

AW Pink

Chapter 6--The Sovereignty Of God In Operation

"For of him, and through him, and to him, *are all things*: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (#Ro 11:36).

Has God foreordained everything that comes to pass? Has he decreed that what is, was to have been? In the final analysis this is only another way of asking, Is God now *governing the world and everyone and everything in it*? If God *is* governing the world, then is he governing it according to a definite purpose, or aimlessly and at random? If he is governing it according to some purpose, then when was that purpose made? Is God continually changing his purpose and making a new one every day, or was his purpose formed from the beginning? Are God's actions, like ours, regulated by the change of circumstances, or are they the outcome of his eternal purpose? If God formed a purpose before man was created, then is that purpose going to be executed according to his original designs and is he now working toward that end? What saith the Scriptures? They declare God is one "*who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*" (#Eph 1:11).

Few who read this book are likely to call into question the statement that God knows and foreknows *all things*, but perhaps many would hesitate to go further than this. Yet is it not self-evident that if God *foreknows* all things, he has also *foreordained* all things? Is it not clear that God foreknows what will be *because he has decreed what shall be*? God's foreknowledge is not the *cause* of events, rather are events the effects of his eternal purpose. When God has decreed a thing *shall* be, he knows it *will* be. In the nature of things there cannot be anything known as what shall be, unless it is *certain* to be, and there is nothing certain to be unless God has *ordained* it shall be. Take the crucifixion as an illustration. On this point the teaching of Scripture is as clear as a sunbeam. Christ as the Lamb whose blood was to be shed, was "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (#1Pe 1:20). Having then "ordained" the slaying of the Lamb, God *knew* he would be "led to the slaughter", and therefore made it known accordingly through Isaiah the prophet. The Lord Jesus was not "delivered" up by God foreknowing it before it took place, but by his fixed counsel and foreordination (#Ac 2:23). Foreknowledge of future events then is founded upon God's decrees, hence if God foreknows everything that is to be, it is because he has determined in himself from all eternity everything which will be-- "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (#Ac 15:18), which shows that God *has a plan*, that God did not begin his work at random or without a knowledge of how his plan would succeed.

God created all things. This truth no one, who bows to the testimony of Holy Writ, will question; nor would any such be prepared to argue that the work of creation was an *accidental* work. God first formed the purpose to create, and then put forth the creative act in fulfilment of that purpose. All real Christians will readily adopt the words of the Psalmist and say, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! *in wisdom* hast thou made them

all." Will any who endorse what we have just said, deny that God purposed to *govern* the world which he created? Surely the creation of the world was not *the end* of God's purpose concerning it. Surely he did not determine simply to create the world and place man in it, and then leave both to their fortunes. It must be apparent that God has some great end or ends in view, worthy of his infinite perfections, and that he is now governing the world so as to accomplish these ends--"The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (#Ps 33:11).

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (#Isa 46:9,10). Many other passages might be adduced to show that God has many counsels concerning this world and concerning man, and that all these counsels will most surely be realized. It is only when they are thus regarded that we can intelligently appreciate the prophecies of Scripture. In prophecy the mighty God has condescended to take us into the secret chamber of his eternal counsels, and make known to us what he has purposed to do in the future. The hundreds of prophecies which are found in the Old and New Testaments are not so much predictions of what *will* come to pass, as they are *revelations to us of what God has purposed SHALL come to pass*. Do we know from prophecy that this present age, like all preceding ones, is to end with a full demonstration of man's failure; do we know that there is to be a universal turning away from the truth, a general apostasy; do we know that the Antichrist is to be manifested, and that he will succeed in deceiving the whole world; do we know that Antichrist's career will be cut short, and an end made of man's miserable attempts to govern himself, by the return of God's Son; then it is all because these and a hundred other things are included among God's eternal decrees, now made known to us in the sure Word of Prophecy, and because it is infallibly certain that *all* God has purposed "*must* shortly come to pass" (#Re 1:1).

What then was the great purpose for which this world and the human race were created? The answer of Scripture is, "The Lord hath made all things *for himself*" (#Pr 16:4). And again, "Thou hast created all things, and *for thy pleasure* they are and were created" (#Re 4:11). The great end of creation was the manifestation of God's glory. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handiwork; but it was by *man*, originally made in his own image and likeness, that God designed chiefly to manifest his glory. But how was the great Creator to be glorified by man? **Before his creation, God foresaw the fall of Adam and the consequent ruin of his race, therefore he could not have designed that man should glorify him by continuing in a state of innocency.** Accordingly, we are taught that Christ was "foreordained before the foundation of the world" to be the Saviour of fallen men. The redemption of sinners by Christ was no mere after thought of God: it was no expediency to meet an unlooked for calamity. No; it was a divine *provision*, and, therefore when man fell, he found mercy walking hand in hand with justice.

