to your heart and mine, fashioned by God. And Who can resist His will? Take a look at this Almighty God as, perhaps, you have not seen Him before.

And what saith David about the perseverance of the saints? Have you ever read Psalm 37:28 with this question in mind? "...His saints...are preserved forever..."

What of war and peace, and their Predestinator? Go to Psalm 46 and read of His decrees: "...He uttered His Voice, the earth melted...the Lord makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire...I will be exalted in the earth!"

David again speaks of the called individual in 65:4. "Blessed is the man whom you choose..."

But more. He not only chooses that man but "causes [him] to approach" to Himself. That sounds a lot like irresistible grace. How else will that man choose to come to God? His choice-maker was forever damaged in the Garden. He knows how to choose evil, ever since he saw it, but to choose good is not with him.

So the chosen one needs an assist. And he gets it. And who receives, therefore, all (not half) the glory? We'll see this spelled out in the New Covenant later, but it is fascinating to know that our God spoke hints to His sovereignty long before Matthew 1.

Next is one of the many promises our God makes to His people with no apparent conditions attached. 73:24, "You will guide me with your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." No intermediate possibility, "You just might decide that my works are not acceptable and send me to Hell." First the counsel, then the glory. Period.

75:7, could all this be spoken more clearly? "But God is the Judge: He puts down one and exalts another."

Then the no-brainer of Psalm 100:2, "It is He that has made us, and not we ourselves." If that concept is so obvious, why not the concept of the new birth? It is He that has re-made us, and not we ourselves. God decided to have a child. We are the result. What can you do but cooperate when you are being given birth or being created?

Truly, Psalm 115:3, "...our God is in heaven. He does whatever He pleases!"

Moving quickly through the Psalms we come to another reminder of His preserving power: 121:7, "The Lord shall

preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore."

That's poetry, you say. Yep. And that's fact. Just like Psalm 23 is poetry, yet to be trusted. And it reminds us of words from the New Testament, too. "He who began a good work in you will finish it...(Philippians 1:6)."

Psalm 135 gives us another reminder that the Lord does whatever He wants to do, then gives us a list of many of those things, like judging His people and having compassion on His servants.

There are of course many more passages, but the point is made. Spirit-filled David and his associate song-writers knew of the "doctrines of grace."

(2,500 years before John Calvin!)

Proverbs

David's son, no less than David, held on to the truth that God does what He pleases, whether it pleases us or not (4:18).

In 16:4: "The Lord has made all things for Himself, yes even the wicked for the day of doom." We inherit many of the Lord's blessings, but step back and see that, originally and ultimately, it's all for Him.

In the plan of God, even wicked people have a part. He will receive all the glory on that day when wickedness and its vessels are all finally thrown into the Lake of Fire. None of God's true church will question these choices, no one will shed

a tear for those who with obstinate hearts stood in the way of their Maker.

And later in this chapter, verse 9. Though you may think you have a great plan for your life, don't be surprised if it gets a bit "adjusted" so that the great Plan-Maker will have His way: "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."

Similar sentiments in 19:21, "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel- that will stand."

Not just my plans and your plans, but also the plans of the government rulers themselves: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord...He turns it wherever He wishes (21:1)."

In fact, there is "no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the Lord (21:30)." You won't surprise Him, He'll surprise you. You won't counter His plan, He'll counter yours. You won't think any thought that He has not already incorporated into the Grand Scheme of things.

You'll see.

Ecclesiastes

The classic third chapter of Ecclesiastes with its talk of a "time for everything", or 1:10's mentioning of the fact that there is nothing new, speaks of His sovereignty, and especially 3:14, "I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever..."

Not as strong a case perhaps in this book, but we have already seen that the author was fully aware of God's sovereignty. Perhaps in his turning away from God and settling his mind on earthly things, he was more aware than most that a man outside God's plan is a miserable man. Yet even his being

allowed to lapse, turns into a blessing to readers of all generations, another signal that all things come from the Creator for His own purposes.

I was unable to pinpoint Sovereignty statements in **Song of Solomon**. Again, the author is on record as a witness to this matter.

Let us pass to the final section of the Old Covenant books and see what the prophets add to the discussion.

Isaiah

Isaiah is brim-full of the message we seek. Chapter one deals with Israel and the heaping of judgments on her. Yet hidden beneath the surface is the promise of God that Israel must in the end be saved, for though the country is desolate, the cities are burned, strangers devour the land, and all the rest, still there is the "remnant." Why should not Israel have become like Sodom and Gomorrah? The promise, evidenced by the remnant. Israel has a future. The theme is throughout the prophets. God will keep His word when men do not keep theirs. Even if He has to write that word in their hearts.

Chapter 10 paints the picture of Assyria. Proud, blood-thirsty, ever-victorious, Assyria, who had been used to punish Israel, is not to be spared. Her annihilation is here foretold, followed by the continuing story of the "remnant", not of Assyria, but of Israel. You see what it is like to have God's love set upon you?

The remnant will return. The remnant will depend on the Lord. How does God know? He has decreed it, and will make it happen. That's how He knows everything...

"For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?"

29:16 is the famed portrait of the potter, that Paul uses to show that we should never question God's ways. We'll deal with it in Romans.

Still have trouble believing in an "election"? Then behold, 42:1, Jesus, God's Servant in whom God delights, "My Elect One..." He then goes on to tell what His chosen One will do. These are the things in fact that God has decreed to do. Jesus did them. He only did what He saw the Father doing. And the Father only did what He said he would do, not just seven hundred years earlier in Isaiah, but before the worlds were formed. Here is Election in its perfect form. Why can we not believe that we too are elected as a part of this Grand Scheme of things?

Who can proclaim as God does (44:7)? No one.

Take Cyrus as another example. Isaiah tells of his election in chapter 45. Cyrus is appointed of God to subdue nations. For Cyrus' sake? No, "For Jacob My servant's sake and Israel my elect (4)." And for God's: "That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides Me(6)..." Cyrus' life is laid out before him. In Cyrus's thinking, before God made these announcements, he was just wanting to rule the world, for his own purposes.

But God, Who knew his name, let him know that God's purposes were the ones he was really working toward.

God can take any of the evil that men do, even that you do, and use it for His glory.

From the Emperor to the animals of his creation God claims to be in charge. We need to hear it (46:9-11).

"...I am God, and there is no other...declaring the end from the beginning...saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure, calling a bird of prey from the east... indeed I have spoken it."

Emperors and eagles and everything in between, a part of God's plan. And you? "You who follow after righteousness (51:1), you who seek the Lord..." You were dug out of a rock, rescued out of a pit of your own making. Yes, you had free will. Free to sin and dishonor your Father. A freedom you inherited from Eden. But only that freedom. To do good you have no inclination or ability.

I mean, "Look to Abraham... (51:2) I called him alone and blessed him and increased him." Who was Abraham before the Lord revealed Himself to him? And who were you and who was I? But he chose us in Jesus just as surely as He chose Jesus, Cyrus, and that eagle.

Isaiah 53, perhaps the most important chapter of the entire Bible, brings us back to the Chosen Servant.

53:1. Only those to whom the arm of the Lord has been revealed, believe the report.

53:2-4. Israel, and with them the world, rejects this Elect one. Chosen of God but not of men.

53:5-7. Isaiah and his people and all the other elect. The ones for whom He was wounded. Oppressed. Slaughtered.

53:8-9. Unfair trial and burial with rich, all decreed beforehand.

53:10. Not the Jews and Romans and our sins... Ultimately it was the Lord Who bruised His own Son. Grace at its apex.

53:11. Jesus will justify many. Not all. You see the elect in this also.

