

God's Plan

By

Don Stewart

God's Plan

God's Plan

To What Extent Has God Determined What Will Happen?

English Versions Cited

The various English versions which we cite in this course, apart from the King James Version, all have copyrights. They are listed as follows.

Verses marked NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version, copyright 1989 by Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved

Verses marked NIV are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, New International Version, Copyright 1973 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Verses marked ESV are from The Holy Bible English Standard Version™ Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked “NKJV” are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked CEV are taken from the Contemporary English Version (CEV) copyright American Bible Society 1991, 1995

God's Plan

Scripture taken from THE MESSAGE: Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Scripture quoted by permission. Quotations designated NET are from the NET Bible Copyright © 2003 By Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. www.netbible.com All rights reserved.

Verses marked RSV are The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version containing the Old and New Testaments, translated from the original tongues: being the version set forth A.D. 1611, revised A.D. 1881-1885 and A.D. 1901: compared with the most ancient authorities and revised A.D. 1946-52. — 2nd ed. of New Testament A.D. 1971.

Verses marked HCSB are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible® Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

GOD'S WORD is a copyrighted work of God's Word to the Nations. Quotations are used by permission. Copyright 1995 by God's Word to the Nations. All rights reserved.

God's Plan

God's Plan

To What Extent Has God Determined What Will Happen?

Table Of Contents

- Question 1 How Should We Approach The Study Of God's Plan And Purpose For The Universe?
- Question 2 What Are The Main Questions Which Need To Be Answered Concerning God's Decrees?
- Question 3 In What Sense Is God In Absolute Control Of Things? (Sovereign)
- Question 4 What Is General Sovereignty? What Is Specific Sovereignty?
- Question 5 What Are Some Basic Truths Which We Need To Understand Concerning God's Decrees?
- Question 6 What Are The Characteristics Of God's Decrees Or Plans?
- Question 7 Did God Decree Or Plan Certain Things To Occur Before The Universe Was Created?
- Question 8 What Are The Specifics Of The Decrees Or The Plan Of God?
- Question 9 How Does God's Sovereignty Work With Our Human Responsibility?
- Question 10 If God Wants Everyone To Be Saved Then Why Are Some People Lost? (1Timothy 2:4)
- Question 11 Does God's Plan Remove Human Freedom And Responsibility? (Fatalism)

God's Plan

- Question 12 Does God's Plan For The World Make Him The Author Of Sin?
- Question 13 What Are Some Of The Practical Benefits Of Understanding The Plan Of God?
- Question 14 Does God Play An Active Role In The History Of Humanity? (God's Immanence)
- Question 15 What Is The Providence Of God?
- Question 16 What Is The Unconditional Providence Of God?
- Question 17 What Is The Special Providence Of God?
- Question 18 What Is Conditional Providence
- Question 19 How Does God's Providence Work With People Who Are About To Sin?
- Question 20 Did God Create Evil?
- Question 21 What About Natural Disasters Such As Earthquakes And Hurricanes? Isn't God To Blame?
- Question 22 Does Isaiah 45:7 Teach God Created Evil?
- Question 23 What Does The Bible Say About The Problem Of Evil? (Theodicy)

About The Author

God's Plan

God's Plan

To What Extent Has God Determined What Will Happen?

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

The evidence from all sources shows that the God of the Bible exists. It is for everyone to see; no one has any excuse for rejecting His existence. Moreover, He is the only God who exists. There is no God either greater or lesser than He.

This being the case, it is important that we have some sort of understanding about His plan and purpose for the universe. What has He planned? How does His plan work? In this book, we will examine the subject of God's plan for the universe. The Bible says that God has decreed or ordered certain things to happen.

However, there is a difference of opinion among Bible-believers as to when God has made these decrees as well as the nature of the decrees. It is of vital importance that we come to an understanding of what Bible says about them.

God's Plan

Question 1

How Should We Approach The Study Of God's Plan And Purpose For The Universe?

As we approach our study of what the Bible has to say about God's plan or program for the universe, there are several introductory issues that must first be addressed. The points which we will make in answering these preliminary matters will also apply to a number of different questions which we will later consider. Consequently, it is especially important that we learn and apply these truths. They can be summed up as follows.

1. There Is Disagreement Among Bible-believing Christians On These Issues

As we begin to look at some of the specifics of who God is and how He has worked His plan for the universe, we must realize that there are many areas in which good Christians will disagree. Indeed, believers hold a number of views with respect to God's plan for the universe and what He has decreed, or not decreed. Some people believe that God has made a number of separate decrees while others believe He has made only one all-encompassing decree. Still others argue that He has made no decree whatsoever.

There are some Christians who think that God has decreed or ordained who will be saved and who will not be saved while others do not believe He has made such a decree. Thus, this is an issue where Bible-believing Christians differ.

2. We Should Not Assume That We Have All The Answers

We should not assume that those who see God's plan differently than us are either somehow lacking in knowledge or have some type of moral problem. Unhappily, too often people have accused other believers who disagree with them over this particular issue as being either failing to understand what the Bible clearly says or else they have something wrong in their personal life. This is certainly not the way in which we should address these issues! There are good Bible-believing Christians who hold

God's Plan

different perspectives on these issues. They are attempting to be faithful to God and to His Word. While they may indeed be incorrect in the conclusions they come up with, this is no reason to assume that somehow they are lacking in biblical knowledge or there is some sort of sin in their life. Indeed, we must ask the question if there is something lacking in our understanding of the subject. Perhaps, we, not them, are the people who are wrong!

