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'Doctrines That Will Change Your Life' Series  
#2

## "How Sovereign is God?" Habakkuk 1:1-2:1

### Introduction

Last week we began our fall preaching series called *Doctrines That Will Change Your Life*. And I assured you at the time that this would be anything but dry, stale dogma. Our goal in this series is to examine the *So what?* of several important biblical truths. The reason for this study is that what you think determines what you do and what you do is a reflection of who you are – hence the idea that you are what you think.

So where do we begin? The best place to begin is in the beginning. And in the beginning, before the world was, before man existed, before the stars shown in the heavens – before there was anything, there was God. And in the beginning of time as we know it now, God created the heavens and the earth.

But then what? Since then, what has God been like – what has He done? Has He stepped back to observe from a distance as the agnostics would claim? Is He simply one god among many, competing for an advantage? Is He involved, but more in a response mode than anything else (as many Christians believe today) – holding things together as He reacts to various events as they unfold? Or is He sovereignly ruling and controlling all things according to His particular and specific design and plan?

Today, I hope we will come to understand that God's absolute control over all things, will bring you freedom to walk with God in love and faith. A wrong view of God's control in the universe will either lead you to blame God or to marginalize His importance.

Our passage of Scripture gives us an example of the sovereignty of God and a glimpse into one man's life as he tries to make sense of it. (Explain how to read chapter 1.)

### [Habakkuk 1:1-2:1]

In 605 B.C. Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian invasion beginning what would be 70 years of captivity. A few years before it happened, the prophet Habakkuk knew it was coming. But how to explain it? Was it a random act in the flow of history where one civilization rises and another falls? Or was it an act of God? And if an act of God, then what should one make of it?

Habakkuk, complaining one day about the sin and unfaithfulness of God's people, was asking God what He was going to do about it. God surprised him by – not because He had a plan – but because of the nature of the plan. God was going to use the wicked, savage Babylonians to bring judgment upon the people God had chosen to be His own. The book of Habakkuk tells the story and shows how Habakkuk came to deal with the sovereign plan of God.

First of all, what do we mean by the sovereignty of God? Let me give two important verses to get us started – one from the Old Testament and one from the New.

Psalm 103:19 says *The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over*

*all. And I Timothy 6:15 says of Christ, He is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,*

The sovereignty of God deals with establishment of the heavens and earth by God and His absolute power and might to control it in all its details. He does this through the Kingship of his Son, Jesus Christ. Whenever we talk about the sovereignty of God, all kinds of other aspects of God's character and work come into the discussion. For instance, God can't be sovereign if He isn't omnipotent, if He doesn't have absolute power. And He can't rule the end from the beginning without all knowledge and wisdom. And when we talk about the big picture of God's plan, sooner or later we have to get to the details. How can God rule over the big picture without controlling all the little details, so we end up talking about His providence or governing all things to their appointed end.

The sovereignty of God is very simply the biblical teaching that God is in control of all things.

Let me give you just a small sampling of what the Bible teaches about this.

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

*Isaiah 14:24,27 - The Lord of hosts has sworn saying, "Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand, . . . For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?"*

Proverbs 20:24 - *Man's steps are ordained by the Lord, How then can man understand his way?*

Ephesians 1:11 - *also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,*

There are many, many others. But we need to move on to the so *what*.

- I. What if you get this doctrine wrong? What difference will it make in your life?

First of all, let's recognize that there are two common mistakes when thinking about this biblical teaching. The first is to deny its reality and the second is to misunderstand it.

1. You don't understand God.

God wants you to understand Him. That's why He's revealed Himself to us in the Word. *Let him who boasts, boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, for I delight in these things declares the Lord.*

If you deny the sovereignty of God, your God is too small. If God is not absolutely sovereign then the logical conclusion of that is that He is surprised by life. He is subject to the whims and actions of men. That he is unable to assert Himself. He may have plans and desires, but like us those plans are constantly thwarted and changed by trouble, and circumstances. The natural and logical conclusion of a God who is not sovereign, is that He is no God at all.

Most Christians don't deny the sovereignty of God theologically. But many struggle with it practically. We are happy to acknowledge his control when things are happy and good. But when things are not so good, we are quick to find explanations outside of God to explain the trouble. And that leads to a second possible result of not understanding this doctrine.