53:12. The decree of the coming Kingdom.

No accidents. No surprises. All is going according to plan, even to this day! Appropriate time for a review lesson(55:11):

"So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

Jeremiah

Another prophet, another man totally known and pre-ordained and predestinated of God.

1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." More than that, "Before you were born I sanctified you; and I ordained you a prophet to the nations."

Then the attention turns to His people Israel. Backslidden. Idolatrous. Rebellious. And loved of God. The heart breaks to hear God's heart through Jeremiah.

In chapter 3 God spells out just how bad adultery is. Once the marriage vow has been broken, it is broken, right? But God says, still, "Return to Me." It's not an idle invitation that can be ignored. Not this one. First (vs 1, 14) it is "Return." But immediately after, the promise, the prophecy, the irresistible pull of God's Spirit wins:

"I will bring you to Zion...I will give you shepherds... Jerusalem shall be called the Throne of the Lord." All Israel will be saved, is how Paul put it. Backslidden, idolatrous, rebellious Israel. Eternally secure.

This is the promise to the nation, I understand. But is there not another nation God has been forming, to whom identical invitations and promises are made?

Things seem reversed in 7:27, where another decree of God establishes their hardness to Jeremiah's preaching, "You shall speak to them but they will not obey you." Here is Israel in process, but not final Israel. Here they test God's love, but God's love for this nation cannot fail their test.

You have tested God's love also?

Jeremiah 31:31 and following is the classic promise of the New Covenant. Now we shall see just how God will keep this Israel promise, and in the process, save a bunch of Gentiles too.

Are you a covenant keeper? Do you delight in God's Word and way? Your future was told here, and the reason for your love: God has written His law on your heart! That's why God is your God. That's why your sins will never be remembered again. It's as fixed, says God as the covenant God has made with the sun and stars. Eternal decrees keep them in place and this eternal decree will keep you in place too. (31:31-37)

Encouraging news, yes?

Equal to or if possible, even better, is 32:40. Here is promised an everlasting covenant. "I will not turn away from doing them good," says God. He will put His fear in their hearts, "so that they will not [as in *will not*] depart from Me."

Puppets? Manipulation? Call it what you want. Call it eternal security if you like. Give it your best shot, but as for me, I like the odds of a covenant like that! And I believe that is the very covenant I have!

Lamentations

Two more statements of the great prophet Jeremiah are worthy of our notice: They are found in 2:17 and 3:22 of Lamentations:

"The Lord has done what He purposed; He has fulfilled His Word [we call this 'decrees'] which He commanded in days of old. He has thrown down and has not pitied..." however, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not..."

He saves some. He hardens some. His purposes stand. He pities not those who have sinned and remain in their sins by their own choice. But some, He sets His love upon and saves.

Ezekiel

You can't get any more dead than those famous bones of Ezekiel 37. Unless it would be that spiritual death that we all experience, inherited as members of Adam's race.

Dead is dead. And no one comes to life unless God brings that person to life. There are just some things you can't do.

If you are Adam, you don't create yourself. You don't breathe life into the dust whether in Eden or Ezekiel. God is the initiator.

How can a man be born when He is old? Same deal. You start with nothing, and you create a new being through the breath of God's Spirit. You did not help your mother or father bring you into the world. Neither do you help the Heavenly Father when you are being born again.

Common, common sense. God initiates all. For His own purposes.

Can those dry bones live? Why of course! That's what God does, that's what He loves to do most, give life!

Daniel

The story of Daniel and the kings that surround him is a story of Sovereignty. There is simply no other way to explain it. In 1:9, God deliberately brings Daniel into favor with his superior, the chief of the eunuchs. Daniel is a prisoner. He is the enemy. But God has ordained that his chosen man will be accepted and prosperous in enemy territory.

Nebuchadnezzar next experiences the will of God in his life. A proud man and a proud Emperor, it would never have occurred to him to give glory to the God of one of his subjects. But God asserts himself into the picture by humbling Nebuchadnezzar.

After the humiliating disease has passed, Nebuchadnezzar proclaims what God's people need to start proclaiming:

"...He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?' " (4:35)

John Calvin could not have said it any better. As we travel through this study, it will become obvious where Calvin got most of his material.

For many years, Daniel's last prophecy, recorded in the last three chapters of the book, has fascinated me with its accuracy and its hiding-in-plain-sight of the mystery of the end times. Here once again we see how God not only foresees but decrees His will. Foreknowledge and decree are often, some say always, one and the same.

11:27-29 tells us that the days of the end time have all been appointed, decreed, planned, predestined. The men who shall take part in that final picture are spelled out here. Their actions and the outcome of those actions have all been done ahead of time. "What has been determined [not just known] shall be done (36)."

Hosea

Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 chronicle the decree of God regarding the people Israel and his undeserved favor upon them. Though not His people, yet they become His people by mercy, and mercy only. When He declares to them "You are My people," and only then, they can respond "You are my God."

Those who believe in the sovereignty of God are in essence saying, God first, people second. Is there one among us who will deny that it was God who came to them first?

Joel

Joel 2:32 is the source of our faith that "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." That's not a New Covenant verse, originally. Our God has never changed from covenant to covenant. The whosoever is there. Deliverance is there, but note, it is

"As the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls." No call of God means there will be no call of man. No call of God means no being saved. No call of God means no deliverance.

Again we must contend that God calls first, men second. "All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me, and he that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37)" is the way that Jesus said it.

Amos

Is God exclusive? Does His love know boundaries? Does He care for one more than another? It is difficult for us to believe in such a concept, if all our life we have heard otherwise. But consider Amos 3:2, in the light of all that has been said so far, and in the much greater light we shall experience when we cross over into the New Testament. God is speaking to Israel:

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

This "know" must not be the "know" of intelligence, for surely God knows of all the nations and every person therein. This must be the "know" of intimacy, of choosing, of caring. His

entire Being wrapped up in tiny Israel, so much so that He must take seriously Israel's disobedience, and deal with it.

God's eye is forever focused on His people. What a blessing! What a responsibility!

Obadiah

Remember Jacob and Esau? God loves one and hates the other, even before they have done anything, that is, before their "works" ?

Obadiah gives us the final outcomes of these two sons and their nations. In Jacob will be deliverance, holiness, possession of all things, the fire and flame of God. Esau? Stubble, devouring, no survivors.

Why? (18) "The Lord has spoken." And that is explanation enough.

Jonah

When men disobey, they are eligible for destruction. Unless they are the called of God, in which case, *correction* is in order.

When men fall into the ocean, they drown. Unless God works a miracle on their behalf.

When men are swallowed by sharks, they die. Unless God speaks to the shark and they vomit the man on dry land (2:10).

What we have called the incredible, nearly unbelievable story of Jonah is nothing more than God showing His sovereignty once more. When He wants a particular outcome,

He moves Heaven and Earth to make that outcome come out as he planned. The Plan? Save Nineveh. The instrument? Jonah. The disobedience? No problem. God's will will be done regardless!

But, but, "God is a gentleman," you say. That is the strange message we have always heard. He will never coerce. Never manipulate. Always invite, and leave the decision up to us...

In stories like Jonah we find that this simply is not the case. God is God and will do as he pleases.

Micah

God's very specific love for His own, Israel, is once more pointed out through the prophet Micah in 7:16-18 of that book. Here, the nations are ashamed, their mouths shut, their ears deafened, licking the dust like a serpent, crawling from their holes like snakes of the earth, afraid of the Lord.

But sinful Israel has as its God the one who "pardon[s] iniquity and pass[es] over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage. He does not retain His anger forever because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea..."