3. Answers Are Found In The Word Of God Alone

When we look at issues concerning the nature of God and the various ways in which He has acted toward humanity, we must limit our answers to what the Word of God says. Too often, we find people citing authorities apart from Scripture to prove their case. For example, they will cite a famous theologian, a theological tradition, or a written creed to make their case.

While we should certainly not ignore what theologians, Christian traditions, and Christians creeds have said concerning these issues, at the end of the day the only thing that really matters is what the Bible says. Appeal to authorities outside of Scripture does not really solve anything. In fact, it often ends up being one particular authority or theological tradition pitted against another.

All this seems to do is cancel out both arguments. What is absolutely necessary is an examination of the totality of Scripture to derive our answer to any biblical question.

4. It Is Possible That Certain Things Are Unanswerable

Finally, while God has revealed a number of things about Himself and His plan, He has not revealed everything. He has told us enough but His revelation to us has not been exhaustive. Therefore, we have to hold to the possibility that not everything which we want to know about this particular subject is answered for us by God.

For whatever reason, He has decided not to reveal certain things to us. If this is the case, then we must be careful not to try to speculate in areas

God's Plan

which God has not clearly spoken. Our goal should be to say exactly what He says on the issue, no more and no less.

Summary To Question 1: How Should We Approach The Study Of God's Plan And Purpose For The Universe?

As we read the Bible we find that the Lord has told us a number of things about His overall plan and purpose for the universe. However, believers in Jesus Christ do not agree on all the specifics of that plan. Indeed, there are a number of matters in which Bible-believers have opposing views. What are we to make of all of this? Four points should be noted.

First, we must recognize that there is disagreement among Bible-believers on these certain aspects of these issues. While there are areas in which Christians agree, there are also areas in which they disagree. This point must be appreciated.

In areas of disagreement, it becomes obvious that both sides cannot be correct at the same time. Consequently, as each of us examines these issues, we should do it with a humble gracious heart. Since there are godly people who disagree, we should not assume that we have all of the answers.

Indeed, as we study the subject in detail we may discover that our particular perspective does not match up with Scripture. If this is the case, then we must be willing to adapt our view to what we believe the Scripture is teaching. We should never assume that we have all the answers. This should be true in every biblical area in which we study.

In addition, any answer that we do come up with must be from the Bible and from it alone. Appealing to authorities outside of Scripture really does not solve anything. The final answers must come from God's Word. Citing tradition, famous theologians or church creeds do not solve the issue. Only God's Word, the Bible, can do this.

We must also recognize that possibility that God has not given us all the answers to this issue which we are seeking. For whatever reasons He may have, the Lord has felt it unnecessary to reveal certain aspects of His

God's Plan

character or His dealings with humanity. Consequently, we must be willing to admit that in certain areas there is no answer possible for us because the Lord has not revealed it.

Above all, this subject of God's decree should be considered with the utmost humility. Indeed, there is much that all of can learn.

God's Plan

Question 2

What Are The Main Questions Which Need To Be Answered Concerning God's Decrees?

There are a number of questions that Christians must consider when it comes to the issue of God's decree. They can be summarized as follows.

Issue 1: Has God Issued A Decree: If So, Then How Many Were There?

The first issue concerns a basic question about any decree or decrees which God has made concerning the universe. Was there a decree made by God? If so, then how many decrees were there?

To begin with, there are those who deny that God has issued any decrees whatsoever. They argue that people have made the mistake of attributing a decree or decrees to God when He has made no such thing. Consequently, it must be established that God has indeed made these decrees.

For those who do believe that the Lord has made certain pronouncement or decrees at some time in the past, there are a number of basic questions which need to be addressed.

While many people speak of the decrees of God, as though there were a number of them, it is usually agreed among Bible students that there is only one all-encompassing decree. This one decree has a number of aspects to it.

These decrees of God are His declarations, or pronouncements, that He has made in working out His plan for the various ages. They represent what God has planned, or purposed, for the universe. The decrees of God extend to His plan for the creation of the universe, His plan of salvation for humankind, and His providence over all things that He created.

On the other hand, there are those who do not believe that God has planned for the salvation of certain people and the damnation of others.

God's Plan

They reject the idea that He has decreed some to be saved and others to be damned.

Thus, the primary issue concerns the decrees themselves. Has God made them? If so, then how many did He make?

Issue 2: When Did God Issue These Decrees?

If God has made an all-inclusive decree then when did He make it? Did He make it before He created the universe or did He make certain of His decrees after humanity fell into sin? Does it really matter one way or the other. This is another issue that divides believers.

Issue 3: Does God Decree Everything That Occurs?

There is also the matter as to the extent of God's decrees. Did He decree everything which will occur or are some things left to our own choice? To what extent is our lives controlled by the decrees of the Lord? The question of the extent of God's decree is another issue where Bible-believing Christians do not agree.

Issue 4: If God Decreed Everything That Will Occur Isn't That Fatalism?

If indeed God has decreed everything that will occur in the universe, then what's the difference between this and fatalism? How can we say we have any meaningful choice if everything is pre-planned? Many believers reject the idea that God has decreed everything because they do not see the Bible teaching this. Again, this is an issue which divides Bible-believers.

Issue 5: If God Decreed Everything That Has Occurred Then Isn't He The Creator Of Evil?