From all eternity God designed that our world should be the stage on which he would display his manifold grace and wisdom, in the redemption of lost sinners: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the

Church the manifold wisdom of God, *according to the eternal purpose* which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (#Eph 3:11). For the accomplishment of this glorious design God has governed the world from the beginning, and will continue it to the end. It has been well said, "We can never understand the providence of God over our world, unless we regard it as a complicated machine having ten thousand parts, directed in all its operations to one glorious end--*the display of the manifold wisdom of God in the salvation of the Church*", i.e., the "called out" ones. Everything else down here is subordinated to this central purpose. It was the apprehension of this basic truth that the apostle, moved by the Holy Spirit, was led to write, "Wherefore I endure all things *for the elects sake*, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (#2Ti 2:10). What we would now contemplate is *the operation* of God's sovereignty in the government of this world.

In regard to the operation of God's government over the *material* world little needs now be said. In previous chapters we have shown that inanimate matter and all irrational creatures are absolutely subject to their Creator's pleasure. While we freely admit that the material world appears to be governed by laws that are stable and more or less uniform in their operations, yet Scripture, history, and observation, compel us to recognise the fact that God suspends these laws and acts apart from them whenever it pleaseth him to do so. In sending his blessings or judgments upon his creatures he may cause the sun itself to stand still, and the stars in their courses to fight for his people (#Jud 5:20); he may send or withhold "the early and the latter rains" according to the dictates of his own infinite wisdom; he may smite with plague or bless with health; in short, being God, being absolute Sovereign, he is bound and tied by no laws of Nature, but governs the material world as seemeth him best.

But what of God's government of *the human family*? What does Scripture reveal in regard to *the modus operandi* of the operations of his governmental administration over mankind? To what extent and by what influences does God control the sons of men? We shall divide our answer to this question into two parts and consider first God's method of dealing with the righteous, his elect; and then his method of dealing with the wicked.

God's Method Of Dealing With The Righteous:

1. God exerts upon his own elect a quickening influence or power.

By nature they are spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and sins, and their first need is spiritual life, for "Except a man be born again, *he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (#Joh 3:3). In the new birth God brings us from death unto life (#Joh 5:24). he imparts to us his own nature (#2Pe 1:4). He delivers us from the power of darkness and translates us into the kingdom of his dear Son (#Col 1:13). Now, manifestly, we could not do this ourselves, for we were "without strength" (#Ro 5:6), hence it is written, "we are *his workmanship* created in Christ Jesus" (#Eph 2:10).

In the new birth we are made partakers of the divine nature: a principle, a "seed", a life, is communicated to us which is "born of the Spirit", and therefore "*is spirit*"; is born of the

Holy Spirit, and therefore *is holy*. Apart from this divine and holy nature which is imparted to us at the new birth, it is utterly impossible for any man to generate a spiritual impulse, form a spiritual concept, think a spiritual thought, understand spiritual things, still less engage in spiritual works. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord", but the natural man has no desire for holiness, and the provision that God has made he does not want. Will then a man pray for, seek for, strive after, that which he dislikes? Surely not. If then a man *does* "follow after" that which by nature he cordially dislikes, if he does now love the one he once hated, it is because a miraculous change has taken place within him; a power outside of himself has operated upon him, a nature entirely different from his old one has been imparted to him, and hence it is written, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, *he is a new creation*: old things are passed away, behold all things are become new" (#2Co 5:17). Such an one as we have just described has passed from death unto life, has been turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God (#Ac 26:18). In no other way can the great change be accounted for.

The new birth is very, very much more than simply shedding a few tears due to a temporary remorse over sin. It is far more than changing our course of life, the leaving off of bad habits and the substituting of good ones. It is something different from the mere cherishing and practising of noble ideals. It goes infinitely deeper than coming forward to take some popular evangelist by the hand, signing a pledge card, or "joining the church." The new birth is no mere turning over a new leaf, but is the inception and reception of a new life. It is no mere reformation but a complete transformation. In short, the new birth is a miracle, the result of the supernatural operation of God. It is radical, revolutionary, lasting.