The nations of earth will not know this mercy, except in the case of those relatively few Gentiles called out of each tribe on earth. But Israel shall. In abundance!

Oh how glad we should be that He is on our side, that he has chosen us!

Nahum

Nahum speaks like a man who has studied Calvin. No, but Calvin must surely have studied Nahum. 1:3 speaks of the God who "has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm", 2:7 says that God makes decrees about those who will be led away captive, 2:13 and 3:5 declare that God is against Nineveh, though in Jonah He called many out of that wicked place.

Habakkuk

I see the word "appointed" in 1:12, and 2:3. Whether here or in Daniel it speaks to me of a God who makes up His mind that something will happen, and it happens. A Sovereign God.

Zephaniah

Zephaniah's special word is "remnant", though he is certainly not the only prophet who uses it. Israel will be judged. But not all. In the midst of the evil is a chosen people. Eventually "all Israel", chosen Israel, will be saved. Included in that number will be hordes of Gentiles who have been grafted on to the Israel tree.

In 2:9, Zephaniah sees the remnant conquering non-remnant Gentile nations. 3:13 pictures a pure and righteous Israel, brought back from destruction by a merciful God who favors them forever. All judgment is past. A striking picture of God's mercy, echoed in Hosea, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and others.

God has a people.

Haggai

Another chosen man. Zerubbabel, Governor of Judah, is told his place in what appears to be the Millennial Kingdom (2:23).

That our names are written in Heaven, that is what matters. Now I ask you, when did God write your name there? After you "stumbled" into faith in Christ and perhaps got baptized? Or was it before the foundation of the world. Answer coming...

Zechariah

12:10, 14:2. It is God Who gathers all nations against Jerusalem. He foreknows, yes, but because He foreordains. I know this *will* happen because *I* will do it, says God! This is not up to you. This prophecy is a decree.

Prophecies and miracles demand a Sovereign God Who can suspend laws of nature and put his will into the characters of history, which characters we all are. Providence is the manifestation of His decrees.

Malachi

Malachi 1:2,3 is where the Jacob-Esau passage is, that we've already discussed. Look at 3:6 while we are here:

"For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob!"

What does that mean? What is it that He has decided to do, and cannot change about? He has decreed that Israel will be, and will be forever, and that He will live among His people.

Normally, the sins that Israel has committed would be enough to send a people group to Hell a thousand times. Look at the wilderness. Look at the Kingdom idolatries. (Look at our own lives!)

But to Israel He lives out the word from the Psalms, "His mercy endures forever." He cannot change. He will always call his people back to Him. He'll write His very law in their hearts and mind. They *will* be saved. They *will* endure. And He with them, forever!

Oh so good to be on this team!

So ends our look at the Old Covenant. When I began this study, I knew there were a few troubling passages for Arminians in the New Testament. I looked for and found them. Then, as an added measure I thought I should at least browse the Old Testament too.

I am still quite surprised to have found evidences of this sovereign grace doctrine in nearly every Old Covenant book. The evidence is there.

We now turn to a wealth of confirmation from the lips of Jesus and His closest men. The teaching is as secure as we are. It's not going anywhere...

5. THROUGH THE BIBLE, THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew

Fittingly in the New Testament, our first encounter with God's sovereignty is in regards to Jesus Himself. 1:21 gives us the words of the angel that His name will be Jesus. A small point, you say. Yet, here God intervenes in the process of childbirth and imposes His own will on a mother. Yes, the child is His own, but some object to God's intervening in any way among us. Give us our free will. We will name our children. We will guide them into their careers. We'll be their protectors.

Sovereignty teaches that it is God, and not man, Who makes all these decisions, using His gentle Spirit's proddings and speakings to make it happen.

Jesus is born, grows, and takes on His ministry of teaching. Towards the end of the famed lesson on the hillside, 7:23, He surely startles his audience when He informs them that persons who seem to be ministering with the power of Heaven will be ejected from the Kingdom when Jesus declares He never knew them. This seems to compare favorably to Hebrews 6:4-8, where persons who came very close to the power of God and son-ship actually fall away and are refused.

The verses are important to our study in showing us that true believers will persevere, but those who only have the external trappings of salvation will not. In both passages, they are refused, and we are told that the requirement for salvation is Jesus' intimate knowledge of them, implying eternal

selection. See also John 10:14, where Jesus says that He knows His sheep, and is known by them. Relationship.

I enjoy finding what I call "Rosetta Stones" when searching out doctrines. In this case, a Rosetta Stone verse would be one that seems to be on both sides of the Sovereign Grace issue. Such a passage is 11:25-28.

The narrative is of a prayer to God and a plea to man. We see the very mind of God in the prayer, but the method for evangelism in the plea. It is most instructive.

The prayer. "You have hidden these things [that I am teaching publicly] from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes..." He explains further that "no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, *and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.*"

Oh my, shut the book! What further evidence do we need of the heart of God and His Son? Together, Father and Son make known to specific, pre-ordained men and women the revelation of Who Jesus is, of what salvation is all about, forgiveness of sins, eternal life. That is how we know God and God knows us.

I am so glad that Jesus abruptly stopped that chain of thought, turned to the audience, and said, "Come to Me, all..."

His method was and continues to be "Whosoever will may come." His theology, and ours, must be, "No one, except the ones to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

It's not either or. We must evangelize believing everyone who hears us is called to salvation. We must rejoice that the

one or two or more that come along with us have been called by the Father.

There's a tension there, a balance we must achieve in our thinking. But both truths are real.

Matthew 12:18 quotes the Isaiah "Servant" passage we covered while there. God's chosen.

13:10-11 is a hard saying for many. The doctrine under examination itself is a hard doctrine, yet the most glorious of all for us. The question is put to Jesus as to why He always speaks in parables, and His answer, "because it has been *given to you* to know the mysteries of the kingdom, but to them it has *not been given.*"

Here is God again predetermining that a group of people will not understand the message of Jesus. He quotes the Isaiah passage that says essentially the same thing.

One could argue, this is because, as the text says, "they have closed their eyes," (13:15). God is merely responding to their evil hearts. True, but are not all hearts evil?

Why to these particular Jews, the disciples, "Blessed are your eyes for they see"? Who made the disciples see and allowed the others to remain blind? Were these men "better"? Were they seeking after God?

"You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you," is the response to that.

Why could these evil Jews not be given another chance? Why not allow grace on all of them?

With that we come to the unanswerable again. He gives grace to whom He wills, for His own purposes. A hard answer. A hard saying indeed.

The same concept is repeated at 19:11, where Jesus tells us that only certain people are called to celibacy. It is an inner knowing, not an outer effort, that accomplishes a feat like this. Jesus knew. Paul knew. It was not to be a general gift for all, not even all apostles and leaders, but to some it was "given." Grace. Sovereign grace.

In the parable of the workers in the vineyard (20:15-16), the Master has the owner of the vineyard, namely Himself, saying to some workers who felt themselves cheated (That's not fair!) that it is lawful for the one in charge to do what he wishes with his own things.

The parable also concludes that "many are called, but few chosen."

We find in other passages that this calling is done by the preaching of the Gospel. The choosing, done by God Himself, is an action that took place before the foundation of the world. How many millions and millions have heard the Gospel? How many have accepted it and will be in Heaven because of it?

We all agree with the answers to those two questions. Where the church divides is in giving the reason why those answers are as they are. Let's keep tracing the Scriptures to see what they actually say, not what seems to us to be right.

Our first opportunity to examine this further is in 23:37, a passage oft quoted by those who agree with Arminian theology. Here, it is Jesus, eternal God that He is, remembering His own willingness to gather Israel together, and Israel's unwilling heart.