Finally, if God, in eternity past, has already decreed everything that will occur then doesn't it make Him the creator of evil? Indeed, if He has pre-planned every event and thought, it must include evil.

Furthermore, how can God hold people accountable if He is the One who has decreed all things, including evil?

God's Plan

These are some of the main questions which have to be addressed when considering the subject of God's decree or decrees which He has made before He created the world. As we can, they are not simple questions. This being the case, we will attempt to present the best argument for all sides so that we can make some conclusions.

Summary To Question 2: What Are The Main Questions Which Need To Be Answered Concerning God's Decrees?

The Bible teaches that God has an ultimate plan for our world. It also informs us that He is in complete control of all things. There is no doubt about this. The question, however, arises as to the degree in which God is in control of the events which happen upon the earth as He is working out His plan. There are a number of issues which arise when dealing with this question.

First, there is the issue of God's decrees of pronouncements. Has the God of the Bible decreed certain things about the human race and the earth which, of necessity, must come to pass? If so, is there one decree of God or are there many decrees? This question is primary.

The next question concerns the timing. When did God make this decree or plan. If He did make certain pronouncements did He make them before or after the Fall of humanity? Does it matter when He made them?

This brings us to the next question, "Does God decree everything which will occur?" Is everything pre-ordained or do humans have some say so in the matter? As can be imagined, this is one of the most important questions in this issue of God's decrees.

If everything has been pre-ordained, then what is the difference between this and fatalism? In what sense do humans have any freedom? How can anything be said to be ultimately meaningful if everything has already been fixed?

God's Plan

Finally, if God did decree everything, then does this not make Him the Creator of evil? If so, then how can we fight evil if it is something which He ordained?

These are some of the difficult questions which Christians wrestle with when they speak of God's plan for the human race. As mentioned, there are good, Bible-believing Christians who hold different perspectives on each of these points. This being the case, we need to proceed with humility and grace as we seek answers to these questions.

Question 3

In What Sense Is God In Control Of Things? (Sovereign)

The God of the Bible is sovereign. This means that He has an absolute right to govern His creation as He pleases. In addition, the God of the Bible has perfect knowledge, and perfect power with which He controls and governs everything. No Bible-believing Christian really disputes this.

However, there is the matter as to the degree in which He exercises His authority or control. In what sense does the Lord exercises His control over all things? A number of important points need to be made.

1. All Things Are In His Control

The Bible makes it clear that all things in the universe are under God's control. The psalmist wrote about this aspect of God's nature.

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land (Psalm 95:1-5 NIV).

According to this verse, all things are His and are under His ultimate control. Everything belongs to Him and everything is under His authority.

2. God Does As He Pleases

In the Book of Proverbs, we read about God doing as He pleases.

The king's heart is like a stream of water directed by the LORD; he turns it wherever he pleases (Proverbs 21:1 NLT).

This is another indication that the Lord God has a right to run His universe in the manner in which He sees fit.

God's Plan

Although the world is in a seemingly chaotic state today, the Bible emphasizes that God is still in control of all events. In the Book of Daniel, we read the following explanation of God's control of the earth and its inhabitants.

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35 NIV).

Notice the description. The people are really nothing compared to the Lord. All power and authority belongs to Him alone.

3. Nothing Can Stop The Lord From Executing His Plan

The Scripture also says that nothing can stop the Lord from being in control. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah put it this way.

He said, "LORD God of our ancestors, aren't you the God in heaven? You rule all the kingdoms of the nations. You possess power and might, and no one can oppose you (Second Chronicles 20:6 God's Word).

The Lord has the exclusive right to run the universe which He has created.

Paul wrote to the Romans about the absolute control of God in the life of the Old Testament character Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, and the control of her children. He said.

Even before they were born or had done anything good or bad, the Lord told Rebekah that her older son would serve the younger one (Romans 9:12 CEV).

God possesses this absolute right by virtue of His character. He has complete ownership over everything and all things depend upon Him for their existence and their continuance.

God's Plan

Therefore, it makes no sense to criticize His ways. Indeed, none whatsoever!

4. Jesus Taught The Absolute Sovereignty Of God

Jesus Christ taught that God the Father was absolutely sovereign in all things. On the night of His betrayal, when He prayed to God the Father He acknowledged this.

After Jesus had finished speaking to his disciples, he looked up toward heaven and prayed: Father, the time has come for you to bring glory to your Son, in order that he may bring glory to you. And you gave him power over all people, so that he would give eternal life to everyone you give him (John 17:1,2 CEV).

According to Jesus, God is in complete control of everything. He has the power over all people.

5. The Death Of Jesus Was In The Sovereign Plan Of God

An example of God's complete control can be found in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Indeed, the Scripture teaches us that the death of Jesus was in the eternal plan of God.

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter said the following to the crowd that had gathered.

But you followed God's prearranged plan. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to the cross and murdered him (Acts 2:23 NLT).

The fact that Jesus died on a cross did not catch God by surprise. It was in His sovereign plan all along. It was all prearranged.

6. God's Work Has Its Basis In His Sovereignty

The Scripture also teaches us that God's work is based upon His sovereignty or absolute control. Peter wrote.

God's Plan

You were rescued from the useless way of life that you learned from your ancestors. But you know that you were not rescued by such things as silver or gold that don't last forever. You were rescued by the precious blood of Christ, that spotless and innocent lamb. Christ was chosen even before the world was created, but because of you, he did not come until these last days (1 Peter 1:18-20 CEV).