Here then is the first thing, in time, which God does in his own elect. He lays hold of those who are spiritually dead and quickens them into newness of life. He takes up one who was shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin, and conforms him to the image of his Son. He seizes a captive of the Devil and makes him a member of the household of faith. He picks up a beggar and makes him joint-heir with Christ. He comes to one who is full of enmity against him, and gives him a new heart that is full of love for him. He stoops to one who by nature is a rebel, and works in him both to will and to do of his good pleasure. By his irresistible power he transforms a sinner into a saint, an enemy into a friend, a slave of the Devil into a child of God. Surely then we are moved to say,

"When all thy mercies O my God
My wondering soul surveys,
Transported with the view I'm lost
In wonder, love and praise."

2. God exerts upon his own elect an *energising* influence or power.

The apostle prayed to God for the Ephesian saints that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened in order that, among other things, they might know "what is the exceeding greatness of his power *to us-ward who believe*" (#Eph 1:18), and that they might be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (#Eph 3:16). It is thus

that the children of God are enabled to fight the good fight of faith, and battle with the adverse forces which constantly war against them. In themselves they have no strength: they are but "sheep", and sheep are one of the most defenceless animals there is; but the promise is sure--"He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (#Isa 40:29).

It is this energising power that God exerts upon and within the righteous which enables them to serve him acceptably. Said the prophet of old, "But truly I am full of power *by the Spirit of the Lord*" (#Mic 3:8). And said our Lord to his apostles, "Ye shall *receive power* after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (#Ac 1:8), and thus it proved, for of these same men we read subsequently, "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all" (#Ac 4:33). So it was, too, with the apostle Paul, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (#1Co 2:4). But the scope of this power is not confined to service, for we read in #2Pe 1:3, "According as his Divine power hath given unto us *all things that pertain unto life and godliness*, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." Hence it is that the various graces of the Christian character, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance", are ascribed directly to God himself, being denominated "the fruit of the Spirit" (#Ga 5:22). Compare #2Co 8:16.

3. God exerts upon his own elect a *directing* influence or power.

Of old he led his people across the wilderness, and directing their steps by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night; and today he still directs his saints, though now from within rather than from without. "For this God is *our God* for ever and ever: he will be *our guide* even unto death" (#Ps 48:14), but he "guides" us by working in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. That he does so guide us is clear from the words of the apostle in #Eph 2:10--"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, *which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*" Thus all ground for boasting is removed, and God gets all the glory, for with the prophet we have to say, "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us: *for thou also hast wrought all our works in us*" (#Isa 26:12). How true then that "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord *directeth his steps*" (#Pr 16:9)! Compare #Ps 65:4, #Eze 36:27.

4. God exerts upon his own elect a *preserving* influence or power.

Many are the scriptures which set forth this blessed truth. "He preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked" (#Ps 97:10). "For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are *preserved for ever*: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off" (#Ps 37:28). "The Lord preserveth *all* them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy" (#Ps 145:20). It is needless to multiply texts or to raise an argument at this point respecting the believer's responsibility and faithfulness--we can no more "persevere" *without* God preserving us, than we can breathe when God ceases to give us breath; we are "*kept by the power of God* through faith unto salvation ready to be

revealed in the last time" (#1Pe 1:5). Compare #1Ch 18:6. It remains for us now to consider,

God's Method of Dealing With The Wicked:

In contemplating God's governmental dealings with the non-elect we find that he exerts upon them a fourfold influence or power. We adopt the clear cut divisions suggested by Dr. Rice:

1. God exerts upon the wicked *a restraining* influence by which they are *prevented* from doing what they are naturally inclined to do.

A striking example of this is seen in Abimelech king of Gerar. Abraham came down to Gerar and fearful lest he might be slain on account of his wife he instructed her to pose as his sister. Regarding her as an unmarried woman, Abimelech sent and took Sarah unto himself; and then we learn how God put forth his power to protect her honour--"And God said unto him in a dream, `Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; *for I also withheld thee from sinning against me*': therefore *suffered I thee not to touch her*" (#Ge 20:6). Had not God interposed, Abimelech would have grievously wronged Sarah, but the Lord restrained him and allowed him not to carry out the intentions of his heart.

A similar instance is found in connection with Joseph and his brethren's treatment of him. Owing to Jacob's partiality for Joseph, his brethren "hated him", and when they thought they had him in their power, "they conspired against him to *slay* him" (#Ge 37:18). But God did not allow them to carry out their evil designs. First he moved Reuben to deliver him out of their hands, and next he caused Judah to suggest that Joseph should be sold to the passing Ishmaelites, who carried him down into Egypt. That it was *God* who thus restrained them is clear from the words of Joseph himself, when some years later he made known himself to his brethren: said he, "So now it was not you that sent me hither, *but God*" (#Ge 45:8)!