So after all, salvation is dependent on man's will, not God's?

Was it all Jerusalem who killed the prophets? The apostles were not involved in this. Surely there were remnant Jews also who did not participate in this evil.

Men shall be damned because of their unwillingness to come to Christ and the Father. Not because God chose them to do evil, made them do evil. They have been doing evil forever, there is none righteous, no not one.

The question is not about them. The question continues to be about us. How did we get where we are? Why are we saved? How can it be that a damned world has produced a remnant of grace? To ask it in this manner is to answer it. Grace. Only grace. God has touched our hearts and called us to Himself.

In 24:22 and 24 is a dual encounter with the word "elect." There is in the world today and in the heavens, a group of people elected by God. That word only means chosen, but there is something about the word that reminds us of our specialness. Humans are "chosen" to a team, but "elected" to office. It's a different feeling.

When the election took place, there was a host of candidates, only one Elector. When He went into the Voting Booth of Heaven, He elected everyone from Jesus to the apostles to all believers of all time. The number is fixed. The outcome of the election is sure. I win.

I take it here (22) that the tribulation period coming to the earth will be shortened for the sake of that small minority of saints that Daniel mentions as being survivors of this final holocaust. Since they must survive, the war will end.

In verse 24 Jesus says, in essence, that it is impossible to deceive the elect in any ultimate sense. Many will try in the last days. The signs and wonders of antichrist, the close but not accurate teachings that will come forth, will all go over the heads of the elect. They're not buying. They know the Shepherd's Voice and will follow no other. That's what chosen people do.

"From the foundation of the world." I like that phrase, don't you? Such security. In 25:34,41, Jesus presents to His own a kingdom that was prepared ages ago. Prepared for you. A prepared place for a prepared people. Its houses and gardens and roads, all to be people by individuals. There will be no vacancies. The number was known when the buildings were going up. There's a place with your name on it. "I go to prepare a place for you," says Jesus to His disciples. If the Kingdom was prepared from the foundation of the world, this preparation mentioned by Jesus must have to do with individual offices or decorations. He has known forever who would be there.

Mark

Another detail of the Kingdom is mentioned in Mark's Gospel (10:40). James and John ask to be installed on the sides of Jesus when He is coronated. Though their request is denied, the fact comes out that there really is such a place of honor, and that it has been predestinated to someone else.

Mark also mentions some of the things that Matthew discussed, so we'll move on to Luke...

Luke

Luke's Gospel also is a "Synoptic" and therefore carries much of Matthew's and Mark's words. But there are a few additional insights we can glean here.

John the Baptist is to be filled with God's Spirit from the womb of his mother Elizabeth (1:15). Let no one charge God with invasive techniques, however. The Spirit of God must have His way. Is there any among us who would not have loved to be filled with God from the start?

His wooing and drawing us later in life seems gentle by comparison, but its intent and result is the same. His sheep hear His voice.

The well-known birth story is next. Have you ever wondered why Jesus' birth is announced only to the few? Unfair? You see, these things keep revealing themselves throughout the Bible story, a God who picks and chooses according to His purposes. If you and I were doing things, we would have had T.V. cameras, reporters from all over the world, bright lights, megaphones, microphones, telephones. The whole world would have known immediately!

But the fact is, only a handful of shepherds and a few astrologers were invited to the scene. Witnesses enough. Blessed are those who did not see, but still believe.

2:34 uses that word we have come to fear, "destined." It sounds like "karma" to us, a pagan description of "fate" or "luck". Nevertheless, neglected or feared, the doctrine of destiny is a Biblical doctrine.

Jesus is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel...

6:13 tells us of twelve men who are destined to follow Jesus, specifically -not randomly – chosen after a night in prayer, not after having surveyed the most talented faithful men in Israel.

12:32 speaks of a “little flock” to whom is to be given the entire Kingdom of God one day. Why so little? Why so few that find the Way? Of course, as we have noted above, we could even ask, why anyone at all? For no one deserves Heaven. Are we to look to man's faith and works, or merely to the grace of God who calls? Some want to look at both, but then who receives the glory for saving man?

Satan enters the plan of God in Luke 22. We remember how deceiving spirits were sent by God to bring Ahab to his death. We see the enemy being allowed by God to test Job, in hopes of bringing him down. Here is what Satan believes to be his finest hour. With permission granted by the Designer of the Plan of our salvation, he enters Judas and the Pharisees to bring Jesus to His death (22:3-5) .

Satan asks permission to have Peter also (22:32). You see how pervasive is his attack on the church, how persistent is his desire to destroy us. But with Peter, the assault is turned back by a simple Divine “No.” Jesus prays for His own, and they shall never perish. More of this in John.

John

Though there are key verses throughout the Scriptures, it seems that John and Paul have been given the lion's share of proof of the Sovereignty of God. Interesting to me is the fact

that John is by far the most popular of the Gospels. Rarely does a publishing house create a “Gospel of Matthew” for distribution. Always it is John. John has everyone's favorite verse, and some of the loveliest thoughts from the Master.

Yet John is also filled with imagery that is quite confusing and, for some, even dangerous. Here we are told to eat Jesus' flesh and blood, for example. Here also are the doctrines of grace laid out in absolutely certain terms. Unmistakable evidence to the one who is listening. Troubling to the souls who have imbibed nothing but “free will” all of their lives. These verses need constant explaining, then eventually, ignoring, so as not to stir up any strange notions of a God who is made in the image of John Calvin.

I came to a point where I could ignore these verses no longer. I find them now to be my joy, not strange at all. So much of the rest of Scripture fits together now. Though it is possible for pendulums to swing too far, I am confident that I have found something wonderful.

The new birth is the first subject that catches our eye in John. People who are truly born of God are not born by their own will (1:13). No-brainer, we say. Our natural birth is the same way. Is there anyone who has willed his own birth? Anyone who participated in it, except to “show up”? Anyone who helped the doctor or the struggling mother?

No. One moment you were not, and the next moment you were. Born and hungry and ready to go.

Born again is like that too, says John... “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

The new birth conversation picks up in 3:3-8, with Nicodemus, a talk we all remember well, but sometimes with the same dullness that that Pharisee evidenced. Jesus says to him that he must be born “again”, or perhaps more correctly, “from above.” That which is born of flesh (human) is flesh. But a Spirit man is a product of Spirit.

His comparison of Spirit and wind nails down the argument even more clearly. The wind blows where it wants to blow. So does God's Spirit.

What about faith? It is not mentioned here, but it seems clear now that faith is a *product* of the new birth, not the cause of it! From the very moment of birth, it is God who receives the glory, God Who is doing everything, man who is swept into the Kingdom, one moment not here, the next moment here.

It is God who gives the grace to believe, to repent, to be baptized, to live godly. He is all, and He is in all.

John 3:16-18 we have covered above. Suffice it here to say that though it is true that God loved the “world” it is also true that the “world” through Him will be saved. Everything He sets his mind to He accomplishes. We must understand the world in this passage to mean representatives of every nation of that world. We know that in the latter case for sure, it does not mean every individual. In fact, at the time of this statement, and at the time of Jesus' death, most of the world was already in Hell.

The world is under the condemnation of God at this hour and always has been since the fall (3:18,36). Men will be lost, justly, because of their sin. But God saw all that, and loved into

being a people whom He graciously called out of that evil world unto Himself.

John 4:14 is the first intimation that our salvation is eternally secure. The woman at the well was promised a fountain of living internal water that would eventually spring up into eternal life. The words "if you can hang on" are not appended to this promise.