The purposes of God in Jesus Christ were determined before time even began. Before the world was created His plan for the earth and its inhabitants was formulated.

7. There Is No Fate Or Blind Chance With God

The biblical teaching on the sovereignty of God refutes any idea of blind chance, or fate controlling events. God works all things according to His will. In the Scripture there are numerous examples of God's overruling power in both heaven and on earth.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians about God always doing what He plans. He also said that Christ, in some sense, has chosen us.

God always does what he plans, and that's why he had Christ choose us (Ephesians 1:11 CEV).

God's plan includes Christ choosing us.

Isaiah wrote about God's plans in the following way.

The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand" (Isaiah 14:24 NIV).

What God plans will come to pass. If He purposes or plans it then it will happen.

8. The Sovereignty Of God Is A Reasonable Truth

Not only is the absolute sovereignty of God a Scriptural truth, it is also a necessary deduction of any proper concept of God. If things are not regulated by God, but merely occur by blind chance, then chance is

God's Plan

superior to God. Any limitation of God's sovereign control causes more problems than it solves. God is in absolute control.

9. It Must Be Understood In Light Of The Trinity

It is essential that we understand the sovereignty of God in light of the fact that God is a Trinity. Scripture teaches that each member of the Trinity is the Lord, Jehovah or Yahweh God. Yahweh or Jehovah is the personal name of the God of the Bible.

God The Father Is The Lord (Yahweh)

James emphasized that God is our Father and the Lord. He wrote.

With it [the tongue] we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God (James 3:9 NASB).

God the Father is the Lord. He is Jehovah or Yahweh.

God The Son Is The Lord (Yahweh)

The writer to the Hebrews stated that God the Son, Jesus Christ, is also Lord.

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant (Hebrews 13:20 NRSV).

Therefore, both the Father and the Son can rightly be called "the Lord."

God The Holy Spirit Is The Lord (Yahweh)

Paul said the Holy Spirit is the Lord. We read the following in the Book of Second Corinthians.

This Lord is the Spirit. Wherever the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17 God's Word).

God's Plan

Understanding the Lordship of God as a Trinity keeps us from falling into false ideas such as fate or karma. There are no impersonal forces in control of our destiny.

Rather, it is the infinite/personal God of Scripture, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that exercise Lordship over all things. This further illustrates the reasonableness of the doctrine of God's sovereignty.

10. The Sovereignty Of God Is A Difficult Truth

Although the sovereignty of God is a biblical truth and a reasonable truth, it is also a difficult truth. Part of the difficulty lies in how God can be in absolute control and, at the same time, humanity can make genuine choices. Each of these truths is clearly taught. Scripture never tries to reconcile them. They are taught side by side. Consequently, there is some mystery in the doctrine of God's sovereignty.

11. God's Sovereignty Is A Comforting Thought

The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is a comforting truth to believers. Realizing that God is in complete charge of everything brings comfort in light of problems that occurs. Believers understand that God is still in control of every situation though we may think the situation is out of control.

The good news is that God is powerful enough to meet all of our needs and can deal with any problem that believers encounter. Jesus said the following about His care of those who believed in Him.

And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand (John 10:28-29 RSV).

God saves and keeps those who are His.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians about God's ability to accomplish things.

God's Plan

Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope (Ephesians 3:20 NLT).

Believers can rest in the truth that God is in control of all things.

In sum, we find that the God of Scripture has the right to control all things in the universe. Furthermore, He exercises that right. This fact is of great encouragement to those who believe in Him. Indeed, when we realize that ultimately He is in control of all things we can rest in the confidence that His divine plan is working in our lives.

Summary To Question 3: In What Sense Is God In Absolute Control Of Things? (Sovereign)

The doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, or control, is one of the central truths of Scripture. The Bible is clear that God is in total control of all things. The fact of God's control is clear. However, an issue which is often discussed is the sense in which the Lord is in control of everything. To what degree does He exercise this control? A number of points need to be made when discussing this issue.

First, it must be clear that all things are in control of the God of the Bible. The Old Testament emphasizes that everything belongs to Him. This truth is also taught by the Lord Jesus. All things are His and all events are ultimately under His control.

Indeed, we find that the death of Jesus Christ was in the preordained plan of God. Before our world was created, the death of Christ for the sins of the world was planned by God. In fact, we discover that God's plan for the earth and the people of the earth was formulated before anything was created. In eternity past, these things were decided.

Since the Bible teaches that God is in control of all things this rules out the idea of fate or blind chance as having anything to do with events which transpire. God, not fate, is in control.

The doctrine of God's sovereignty or right to rule is actually very logical and reasonable. Unless God is ultimately in control of all things then we

God's Plan

must assume fate or luck runs the universe. Since the Bible teaches that an all-powerful God exists who has the right to rule it is logical that everything eventually is under His control.

The sovereignty of God must be viewed in light of God's nature, or essence as a Trinity; The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. This illustrates that the personal infinite God of Scripture is in control of all things; not blind fate, or chance. This further illustrates that the doctrine of the sovereignty of God is a reasonable truth.

While God's right to rule as well as His control over the universe is a logical truth it is also a difficult truth. The problem that arises is how can God be in control of all things and, at the same time, grant genuine freedom to humans? How can we be free if He controls all things?

Finally, the doctrine of God's sovereignty is comforting to the believer. Since all things are under His control, each believer is secure in His protection. Nothing will happen to any of God's children without the knowledge and consent of God.