## 2. You will blame God for evil.

One of the deepest and most difficult questions that exists is the question about evil. If God is sovereign and if He is good, why is there evil?

This was Habakkuk's issue. He knew God was eternal and holy and in control (vs. 12). So in verse 13 he asked the question (read).

The theological answer lies in idea of second causes. In the plan of God He ordains everything that comes to pass, but allows them to unfold without doing evil Himself. We often speak of the permissive will of God. While God's decree renders men's sinful acts certain, he does not work in them positively to go against His declared will. So he does not hinder man in carrying out their sinful intentions and He regulates and controls their actions for His good pleasure.

The ultimate example of this is the crucifixion of His only begotten Son. Did God predestine and determine the death of Jesus. Absolutely. Is God guilty of murdering His own Son? No. Listen to Acts 2:23. Speaking of Jesus, it says *this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. And again in Acts 4:27, 28. "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.*

God allows sinful men to act upon their sins; but not to thwart the plan of God, as they might desire, but to fulfill it for His glory. Only a sovereign God could bring glory and goodness out of evil. And that's what Habakkuk was struggling to see. God was going to use the sinful Babylonians to accomplish His purposes of discipline against His

people. It was hard for Habakkuk to fathom that. And yet that's exactly what God said.

And you see, when evil touches your life, if God is sovereign and if He is good, then you can be assured that this thing has come into your life as part of God's good and glorious plan.

3. If you get this doctrine wrong, you may not take responsibility for your life.

How often have you heard a Christian say that if God is sovereign then He can make me stop? . . . Or He made me do it? There is an admitted paradox in the Scriptures between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. It is not true that both God and man are sovereign. But it is true that God is sovereign and you are responsible for what you do and you will answer to God for it in the end. The sovereignty of God does not deliver you from responsibility to walk in obedience to Christ. It does not get you off the hook for taking responsibility to honor Him in the way you live.

So let's move to the positive side of this equation. What if you get this doctrine right? What are the blessings that come with believing and understanding God's absolute sovereignty?

1. It will cast out your pride.

One of the reasons men reject the sovereignty of God is because it by necessity implies that we are not in control. And sinful man wants to be in control. That is at the very heart of sin – pride and a desire for independence and autonomy. Satan tempted Eve with this lie by saying if you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will be like God – you'll be his equal.

When you acknowledge and submit to the sovereignty of God you willingly give up the rights to

self-determination. You joyfully put yourself into the hands of God, you lay aside your plans, your dreams and desires, and humbly say *Lord, you know best. Your ways are not my ways. Your ways, though difficult, are better.*

2. It will increase your faith.

Look at Habakkuk 2:4. *Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith.* Perhaps one of the most helpful doctrines for our faith is the doctrine of sovereignty. When we begin to grasp all of the implications of God's control – His power to do whatever He wants; His goodness and commitment to *work all things together for good to those who love Him*; His wisdom and knowledge to know all the angles, all the implications, all the consequences of every detail – when we begin to see and understand those things by faith – we can trust God through the most difficult trial. He doesn't erase pain and suffering. But it builds hope.

Job's wife said to him one day, *"Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!"* But he said . . . *shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?"* In all this Job did not sin with his lips. And then a little later he spoke those famous words, *As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God;* David wrote, *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

When you understand that God is sovereign, you will have a foundation to trust God in the good times and the bad time.

### 3. You will be driven to love and worship God.

In the end, believing and understanding the sovereignty of God will take you to the throne room of worship. When God was done talking with Habakkuk and explaining His purposes, Habakkuk trembled at the prospects of suffering, for who enjoys that? But his heart was at peace and he loved God more and praised him more. Look at the end of the book. Verse 16 and following:

*16 I heard and my inward parts trembled, At the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, And in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, For the people to arise who will invade us.*

*17 Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls,*

*18 Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.*

*19 The Lord God is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places.*

Your life will be filled with joys and sorrows. You will have good days and bad days. But know this; if you belong to Jesus Christ through faith in Him, He will never leave you or forsake you. *He knows the plans that He has for you, plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope.* Will you trust Him? Will you worship Him? He is your strength. He will make your feet like hinds feet. No matter how treacherous the path may seem to you, He will make you walk on high places without stumbling or falling.