God's choices. God's sovereign choices. See it again in 5:2ff, where one man out of a "great multitude" of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, is singled out for healing by Jesus. In many of the passages about Jesus' healing we are told that He healed them all. Everyone. But not here. He chose one. Why? We can speculate all day, but the answer is , "We do not know." The further answer is, "He does all things well."

Why does He save only certain ones? Why you? Why me? That is definitively answered in 5:21, "The Son gives life to whom He will." Did I say "definitively"? That's as definitive as it gets with this subject. His will is all that matters.

5:40 says that the others are simply not willing to come to Jesus. Why are they not willing? Why would anyone not be willing to come to this marvelous Savior? Their eyes are not opened.

But you say, again, "not fair!" If it is God making me willing or allowing me to stay unwilling, who can resist the will of God? Indeed. Paul's question, that we will come to in Romans. Paul's answer, "How dare you reply against God!"

John 6:37-45 seems to spell out as clearly as anywhere in the Bible that God has chosen certain men to salvation, and that that salvation is eternally secure. How often I have read

this with a worried heart, for those who do not believe in an eternal security and an elect race are forever wondering if they are one of the chosen. They do not want to face the possibility that maybe they are not, so they refuse the implication of a choosing God altogether. In the process, they make salvation dependent on their own choosing, a shaky foundation for eternal life if ever there was one.

37a. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me." God has chosen a people that He is giving to His Son, per Psalm 110's decree that Jesus is to be King over all. These people *will* come to Jesus. Here is where the doctrine of "irresistible" grace comes in. He doesn't beat us over the head, but He does make Himself attractive to our spirits in such a way that we have no desire to say no to Him.

37b. "...the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." Did you feel drawn to Jesus and His salvation? He will not cast you out. He will receive you. He has received you. "But I don't believe in Calvin! I'll be Arminian all my life!" No problem. Your theological stance does not influence the fact that you have been called. And received. This is how people know they are of the chosen: they wanted to come to Jesus, and they came to Him, and their relationship has been wonderful. What church has influenced your thinking all your life will never change this, though it could affect your ongoing appreciation of what has happened.

39. "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day." See how secure this is? Once you've been "given" by the Father to the Son, you are in. Jesus won't lose you. He'll

call you to greater and greater heights of holiness and glory, then sweep you into the Kingdom at last.

44. "No one can come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him..." No one. He draws, you respond.

45b. "...Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me." So here we find out just how you are drawn in. You hear and learn from the Father. A Gospel tract or video. A sermon. A testimony. A song. You hear something. You learn something. It goes straight to your heart. You are warmed inside. You want more. He gives more...

Chapter 10's discussion of the Good Shepherd helps us to understand John 3:16 a little better. God gave His only begotten Son, says Jesus. That Son in 10:11 is the Good Shepherd. And "the Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep." Notice the other members of the group described. There is the hireling. There are the wolves. The shepherd does not give His life for them. Only for the sheep. Limited atonement is a difficult idea and many have accepted all the doctrines of grace except this one. All we can do is read what it says. And keep praying for more light.

John 10:29-30 was offered to me as a teenager by a fellow student. God even then was trying to tell me just how secure I am, but I wanted to have it, for some odd reason, that I could jump ship and spoil everything at any time. In the 50 years since Rick shared that verse with me, I have failed the Lord, the church, my family, over and over, but my relationship goes on. I still love and serve Him. I was wrong to doubt His power to keep me.

Again, the words are clear. I give them eternal life. They will never perish. No one shall snatch them from my hand. Not even “them”. My Father gave them to Me. No one is able to snatch them from My Father's hands. My Father and I are One. Together we will keep each person given.

11:26 repeats the promise, to Lazarus' sister Martha: “Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”

By the way, while we are talking of Lazarus, try this on: Lazarus could not raise himself. He was dead. Dead men do not raise themselves from the dead.

And you? The Bible says you were dead in your trespasses and sins before Jesus came. How is it that you raised yourself? You did not. Christ did all the raising when He drew you to Himself.

So Jesus manifests Himself to some, but not to all. Why is that? Judas – not Iscariot – asked that very question in John 14:22. Jesus responded that God only enters into the heart of those with whom He has a relationship based on mutual love. We have seen above where that love begins, and we must interpret His answer in that light.

But Judas was thinking important things. Again, why us? Why just the shepherds and the “wise men”? Why that one guy at Bethesda healed? Why, why, why?

If you keep asking questions like that, you are in good company. But we again respond, “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” We simply do not know why He makes these choices, why He loved us so much and saved us. We have alluded to 15:16 before, “You have not chosen me but I chose you...” He goes on to say that this choosing does not just result

in a one-time celebration and then a life of ease while we sit and wait for Heaven. We were chosen to go bear fruit. We were chosen to ask and receive things from the Father. We were chosen unto good works. If you see one who calls Himself Christian but who has no good works associated with his life, this one needs to heed the call to make his “calling and election sure.” That's from Paul, and we have much more to glean from him later.

The so-called “high-priestly” prayer of Jesus in chapter 17 is full of the language of sovereignty.

6. “...the men whom You have given Me out of the world.”

9. “I do not pray for the world, but for those You have given Me...” Two classes of people are described throughout Scripture. God's elect, and the rest of the world.

11. “...those whom You have given Me.”

12. “Those whom You gave Me I have kept...”

14, 16. “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

By the way, Christ's intercession for His people, that they would be kept, is this not another huge sign of our security? Is there a prayer that the Son has not had answered positively? Then His prayer for us will be heard too.

Indeed, 18:9, “Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.” This was in regards to His protection of His frightened disciples in the Garden. These are the men who lived with Him for 3 years and are now about to head for the hills. But did He not keep them all anyway? Will He not keep you also, though you fail Him often?

Acts

Luke's book of Acts is also surprisingly full of clues that will help us solve the mystery of God's pre-ordained plan.

2:5 further explains God's promise to pour out His Spirit on "all flesh" and the statement that He so loved "the world." For, "There were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven." It is in this sense that the Gospel was preached to the whole world. Representatives from every nation were there, and received the power of God.

Once more, in 23-28, we see God's plan for Jesus, which allowed for no separate plan by the Son. He did what He saw the Father do. His life was mapped out from start to finish. At that finish, "[He] being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God," was slain by wicked men.

Notice the counsel precedes the foreknowledge. That is, there was a plan in place, and that is what God foresaw. Foreknowledge is not just God observing all the counsels of man, as though they are directing traffic. Foreknowledge means God has planned and therefore knows what is coming!

3:20 tells of a God Who has been speaking forth His decrees since the world began. One of them is that Jesus will remain in Heaven until all is restored.

4:27,28, confirms that although it looked like Herod and Pilate were directing the events of that awful weekend, it was God's purpose beforehand that was being lived out.

Can we not argue that such is the situation with us? God has a plan, and a people, and it looks like we are choosing all, but in fact the choosing has already been done and we are

living it all out? Is that offensive? How would it change your daily life to believe such a thing?

Enter Saul, soon to be Paul, 9:15. Chosen. Like Jesus. Like us. Earlier in the chapter on the Damascus Road, Saul's friends "heard" but did not hear the Voice from Heaven! Yet Paul heard everything in crystal clarity. This is symbolic (though a true story) of the way even today some can hear God's Voice, and some cannot. And why is that? I think you know now how I must answer such a question.

The story that ends in 13:48 ought to be a home run in its effectiveness in scoring a point of understanding of sovereignty. The Jews are in the process of rejecting yet another of God's spokesmen among them, the apostle Paul. Paul turns to the Gentiles, who as a group are delighted. But there is a smaller group. Read carefully:

Of those Gentiles, "...as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."