The restraining influence which God exerts upon the wicked was strikingly exemplified in the person of Balaam, the prophet hired by Balak to curse the Israelites. One cannot read the inspired narrative without discovering that, left to himself, Balaam had readily and certainly accepted the offer of Balak. How evidently God restrained the impulses of his heart is seen from his own acknowledgment--"How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied? Behold I have *received commandment* to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it" (#Nu 23:8,20).

Not only does God exert a restraining influence upon wicked individuals, but he does so upon whole peoples as well. A remarkable illustration of this is found in #Ex 34: 24-- "For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: *neither shall any man desire thy land*, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year." Three times every male Israelite, at the command of God, left his home and inheritance and journeyed to Jerusalem to keep the feasts of the Lord; and in the above

scripture we learn he promised them that, while they were at Jerusalem, he would guard their unprotected homes by *restraining* the covetous designs and desires of their heathen neighbours.

2. God exerts upon the wicked a *softening* influence disposing them contrary to their natural inclinations to do that which will promote *his* cause.

Above, we referred to Joseph's history as an illustration of God exerting a *restraining* influence upon the wicked, let us note now his experiences in Egypt as exemplifying our assertion that God also exerts a *softening* influence upon the unrighteous. We are told that while he was in the house of Potiphar, "The Lord was with Joseph, and his master saw the Lord was with him", and in consequence, "Joseph found favour in his sight and he made him overseer over his house" (#Ge 39:3,4). Later, when Joseph was unjustly cast into prison, we are told, "But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and *gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison*" (#Ge 39:21), and in consequence the prison keeper shewed him much kindness and honour. Finally, after his release from prison, we learn from #Ac 7:10 that the Lord "*gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.*"

An equally striking evidence of God's power to melt the hearts of his enemies, was seen in Pharaoh's daughter's treatment of the infant Moses. The incident is well known. Pharaoh had issued an edict commanding the destruction of every male child of the Israelites. A certain Levite had a son born to him who for three months was kept hidden by his mother. No longer able to conceal the infant Moses, she placed him in an ark of bulrushes, and laid him by the river's brink. The ark was discovered by none less than the king's daughter who had come down to the river to bathe, but instead of heeding her father's wicked decree and casting the child into the river, we are told that *she had compassion on him* (#Ex 2:6)! Accordingly, the young life was spared and later Moses became the adopted son of this princess!

God has access to the hearts of all men and he softens or hardens them according to his sovereign purpose. The profane Esau swore vengeance upon his brother for the deception which he had practised upon his father, yet when next he met Jacob, instead of slaying him we are told that Esau "fell on his neck and kissed him" (#Ge 33:4)! Ahab, the weak and wicked consort of Jezebel, was highly enraged against Elijah the prophet, at whose word the heavens had been shut up for three years and a half: so angry was he against the one whom he regarded as his enemy that, we are told he searched for him in every nation and kingdom, and when he could not be found "he took an oath" (#1Ki 18:10). Yet, when, they met, instead of killing the prophet, Ahab meekly obeyed Elijah's behest and "sent unto all the children of Israel and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel" (#1Ki 18:20). Again; Esther the poor Jewess is about to enter the presence chamber of the august Medo-Persian monarch which, said she, "is not according to the law" (#Es 4:16). She went in expecting to "perish", but we are told "*She obtained favour in his sight,* and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre" (#Es 5:2). Yet again; the boy Daniel is a captive in a foreign court. The king "appointed" a daily provision of meat and drink for Daniel and his fellows. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not

defile himself with the allotted portion, and accordingly made known his purpose to his master, the prince of the eunuchs. What happened? His master was a heathen, and "feared" the king. Did he turn then upon Daniel and angrily demand that his orders be promptly carried out? No; for we read, "*Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs*" (#Da 1:9)!