God's Plan

Question 4

What Is General Sovereignty? What Is Specific Sovereignty?

Two terms which are often used in explaining God's sovereignty are the terms general sovereignty and specific sovereignty. To have a proper understand of the debate about God's sovereignty over all things, it is important that we have an understanding of each of these terms. We can briefly sum them up in the following manner.

General Sovereignty

General sovereignty can be simply defined as follows. God has a general plan for the human race in which He will accomplish all of His purposes. Because His plan is of a general nature, He does not predetermine each event.

Indeed, much of what occurs on our planet is due to our own doing, not God's. This position allows for genuine human freedom. Human beings, according to general sovereignty, have legitimate choices which they can and do make.

In other words, God does not control every act, every deed, and every thought. We choose how we will act under God's general control of all things.

Specific Sovereignty

There are many Christians who believe that general sovereignty does not explain the biblical data on the subject. They believe that God has more than a mere general plan for the human race.

In fact, they do not see the Bible teaching that God controls every single event which will happen. This means that every thought, action, and deed is ordained by God. He determines what we will do, how we will think and what we will say.

God's Plan

Good Christians Hold Each Of These Views

It must be emphasized that there is no agreement among Bible-believers as to which perspective is the correct one when it comes to the sovereignty of God. There are good Christians who embrace the doctrine of God's general sovereignty and we have good Christians who hold the opposing view and believe in God's specific sovereignty.

Furthermore, we must recognize that within these two categories there are differences as to how God's sovereignty actually works out in our lives. While we can generalize about this subject and place Bible-believers into two basic categories there is much disagreement among those who hold these positions. This must be recognized as we examine what Scripture has to say about God's sovereignty over humanity.

Summary To Question 4:

What Is General Sovereignty? What Is Specific Sovereignty?

There are differences of opinion among Bible-believing Christians with respect to the extent of God's sovereignty over all things. Is it general or is it specific? Christians can be basically divided into two camps. There are those who hold to what is known as "General Sovereignty" while others believe in "Specific Sovereignty."

Those who argue for a general sovereignty believe that God has a plan for the human race which He will accomplish but this plan does not include God determining every event ahead of time. Humans are given real freedom to make their own decisions. In other words, we control our own eternal fate by our choices. If we receive Christ as Savior then we will go to heaven. If we willingly reject Him, then we will go to hell. The choice is ours.

Those who believe in specific sovereignty deny that God merely has a general plan for the human race. Indeed, they believe that everything that happens occurs because God determined it to happen. This includes who goes to heaven and who does not. God chooses, we do not choose. In addition, this perspective says God is responsible for evil as well as good. While God is not blamed for the evil, He is the One who ultimately decides upon everything which takes place in the universe.

God's Plan

This basically sums up the two positions. It also must be appreciated that there is not complete agreement within each position. Indeed, there are different ways in which general sovereignty and specific sovereignty are understood by Bible-believers. Consequently, making two basic categories is merely a simple way of stating the issue as well as the views held by those who believe the Bible.

God's Plan

Question 5

What Are Some Basic Truths Which We Need To Understand Concerning God's Decree Or Plan?

One of the most difficult topics for the Christian to understand concerns the plan of God for us and for our world. While this topic can be complicated, it is also one of the most rewarding subjects that a person can study. Therefore, it is important to understand, as best as we can, exactly what Scripture has to say on this subject.

Some Important Observations About God's Plan

There are a number of specific things that we need to understand when we examine the subject of God's plan for the earth and the universe. They are as follows.

1. God's Decrees Deal With What He Has Created, Not Who He Is

The decree of God, or the plan of God, concerns the things that He has created. It has nothing to do with His basic nature, or character.

For example, God did not decree that He would be a God of love, or that He would be all-knowing. Neither did He decree that His nature would be that of a Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Attributes such as love, holiness, all-knowledge, as well as His essential nature as a Trinity, are not something that came about by God's declaration, or plan. They are part of His essential being. He existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, before He made any of His plans.

Therefore, we must distinguish between God's nature, or essence, and His declarations, or decrees that He has made.

2. God Uses Different Means To Execute His Plan

We find that the Lord has used a number of different ways in which He brings His plans to pass. At times, He brings them about totally on His

God's Plan

own. For example, He created the universe, and all that is in it, without any involvement from any person, angelic being, or any other thing.

However, He keeps the universe running through secondary means. His original creation set the world in motion, and now God allows it to run its course through the various laws that He has established. The Apostle Paul said of God.

Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17 RSV).

God has left a witness of Himself in the way the universe runs by the laws He has set down.

God's purposes are also accomplished through the behavior of humans. At times, He uses human beings to bring about His desired ends. For example, we are told that God raised up Pharaoh for His own purpose.

For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth" (Romans 9:17 RSV).

Therefore, the fulfillment of God's plan comes about a number of ways.

3. The Purpose Of The Plan Of God Is To Glorify Himself

It must be emphasized that the purpose of God's plan is His own glory. Because of who He is, and what He has done for us, the Lord deserves our praise and adoration.

Indeed, the God of the Bible has no equal. Therefore, no one deserves equal glory. The Bible says that He shares His glory with no one. The Lord has said.

My name is the LORD! I won't let idols or humans share my glory and praise (Isaiah 42:8 CEV).

God's Plan

God deserves the highest honors from His creation. This should not be viewed as some sort of selfish pride. The Creator has the right to receive praise from His creation. Actually, it is the creature merely recognizing what the Creator has done and exalting Him for it.