Wow! So clear. God appoints people to eternal life. After that appointment, they believe! Not the other way around, mind you! We like to say that it is because God sees that we are going to believe, He "appoints" us to be saved. Any basic reader can understand that that is not how it works.

No, as James, who is quoting Paul, says in 15:14, "God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name... known to God from eternity are all His works." A long, long time ago, God knew and ordained every saved Gentile by name. In our own day, that foreknowledge and appointment have been made public.

16:14 tells us how Lydia, already a woman of prayer, became a woman of God, one of the saved, redeemed: "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul." It's the only way one can come to the Father. The Father draws, opens the heart, enters in.

To Corinth. As in Antioch, God has some people there. His man Paul needs to know that, as things are getting pretty rough. It would be possible in some cases to move on, dust the feet off, etc. But not here, "...for I have many people in this city." God knew that certain ones were going to be saved, because he had so appointed them. Hang in there Paul, until they come in.

So today God is waiting until the last of the elect comes in. "God is not willing that any should perish," that is, any of the chosen ones, and so He waits. That verse we will see from the apostle Peter later.

Is it sinking in? All our believing even is not of ourselves, as Paul will later tell us, it is all grace. This was his encouragement in 18:27: "...when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace." There's no other saving way to believe but by grace.

In 22:14 Paul tells more details of his conversion, words from Ananias, who was first sent to him after that rocky ride on Damascus Road. It is a word we all could take to heart:

"God has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth."

May it be so.

Romans

Romans is the heartland of Sovereignty teaching. Here are the Bible's most troubling verses on the subject, at least for those who are still in the other camp. Many have heard these verses. Most have come up with an interpretation that allows them to move on un-touched. But I suggest that in the light of all that we have examined so far, we take a closer look at Paul's statements.

It all starts in 1:1. In this verse Paul declares that he was not only called, but separated. In verse 6 he extends that appointment to his fellow-believers in Rome, the "called" of Christ Jesus. He will make a clear statement later in the letter as to what he means by "called" and what their destiny is.

In 1:19-29, the apostle makes his case about a condemned world. He claims rightly that no one has an excuse before God. All are corrupt fools who have given themselves to their flesh and to other gods besides their Creator.

He further justifies his God in giving them up to their lusts. No one on that day will say they are judged unjustly. The world, without Christ, is totally lost, depraved, undeserving of any gifts from God.

If the book were to end here, no one could cry out "unfair." No one could demand that God owes them something. The rules were made, the rules were broken. They were written in man's heart, in nature, in stone, and always disobeyed. End of story.

Of course, the book does not end here. Amazing grace enters. But grace is not amazing if someone believes it is

deserved. In fact, deserved grace is not grace at all. This will be Paul's point in Romans.

In fact, 4:4 makes that point early on. Paul says that if I do something good, and God pays me for that thing, He does it out of debt, not grace. We have all believed that none of our good works could earn us Heaven. Have any of us also concluded that even our faith could be viewed as a work? Believing itself is an act of the mind. Does God owe me salvation because I first believed in Him? Ephesians will answer that one.

5:8 reminds us which came first, our love or His. His love of course. He died for us. While we were still sinners, He died for us. This refers to the fact that we were in His mind from the beginning, and on the cross. One more clue about our predestined status.

The "we" and "us" of the passage is not the whole world and every member thereof. It is "us" , the saved, the church, the sheep. He died for us, though He knew we would live a life of sin for x number of years. He saw the sin, but He had already chosen us to salvation, and died for us anyway.

Again 3:16 comes to mind. And I John 4:19, "We love Him because He first loved us."

Romans 8-11 form the basis for Paul's sovereign grace teachings. These are some of the most hard of the "hard sayings" of Paul, perhaps the very words of which Peter spoke when he suggested that Paul says some difficult things sometimes...

It begins in 8:18 and following with a discussion of suffering now vs. glory then, which cannot be compared. He then speaks of how the present creation is waiting for the sons

of God to be revealed and set things right. No need for the fanciful interpretations of our day on this passage. The fact is, Jesus and Jesus' people will rule the earth one day, and this earth will hum with order and beauty unparalleled in its history.

All of this leads him to talk of what is going on now in terms of our prayer life and how all that works, in the Spirit. Then he comes down hard with this fact (27):

It is the Spirit of God within the church that is directing everything. When we pray in the Spirit, the Spirit answers those prayers according to the will of God. That is, God is in charge, and He has taken direct charge of His Church by means of His Spirit. Therefore everything the Christian prays for in the Spirit, according to the will of God, will be done, and all things that come about through this prayer work together for the good of God's people. It can be no other way but good when they listen to what God is saying, and say what God is wanting.

Here is where he brings in the fact that there is a group of people in the world who have been called out according to His purpose.

It is a group He foreknew.

That same group He decided ahead of time to be conformed to Jesus in every particular.

That same group He called, by the Gospel.

That same group He justified, saved, redeemed, forgave.

That same group He took on to Himself. Those still here will one day join them.

Knowing these facts is what gives the believer his eternal security, as explained in 31-39. God, says Paul, has decided to save us. Whose decision can counter God's? What individual

would want to? No created thing can separate us from the love of Christ. You are a created thing. Can you separate yourself?

We spoke of the Jacob and Esau situation above. It is recorded here in 9:11-13, as Paul makes the case that our salvation has nothing to do with our works. The twins were still in the womb when a decision about each of them was made.

He goes on to cite Pharaoh as another witness to the fact that God can harden whom He pleases when He pleases. This also we have already discussed.

As sinful man continues to cry out "unfair", Paul lashes back in the name of the Lord and questions little man for questioning a big God. How dare we think we understand His heart and mind? How dare we think our sense of justice is more refined than His? How dare we speak out against a holy God!

A potter can make pieces of pottery simply to be discarded if he wants. And he can make other pottery to be used indefinitely. Our God has such rights if anyone does!

Hosea and Isaiah are next quoted. People who were not considered to be His people suddenly are, by grace. The number of these people is fixed, and given a name in Isaiah: the remnant. We use the term "elect" today.

There is no opening of the mouth once Paul is finished with this argument. God calls, chooses, has mercy, hardens. Not whimsically. Not unfairly. But according to His own purposes.

Chapter 11 carries on this theme speaking in verse 7 of an elect Israel that is differentiated from non-elect Israel, that is hardened.

Those who have trouble with this line of thinking see some light in verses 19-23. Paul uses the analogy of a tree. The tree is

Israel. The natural branches of this tree are all the Israelites individually. Alas, most were broken off because of unbelief. In their place, God grafts in Gentile branches which actually become a part of Israel.

Those grafted in begin to boast that they replaced a natural branch! Paul says, Don't do that. God could cut you off too, and graft the true Jews back in if they repent.

He says that the condition for staying in is that you "continue in His goodness."

In the light of every other passage on this subject, we respond, "and we will." Will what? Will "continue in His goodness." Paul's hypothetical will not come to pass. The saved of today will be the saved of tomorrow. The number and names will not change.

Yet God uses "means" to accomplish this task. One of the "means" is warnings like this. The truly saved will tremble at even the hypothetical possibility of falling away and will remain true to Christ.

This point is summarized in verse 29: "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." That is, God does not change His mind.

Let's move on to Corinth.

1 Corinthians

Paul shows us in 1:8,9, that our security is based on God, not ourselves. He will continue to strengthen us to the end. He is faithful.

The familiar discussion of the natural man not being able to discern the things of the Spirit (2:14) has added meaning now that we see that God speaks to us by His Spirit, specifically to save and keep us. The others are like the Jews who could not understand the parables of Jesus, and Jesus did not want them to understand it.