"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever he will" (#Pr 21:1). A remarkable illustration of this is seen in Cyrus, the heathen king of Persia. God's people were in captivity, but the predicted end of their captivity was almost reached. Meanwhile the temple at Jerusalem lay in ruins, and, as we have said, the Jews were in bondage in a distant land. What hope was there then that the Lord's house would be rebuilt? Mark now what God did, "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, *the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus* king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it in writing, saying, `Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, the Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah' " (#Ezr 1:1,2). Cyrus, be it remembered, was a pagan, and as secular history bears witness, a very wicked man, yet the Lord moved him to issue this edict, that his word through Jeremiah seventy years before might be fulfilled. A similar and further illustration is found in #Ezr 7:27, where we find Ezra returning thanks for what God had caused king Artaxerxes to do in completing and beautifying the house which Cyrus had commanded to be erected-- "*Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem*" (#Ezr 7:27).

3. God exerts upon the wicked a directing influence so that good is made to result from their intended evil.

Once more we revert to the history of Joseph as a case in point. In selling Joseph to the Ishmaelites, his brethren were actuated by cruel and heartless motives. Their object was to make away with him, and the passing of these travelling traders furnished an easy way out for them. To them he act was nothing more than the enslaving of a noble youth for the sake of gain. But now observe how God was secretly working and overruling their wicked actions. Providence so ordered it that these Ishmaelites passed by just in time to prevent Joseph being murdered, for his brethren had already taken counsel together to put him to death. Further; these Ishmaelites were journeying to Egypt, which was the very country to which *God* had purposed to send Joseph, and he *ordained* they should purchase Joseph just when they did. That the hand of God was in this incident, that it was something more than a fortunate coincidence, is clear from the words of Joseph to his brethren at a later date, "*God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance*" (#Ge 45:7).

Another equally striking illustration of *God directing the wicked* is found in #Isa 10:5-7-- "*O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of*

the streets. *How be it he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so;* but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few." Assyria's king had determined to be a world conqueror, to "cut off nations not a few." But God *directed* and *controlled* his military lust and ambition, and caused him to confine his attention to the conquering of the insignificant nation of Israel. Such a task was not in the proud king's heart--"he meant it not so"--but *God* gave him this charge and he could do nothing but fulfil it. Compare also [#Jud 7:22](#).

The supreme example of the controlling, directing influence, which God exerts upon the wicked, is *the cross of Christ* with all its attending circumstances. If ever the *superintending* providence of God was witnessed, it was there. From all eternity God had predestined every detail of that event of all events. Nothing was left to chance or the caprice of man. God had decreed when and where and how his blessed Son was to die. Much of what he had purposed concerning the crucifixion had been made known through the Old Testament prophets, and in the accurate and literal *fulfilment* of these prophecies we have clear proof, full demonstration, of the controlling and directing influence which God exerts upon the wicked. Not a thing occurred except as God had ordained, and *all* that he had ordained took place exactly as he purposed. Had it been decreed (and made known in Scripture) that the Saviour should be betrayed by one of his own disciples--by his "familiar friend"--see [#Ps 41:9](#) and compare [#Mt 26:50](#)--then the apostle Judas is the one who sold him. Had it been decreed that the betrayer should receive for his awful perfidy thirty pieces of silver, then are the chief priests moved to offer him this very sum. Had it been decreed that this betrayal sum should be put to a particular use, namely, purchase the potter's field, then the hand of God directs Judas to return the money to the chief priests and so guided their "counsel" ([#Mt 27:7](#)) that they did this very thing. Had it been decreed that there should be those who bore "false witness" against our Lord ([#Ps 35:11](#)), then accordingly such were raised up. Had it been decreed that the Lord of glory should be "spat upon and scourged" ([#Isa 50:6](#)), then there were not found wanting those who were vile enough to do so. Had it been decreed that the Saviour should be "numbered with the transgressors", then unknown to himself, Pilate, directed by God, gave orders for his crucifixion along with two thieves. Had it been decreed that vinegar and gall should be given him to drink while he hung upon the cross, then this decree of God was executed to the very letter. Had it been decreed that the heartless soldiers should gamble for his garments, then sure enough they did this very thing. Had it been decreed that not a bone of him should be broken ([#Ps 34:20](#)), then the controlling hand of God which suffered the Roman soldier to break the legs of the thieves, prevented him from doing the same with our Lord. Ah! there were not enough soldiers in all the Roman legions, there were not sufficient demons in all the hierarchies of Satan, to break one bone in the body of Christ. And why? Because the Almighty Sovereign had decreed that not a bone *should be* broken. Do we need to extend this paragraph any farther? Does not the accurate and literal fulfilment of all that scripture had predicted in connection with the crucifixion, demonstrate beyond all controversy that an Almighty power was *directing* and *superintending* everything that was done on that Day of days?