The Lord has said through the prophet Isaiah.

All who claim me as their God will come, for I have made them for my glory. It was I who created them (Isaiah 43:7 NLT).

Since our very existence depends on the graciousness of the Creator, we ought to give thanks and exalt the One who has been so gracious to us.

4. The Plan Of God Is Beyond Our Human Understanding

There is more. It is essential to that we appreciate that God's plans and purposes are beyond our human understanding. They are something that the Lord Himself has determined, and has graciously revealed to us. We can only understand them to the extent that He explains them to us. Paul wrote about this to the Ephesians.

You have heard that he let me know this mystery through a revelation. I've already written to you about this briefly (Ephesians 3:4 God's Word).

While we can have some insight into His plans, it is not possible to reconcile all the particulars. Neither should we attempt to do it. We must understand our limitations.

5. We Need To Examine The Decrees From God's Perspective

When we look at the decrees that are recorded in the Bible, we must look at them from God's viewpoint rather than from a human point of view. Our understanding of their meaning and purpose should be from His perspective, not ours.

Therefore, the only way that we can discover His perspective is find out what the Scripture has to say about it.

6. We Must Be Careful Of Making Hasty Conclusions About God's Decrees

Because the plans and purposes of God are beyond our own understanding, and because we need to have God's viewpoint, and not our own on the subject, it is important that we consider what the totality of Scripture has to say about the decrees of God.

Any conclusion that we come to must be after all the evidence is examined. We should not base our understanding of God's decrees on a few verses, or one particular passage. Otherwise, we will have a distorted view of what the Scripture says. All of Scripture must be consulted.

Consequently, we must not let our human reasoning force us to accept conclusions that are not supported by Scripture, or are contrary to what God has revealed. Human reason is not the final judge in these matters. The Word of God must be the judge.

Conclusion: The Decrees Are God's Concern, Not Ours

Finally, we should emphasize that the issue is not so much discovering what God has decreed, as it is to discover what He personally requires from us. We need to know what He wants us to do with our lives so that we can please Him. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we should do everything for God's glory. He put it this way.

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV).

This is where our ultimate concern should be; how to glorify the God of the Bible. Everything else pales in importance.

Summary To Question 5: What Are Some Basic Truths Which We Need To Understand Concerning God's Decrees?

The Bible says that God has made a number of divine decrees, or declarations. The fact that God has made these pronouncements is

God's Plan

beyond dispute. Scripture speaks of a number of decrees, or divine pronouncements, that God has given.

There are several important observations that we should make about the decrees of God.

First, these decrees do not have anything to do with God's basic character, or the way the members of the Trinity interact with each other. The decrees deal with God's declarations about His creation; not Himself. Therefore, He did not decree that He would be holy, a God of love, or a God of justice. These are attributes of His character.

To bring about these decrees, God used a number of means. Sometimes He accomplished the decree without any secondary means, such as when He created the world. For example, He formed the first man, Adam, out of pre-existing material. At other times, He used secondary means such as the actions of human beings to complete His purpose.

The ultimate purpose for the decrees is the glory of God. This is what God's plan will eventually accomplish, His glory.

To have a proper understanding of God's decrees we should keep a number of things in mind. For one thing, they are beyond our own human understanding and reasoning. We can only know about them through divine revelation. Therefore, we should not be surprised if we cannot understand everything about them.

Also, these divine pronouncements must be examined from God's viewpoint, not ours. We need to have *His* mind on the subject rather than coming up with some preconceived notion of what He plans to do. Let us always remember that it is His plan that we are looking at, not ours!

Finally, we must look at the totality of what the Bible says on the subject before we come to any conclusions about them. We must be careful not to base our conclusions on one verse here and another verse there. Consequently, we must become students of the Scripture as we seek to discover what He has purposed for the human race as well as for our planet.

God's Plan

God's Plan

Question 6

What Are The Characteristics Of God's Decrees Or Plan?

God has planned or decreed that certain things are to take place. There is no denying this. Consequently, it is important that we have some understanding of the characteristics of God's decrees. They include the following.

1. God Freely Chose To Make The Decrees

The decrees of God were freely made. No one forced Him to make the decrees, and no one counseled Him about what He should or should not do. Isaiah the prophet wrote about God's lack of need for counseling or advice.

Who is able to advise the Spirit of the LORD? Who knows enough to be his teacher or counselor? (Isaiah 40:13 NLT).

Indeed, who is going to teach the Lord?

We also read about this in the Book of Daniel. The pagan King Nebuchadnezzar put the matter into its proper perspective when he wrote.

To him the nations are far less than nothing; God controls the stars in the sky and everyone on this earth. When God does something, we cannot change it or even ask why (Daniel 4:35 CEV).

God alone made the decrees. In fact, when God made the decrees, He was by Himself. The angelic realm, the heavens and the earth, and humanity had not yet been created. There was nobody there to counsel or to advise Him.

2. All Of God's Decrees Are Wise

The decrees of the Lord are established by His wisdom and knowledge. Paul wrote of God's wisdom in his letter to the Romans. He stated.

God's Plan

Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his methods! For who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who knows enough to be his counselor? And who could ever give him so much that he would have to pay it back? (Romans 11:33-35 NLT).

Nobody knows enough to counsel God. Nobody! We should always remember this.

The wise decrees of God reflect His eternal purpose. Paul wrote of this to the Ephesians.