Those of us who have received from God need to keep being reminded that there is absolutely nothing about our natural man that merits the joys of Heaven (4:7). It's all pure grace.

The very ordering of the members of the Body, with their several gifts, is also a thing of the Spirit, not of man, though man tries to duplicate and manipulate (12:18,28).

Vocabulary is important. It's easy for us, as Paul, to slip into "I did this, and I did that," but referring to labors for God, Paul corrects that talk and says instead, "the grace of God which was within me," (15:10) did the work. Even Jesus talked this way, "The words that I speak to you are not Mine but the Father Who dwells within Me, He does the works."

2 Corinthians

Paul once more claims that everything coming from Him is really God's work, not his own (3:5).

"Hardening" of Israel's heart is again mentioned in 3:14-16, in the passive voice, meaning Israel did not do it.

More to the point regarding the "veil" of "hardening", Paul comes out and says that there is a group of people who are

perishing. They are already known in heaven, and they simply cannot see the things whereof we speak (4:3).

13:5 is another of those verses that causes trembling among the elect. Self-test is admonished by the apostle. Do whatever you have to do to be sure you are one of His. Look at your life. Is it producing holiness? Look at your ministry. Are people coming to know the Lord, are believers being edified, is the world and church around you any better over the days and weeks and years? Is your light shining? Take stock. If you cannot see Jesus in anything you do, it is time to repent and be saved.

Galatians

3:8. Notice here that God is said to "justify the nations." It is in this vein that we see John 3:16. God so loved the world. God will justify the nations. In neither case is the Scripture talking about every individual in every nation on the entire globe that ever lived, that is living now, and that will live. But from every nation, kindred, and tribe, a people is being called out who will one day rule this world that God loved so much.

Ephesians

We are caught off guard in the little letter to Ephesus. Some hard-hitting theology greets us from chapter 1, as in verse 4, where we are told that we who are in Him were chosen before the foundation of the world! This selected group is to live holy before God.

More motivation is given in the very next verse: "...having predestinated us to adoption..." So that's the plan. Our destiny is to be an adopted Son of God.

But on what basis? 5.b says "...according to the good pleasure of His will."

So there it all is again, in that crystal clarity to which we have become accustomed.

And there it is again in verse 11. We have obtained - already- an inheritance, "being predestinated according to the purpose of Him Who works all things according to the counsel of His will."

His purpose. His will. Seems like we have run across those words before!

The coming of the Spirit into our life is the guarantor of all this, the down-payment, the seal, the assurance that we are one of the beloved.

2:1 tells us the obvious. Since you were dead, you could not bring yourself to life. He did that for you.

And the famous Ephesians 2:8, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and [even] that [faith] not of yourselves; it is the gift of God! "

So it is God who gives the faith, too! We say that "we" believed, but it was really the "faith of God" in us believing!

If it is God Who gives faith, He cannot elect a person *on account of* his faith, which He foresaw. God does not choose someone because he knows He will choose them! He chooses them, sees them, and brings them to glory, because... because... because He will.

Philippians

Here is a comforting verse. 1:6, "He Who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." He started it. He'll finish it. Not without you, of course, but every aspect of what happens from birth to earth is from His hand and power. He will receive all the glory!

Further, 2:13, it is God who is even working inside of you to want to do the right thing. We are not saved by works, yet His workings continue to be manifest through us.

Colossians

Here is another place we are called "the elect of God." It is a phrase that should now be rich with meaning (3:12).

1 Thessalonians

Paul is confident that his Thessalonian readers are among the elected (1:4-5).

No, people who know they are elect are not slothful. They are ever mindful of the call and must walk a walk that is worthy of such a calling. Note it is not the working, but the calling, that comes first. We work because we are elected, we do not work in hopes that He will elect us (2:12).

We have an appointment. We will all keep it. Our appointment is to obtain eternal salvation with Christ. 5:9

2 Thessalonians

The subject is the great apostasy and the coming of Christ (2:11-14). Once more we are confronted with a God who will deliberately blind people if they do not have pleasure in the truth. And no unsaved person delights in the ultimate truth of God. So God will put a spirit of deception on them when the last days emerge and antichrist rises. All the world will be fooled in this way. But of course, not the elect. We learned that back in Matthew.

1 Timothy

We spoke of an objection and dealt with it earlier, in 2:4-6. Also see 5:21, where mention is made of "elect angels." Yes, there is choosing in the angelic realm also. This electing concept is one with which we must come to terms.

2 Timothy

Here (1:9) again Paul spells out that which by now is to us a familiar doctrine.

God saved us. He called us. Not according to our works. According to His purpose and grace. All of this was given to us before time began.

And in 1:12: Paul knows God and this grace of God so well that he is confident that whatever he has committed to God, God will keep. That is not to say that Paul did not buffet his

body daily, die with Jesus daily, and all the rest. He accepted the "means" put before him. But his salvation was sure!

More security in 2:19. "The Lord knows them who are His." This is the foundation on which the promise is given. God knew me and chose me. I will make it on that basis.

Do we know the elect's identity? Not at all. Paul says there will be those who will oppose us. We will at times need to correct them. They may show up even in the church. Be humble with them, be gentle. For all you know (25) they may be the next one to whom God is going to grant repentance and knowledge of the truth.

Titus

The elect are mentioned in 1:1, and the grace of God that brings salvation in 2:11.

Philemon

In this one-chapter book I was able to find no specific mention of sovereign grace. The author has declared himself quite well in other books, though.

Hebrews

The book of Hebrews introduces some "if's" to the discussion of eternal security. Look at 3:6, "...whose house we are, *if* we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end."

Also 3:14, "For we have become partakers of Christ *if* we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end."

The response to this, again, is, "And we will." Christ is in us completing what He began, according to Paul. Nothing that the writer of Hebrews can say changes that.

We dealt in the intro with passages like 6:6-9 and 10:26-29 that suggest awful punishments to those who might fall away. But we won't. That is confidence, not in our own strength, but in the strength of the one Who holds us in the palm of His hands.

In each of the severe warnings, the writer returns to the reality that the persons to whom he is writing will indeed not go that evil route. He even says in 10:39, "But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."

And God will use these scary letters to be sure that His sensitive saints do not stray. No, it will not happen!

After all, 12:23, we are actually registered in Heaven! Do you believe that God goes through the register and crosses out names from time to time? Is our salvation not more secure than that?

Thank you, Brother Paul, for all this clarity on sovereign grace.

James

We revisit the born again experience in 1:18. How did we get here? Remember John? James agrees. Not by our own will! Not by the will of some other human! But "Of His own will He

brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures."

1 Peter

Did Peter also believe in eternal security? Hear him at the very beginning of his letter:

(1:3-5) "...God... has begotten us again... to an inheritance incorruptible, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith..."

Sounds secure to me. God started it by giving me new birth. He attached an inheritance to it. The inheritance is reserved for me. And to that end I am being kept by God's power. Sounds like language we have heard before, and sounds very secure...

After all, that seed which is in us cannot decay or change (23). It is the very Word of the living God. Once it is spoken in the human spirit, it will do its work.

And unbelievers? They too have a promise that cannot be broken, an appointment (2:8). Their appointment is to stumble. Those who have rejected Christ will trip and fall, and all of this was fore-appointed by God. Read it carefully: 2:6-8.

But not you, believer. Chosen, royal, holy. And as in Hosea and Paul, once not even a people at all before men, but because of your calling aeons ago, now a people, and a people who have obtained the undeserved favor and mercy of God (9-10) .