4. God also *hardens* the hearts of wicked men and *blinds* their minds.

"God hardens men's hearts! God blinds men's minds!" Yes, so Scripture represents him. In developing this theme of the sovereignty of God in operation we recognise that we have now reached its most solemn aspect of all, and that here especially, we need to keep very close indeed to the words of Holy Writ. God forbid that we should go one fraction *further* than his Word goes; but may he give us grace to go *as far as* his Word goes. It is true that secret things belong unto the Lord, but it is also true that those things which are revealed in Scripture belong unto us and to our children.

"He turned their heart to *hate* his people, to deal *subtly* with his servants" (#Ps 105:25). The reference here is to the sojourn of the descendants of Jacob in the land of Egypt when, after the death of the Pharaoh who had welcomed the old patriarch and his family, there "arose up a new king who knew not Joseph"; and in his days the children of Israel had "increased greatly" so that they outnumbered the Egyptians; then it was that God "turned their heart to hate his people."

The consequence of the Egyptians' "hatred" is well known: they brought them into cruel bondage and placed them under merciless taskmasters, until their lot became unendurable. Helpless and wretched the Israelites cried unto Jehovah, and in response, he appointed Moses to be their deliverer. God revealed himself unto his chosen servant, gave him a number of miraculous signs which he was to exhibit at the Egyptian court, and then bade him go to Pharaoh, and demand that the Israelites should be allowed to go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that they might worship the Lord. But before Moses started out on his journey God warned him concerning Pharaoh, "*I will harden his heart that he shall not let the people go*" (#Ex 4:21). If it be asked, *Why* did God harden Pharaoh's heart? The answer furnished by Scripture itself is, In order that God might show forth *his power* in him (#Ro 9:17); in other words, it was so that the Lord might demonstrate that it was just as easy for him to overthrow this haughty and powerful monarch as it was for him to crush a worm. If it should be pressed further, *Why* did God *select such a method* of displaying his power? then the answer must be, that being sovereign God reserves to himself the right to act as he pleases.

Not only are we told that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that he would not let the Israelites go, but after God had plagued his land so severely that he reluctantly gave a qualified permission, and after that the firstborn of all the Egyptians had been slain, and Israel had actually left the land of bondage, God told Moses, "And I, behold, *I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians*, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen" (#Ex 14:17,18).

The same thing happened subsequently in connection with Sihon king of Heshbon, through whose territory Israel had to pass on their way to the promised land. When reviewing their history, Moses told the people, "But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: *for the Lord thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate*, that he might deliver him into thy hand" (#De 2:30)!

So it was also after that Israel had entered Canaan. We read, "There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. *For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel* in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the Lord commanded Moses" (#Jos 11:19,20). From other scriptures we learn why God purposed to "destroy utterly" the Canaanites--it was because of their awful wickedness and corruption.

Nor is the revelation of this solemn truth confined to the Old Testament. In #Joh 12:37-40 we read, "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: *that* (in order that) *the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled*, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? *Therefore they could not believe*, because that Isaiah said again, *he hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.*" It needs to be carefully noted here that these whose eyes God "blinded" and whose heart he "hardened", were men who had deliberately scorned the Light and rejected the testimony of God's own Son.

Similarly we read in #2Th 2:11,12, " And for this cause *God shall send them strong delusion*, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness". The fulfilment of this scripture is yet future. What God did unto the Jews of old he is yet going to do unto Christendom. Just as the Jews of Christ's day despised his testimony, and in consequence, were "blinded", so a guilty Christendom which has rejected the truth shall yet have sent them from God a "strong delusion" that they may believe a lie.

Is God really governing the world? Is he exercising rule over the human family? What is the *modus operandi* of his governmental administration over mankind? To what extent and by what means does he control the sons of men? *How* does God exercise an influence upon the wicked, seeing their hearts are at enmity against him? These are some of the questions we have sought to answer from Scripture in the previous sections of this chapter. Upon his own elect God exerts a quickening, an energising, a directing, and a preserving power. Upon the wicked God exerts a restraining, softening, directing, and hardening and blinding power, according to the dictates of his own infinite wisdom and unto the outworking of his own eternal purpose. God's decrees are being executed. What he has ordained is being accomplished. *Man's wickedness is bounded*. The limits of evil doing and of evildoers has been divinely defined and cannot be exceeded. Though many are in ignorance of it, all men, good and bad, are under the jurisdiction of and are absolutely subject to the administration of the Supreme Sovereign. --"Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (#Re 19:6)--reigneth over all.