This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:11 RSV).

Therefore, before anything was created, the eternal purposes of God were decreed or pronounced by Himself alone. All events are controlled by Him, for His glory, and for our benefit. Since He is a God of wisdom, all of these plans and purposes are wise. In other words, they cannot be improved upon.

3. The Decrees Of The Lord Affect Everything In The Universe

The decrees of the God of the Bible extend to everything in the universe. This includes the visible and invisible, the righteous and unrighteous, the personal and impersonal, and the living and non-living. Consequently, His decrees are comprehensive.

Indeed, they include something as simple as the throwing of dice. We read about this in the Book of Proverbs.

We may throw the dice, but the LORD determines how they fall (Proverbs 16:33 NLT).

This indicates His ultimate involvement with even the smallest of things.

God's Plan

Everything, everywhere, is affected by God's decrees. Paul also emphasized that all things are brought to pass by God's decrees. He wrote to the Ephesians.

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will (Ephesians 1:11 NRSV).

Everything in the universe is under His control. Nothing is exempt from His plan and purpose.

4. God's Decrees Will Not Be Changed Or Altered In Any Way

The eternal decrees of God are unalterable. Indeed, nothing can change them. The write to the Hebrews said.

Because God wanted to show His unchangeable purpose even more clearly to the heirs of the promise, He guaranteed it with an oath (Hebrews 6:17 HCSB).

Notice the emphasis on His unchangeable purpose.

The psalmist likewise stressed that God never alters or changes His plans and purposes. He wrote.

But what the LORD has planned will stand forever. His thoughts never change (Psalm 33:11 CEV).

This gives us further confidence in His Word. Once He says it, the matter is settled once and for all.

Isaiah the prophet recorded the Lord affirming that what He says will come to pass exactly as He has promised.

The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand (Isaiah 14:24 NIV).

God always achieves what He sets out to do. There is no doubt about this.

5. His Decrees Are Not Dependent Upon Anything Or Anybody

The decrees of the Lord depend upon the God of the Bible and Him alone. They are not dependent upon the behavior or the cooperation of any outside source.

In the Book of Proverbs, we read that it is the Lord's purpose, not our human's purposes, that will be established.

The human mind may devise many plans, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will be established (Proverbs 19:21 NRSV).

Therefore, the Scripture teaches God does not adjust His plan, or change it because of changing circumstances. Once He decrees or pronounces something, it will occur. There are no exceptions.

For example, we find that the death of Jesus Christ was in the eternal, wise plan of God. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter declared the following to the crowd that had gathered.

But you followed God's prearranged plan. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to the cross and murdered him (Acts 2:23 NLT).

Jesus' death was prearranged. This is the clear teaching of Scripture.

Later, we find the members of the early church gathering together and saying the following to the Lord.

That is what has happened here in this city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. In fact, everything they did occurred according to your eternal will and plan (Acts 4:27-28 NLT).

The entire body of believers realized that all of the things which happened to the Lord Jesus happened according to God's eternal will and plan. Nothing occurred by chance.

6. There Is No Person Or Force That Can Stop Them From Occurring

Because the decrees of the Lord are unchangeable, and not dependent upon humans or upon circumstances, there is no outside power or force that can stop them from occurring. Nothing in the universe can stop what the Lord desires to do.

Our behavior may affect other humans, but it certainly does not affect God and His plans. We read in Job.

Look up to the heavens and think! Do your sins hurt God? Is any good you may have done at all helpful to him? The evil or good you do only affects other humans (Job 35:5-8 CEV).

God, as well as His plan, is not affected by our sin. It is only other humans that we can affect. His plan will be carried out in spite of our sin.

The prophet Isaiah said that nothing could stop the plan of God. He wrote.

This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? (Isaiah 14: 26,27 NIV).

This passage makes it about as clear as it can be. He has set a plan and nothing can thwart it. Nothing!

An historical example of this can be found in the death of the evil King Ahab. The Lord had decreed disaster for Ahab if he went into battle. The prophet Micaiah said to Him.

So you see, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has decreed disaster for you (1 Kings 22:23 RSV).

Disaster had been decreed for Ahab.

God's Plan

However, the evil King Ahab attempted to keep this from occurring. The Bible records what happened.

Ahab and Jehoshaphat led their armies to Ramoth in Gilead. Before they went into battle, Ahab said, "Jehoshaphat, I'll disguise myself, but you wear your royal robe." Then Ahab disguised himself and went into battle. The king of Syria had ordered his thirty-two chariot commanders to attack only Ahab. So when they saw Jehoshaphat in his robe, they thought he was Ahab and started to attack him. But when Jehoshaphat shouted out to them, they realized he wasn't Ahab, and they left him alone. However, during the fighting a soldier shot an arrow without even aiming, and it hit Ahab where two pieces of his armor joined. He shouted to his chariot driver, "I've been hit! Get me out of here!" The fighting lasted all day, with Ahab propped up in his chariot so he could see the Syrian troops. He bled so much that the bottom of the chariot was covered with blood, and by evening he was dead (1 Kings 22:29-35 CEV).

What looked like a chance occurrence was actually the fulfillment of God's decree. Indeed, God decreed that Ahab was to die in battle. Consequently, he could not stop it from happening no matter what precautions he took.

The Lord said elsewhere about His Word.

So My word that comes from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I please, and will prosper in what I send it [to do] (Isaiah 55:11 HCSB).