2 Peter

It behooves us, since there really is an "election", a calling from eternity, a series of Divine appointments that will usher the chosen into the Presence of God forever, it behooves us, I say, and Peter says, to be absolutely sure of our calling (1:8-10). Paul had said it and we commented on it, above. Test yourself. Be thorough. Do you remember a call? A sealing? A change? New life? Fruit? Be sure. Be very sure!

In 2nd Peter is a reminder of how God chooses and spares but also unapologetically wipes out entire civilizations, yea worlds, of disobedient.

So it shall be in the last day. The chosen "Noah's", made righteous by the blood of Christ, will all be spared, but the great masses of humanity will be cast out of His Presence forever. And they will weep, and they will gnash their teeth, and I imagine many will still be calling out "unfair" as they descend into Hell.

But it is we, the redeemed who alone have a right to say such a word. Unfair! Why should I be saved? Why should the Son of God come to Earth for me and the relatively few earthlings who will escape the wrath of God? Why?

Shall we ever know His mind? Shall we ever stop thanking Him that he chose us? You see the glory of the doctrines of grace when you see what is coming to the planet.

In 3:9 we are reminded that God awaits the coming in of all the elect before this judgment comes. He is not willing that any of us perish.

1 John

1 John is a book of "us" and "them." Though 2:2 talks about a propitiation (atonement, expiation) that Jesus was for the whole world, 4:10 clarifies by adding that the Son was sent to be the propitiation for *our* sins.

They and we are alluded to in 2:19 : "They went out from us..." "They" being a series of false teaching antichrists. Verses 20 and 27 go on to explain why the "we" are who we are: the anointing, or Presence of God through the Holy Spirit. We are nothing without this Presence. The doctrines of grace and the doctrines regarding the Spirit perfectly dovetail, as in Romans 8. God is doing according to His will, and His will is manifested through actions of the Spirit in His Church. All human personality is buried. No man does His own will and survives in the ongoing workings of the Spirit of God. The eternal plan will be worked out in us, but through Him alone (See also 4:13).

More to this in 5:10. True believers in Jesus have the Spirit inside witnessing to that fact. Unbelievers wittingly or not continue to call God a liar. 5:20 ends the book by declaring that it is to "us" that an understanding has been given regarding the true God. That "us" is the same "us" elsewhere known as the elect, the chosen, the called, the pre-ordained, the predestined.

2 John

1:1 and 13 have John speaking of an elect lady and her sister. Whether this be an individual family or two church

families, the fact remains that "election" is a vocabulary word that Christians need to use and understand.

3 John

Once more I come across a book, one chapter long, in which I find no clear references to the doctrine of grace. And once more, the author has declared himself on this doctrine quite well.

Jude

A most difficult book/chapter, looking much like the words of Peter in his 2nd epistle. But Jude bears witness to the truth of predestination and the election.

Verse 4 speaks of evil men who had long before been "marked out" for condemnation. We are always careful to stop short of accusing God of any evil. For Him it is impossible. For us to accuse is very dangerous. Nevertheless, in allowing men to be given over to their lusts and other sinful ways, eventually the enemy will use these evils for his purposes, which, in a wisdom we cannot comprehend, plays into the eternal plan of God also.

For these evil men a reservation has also been made, and it will be kept (13): "...the blackness of darkness forever..." will be their abode.

Thankfully the book ends on a happier note, affirming once more our security in Christ: 24 tells us that our God is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before the

presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Now there's a promise!

Revelation

We now rejoin the great apostle John for a fitting end to the discussion of electing and securing grace.

It is God, says Jesus to the church in Philadelphia (3:7-13), who opens and shuts doors. Man only thinks he does. God has the Key.

Still have trouble believing in numbers? That God would choose this many and no more? Check out chapter 7, where 144,000 Jews are "sealed." This sealing in Paul seems to refer to the coming on an individual of the Holy Spirit.

The point here is that God chooses, and counts, and excludes. We really do not want to hear this. But here it is.

That God could be behind something negative is also painful to our ears. But see 9:5 and 15 where "locusts" are released and given authority to hurt men for 5 months. It could be that the world will look for human or natural origins of this monstrosity of plagues when they come, but the Scripture is clear. Though a fallen angel may be in charge of guarding the pit, the key is given to him by Another.

Peoples, punishments, times, places, all measured by Eternal God who likewise measured the boundaries of the oceans and rivers and mountains. 11:1 sees Jerusalem so measured. What shall happen to it, who shall make it happen, how long it shall happen, has already been decreed.

Antichrist himself will be subject to limitations from Heaven. It's all been planned. He will overcome saints. he will rule the world. It's coming. The decree is made. Only foolish virgins will not prepare for the world that is to come.

As in the days of Ahab we see evil spirits being sent out to gather men to battle, and to lose. (16:14) As we read in 17:17, it is God Himself that puts into the hearts of evil men the design of His own will. "To be used of God" is not only the delight of the believer, but the fate of all men.

What of the Lamb's Book of Life? Only those written in that Book gain entrance into the new city of Jerusalem (21:27).

First, the presence of such a Book should set our hearts and minds searching to know one thing: Is my name written there? And if it is there now, can it ever be blotted out?

Moses believed in a Book of Life and like Paul was willing to be taken out of it for his kinsmen (Exodus 32:32-33). God's response to Moses was that anyone who sins will be taken out of it!

That means that all have been so removed. For all have sinned.

We need a new book. The new book comes with the new covenant. It's called the "Lamb's Book" because the Lamb made it possible to publish such a book, a book of life, but this time life in Christ, a secure book that will not be changed, since it is not based on our works, but His.

Jesus in Luke 10:20 tells his disciples to be more concerned about their names being in that Book than the thrill of casting out a demon.

Paul knows (Philippians 4:3) that his name and the names of his fellow-workers are all in that Book. He understands the eternal nature of an entry into the Book and is not worried that later one of them might not make it.

Revelation is the final word about the Book. 3:5 says that overcomers will not be erased from it. We have seen thus far that all those called and chosen of God will overcome, so this is a promise, not a threat.

More to the point, 13:8 and 17:8 tell us that the contents of the Book were filled in before the foundation of the world - there's that phrase again! Those not in the Book will be in the fire. Only those in the Book will be in the City.

Finally the warning of the last chapter, almost the last verse of God's revealings to man. But it is a warning addressed to hearers, not believers...(22:19)

"For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book...if anyone [liberal scholar, unbeliever, blasphemer] takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life..."

You cannot be saved if you do not believe God's Word.

In the light of all God has said about His plan and program, what do you make of Revelation 22:17? It is an invitation from the Spirit of God and the Church of God. It is the preaching of the Gospel. It is the salvation message, offered to all ears. Anyone who hears and is thirsty for God can come, will come. Whosoever is still the standard, still the audience we reach. Nothing about defining grace changes the message.

But troubling as it is to many, only those whom the Lord our God shall call will respond, will hear, will be thirsty. That's

how the disciples came. That's how you came. That's how all your genuine converts will come.

Whosoever will! Yet, saved from the foundation of the world. A tension there, but a reality of God's Word, I'm sure you now agree.

6. AFTERWORD

No one has known God's mind. Calvin didn't know it. Neither did Luther. We don't follow men. But he perfects us little by little using imperfect men who have seen bits and pieces of the Truth. No movements, confessions, creeds suffice to say all that God has said in His Word. But that Word, plus the Spirit, its only true Interpreter, will bring us all to the perfect light of His day, a day He planned for us before the worlds began.

Am I a convinced Calvinist now? Not totally. Surely the pendulum has swung and I can see a vast array of truth that had formerly been hidden. But the problems I mention in the text, as well as those I did not mention, will keep me seeking. I do not present this work as final, but at least as a provoking of God's people to keep looking, and not to be content with present levels of understanding.

There's always more.