His plan cannot be stopped. There is no doubt about this whatsoever.

7. There May Be An Indication Of Consultation Among The Trinity

There may be some indication in Scripture that there was consultation among the members of the Trinity with respect to the plan and purposes of God. We are told that in the creation of humanity, there may have been some discussion and consultation among the members of the Trinity. We read about this in Genesis.

God's Plan

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth" (Genesis 1:26 HCSB).

Thus, though the creation of humanity occurred after God made the heavens and the earth, it may give us insight into the fact that the members of the Trinity discussed the eternal plan and will of God among themselves.

We should note that while this may indicate the three members of the Trinity discussing creation among themselves, this is not the only way this passage may be understood.

8. We Can Only Know The Decrees To The Extent That God Has Revealed Them

Finally, we must realize that the decrees of God can only be known to us as God reveals them. Without divine revelation, we would know absolutely nothing of them. Moses wrote of the secret things of the Lord. He explained it in this manner.

The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law (Deuteronomy 29:29 RSV).

There are things that are secret and there are things that are revealed. As finite human beings we can only know the things which the Lord has revealed.

Paul wrote about the things of God that had been hidden from humanity for long ages. He said to the Romans.

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, *leading* to obedience of faith (Romans 16:25,26 NASB).

God's Plan

Things which have been kept secret for the ages have now been revealed to us. Indeed, once Jesus Christ came into the world new revelation from God was forthcoming.

In other words, we now know many things about the plan and purposes of God that those who lived before Christ were unaware of.

The prophet Amos said that the Lord does reveal His plan to His chosen prophets. He put it this way.

Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets (Amos 3:7 RSV).

They, in turn, reveal them to us.

The Lord reveals things to us because we are His "friends." Jesus made this clear. He said.

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you (John 15:15 RSV)

We are not God's friends in the sense that we have a constant audible communication back and forth with Him, but rather that we have a relationship where each side communicates with the other. He communicates to us through His written Word, and we can communicate with Him through prayer. In this sense, we are His friends.

In sum, these are some of the basic things we learn from Scripture about the characteristic of God's decree or His plans. It is important that we keep these things in mind as we examine what the Scripture has to say about God's plan for time and eternity.

Summary To Question 6: What Are The Characteristics Of God's Decrees Or Plans?

There are a number of characteristics of God's divine decree or His plan for time and eternity that need to be understood by Bible-believers. They can be summed up as follows.

God's Plan

To begin with, these decrees are the pronouncements of God alone, nobody else was consulted. Indeed, when God made His plan there was nobody around to consult! He alone made the decisions.

Because God alone made these declarations, they reflect His infinite wisdom. Therefore, His plans are wise plans. Consequently, they cannot be improved upon. This also means that we should not question His wisdom.

The extent of His wise decrees is comprehensive; they touch everything in the universe. Nothing is out of His reach. Everything is involved in His decrees.

Once the decrees have been given, God will never alter or change them. Indeed, His Word stands firm in the heavens. This is something which we can count upon.

Furthermore, the decrees do not depend upon the action, or inaction of anyone. If humans fail, it will only affect other humans. It will not affect God's plan at all. His plans do not depend upon human obedience. Indeed, God's plan allows for human failure.

In addition, there is no person, or force, in the universe which can stop what God intends to do. God's plan cannot be stopped. They will not be stopped.

Finally, what we know about God's decrees can only come from what He has chosen to reveal to us, no more, no less. Therefore, we must be careful not to speculate in areas in which God has not spoken. Instead we must reverently accept the fact that we will be ignorant of certain things.

God's Plan

Question 7

Did God Decree, Or Plan, Certain Things To Occur Before The Universe Was Created?

The fact that God has decreed or commanded certain things to occur is beyond dispute. However, there is no agreement about a number of factors relating to His decrees.

One of the issues which is discussed among Bible-believing Christians has to do with the timing of God's decrees. Did He command or decree certain things to come about before He actually created the universe or were His decrees made after His original creation?

Option 1: Did God Make His Decrees Before The Universe Was Created?

It is contended that God has decreed, or made a number of divine pronouncements, before He created the heavens and the earth. The decrees were made in eternity but manifested or came to pass in time.

Therefore, everything which has occurred on our planet, including the fall of humanity and the entrance of sin, was pre-planned. If this is the proper understanding of what Scripture teaches then everything which has occurred on earth from the initial creation until the new heaven and new earth has already been fixed in the heavens.

Option 2: Did God Make His Decrees After The Universe Was Created?

There is also the perspective that God did make certain decrees but these were not made until after He had created the material universe. In other words, they were not made in eternity, but rather in time.

Option 3: Did God Make Any Decrees?

Some argue that the idea of God's pronouncements or decrees is not really a biblical doctrine. They contend the passages are misinterpreted

God's Plan

which are used to support the idea that God had decreed certain things. Thus, the idea of divine decrees is not a biblical idea at all.

There Is No Agreement Among Bible-Believers

Thus, we have a number of different perspectives as to whether God has made divine decrees or pronouncements as well as when He made them. As we have stressed, there are Bible-believing Christians who hold each of these perspectives.

Does It Really Matter?

There is another issue which needs to be addressed. Does it really matter to us whether God issued certain decrees before the creation of the universe or after its creation? What is the difference? Consequently, are we addressing a question which is ultimately irrelevant? This issue also has to be discussed.

Summary To Question 7:

Did God Decree Or Plan Certain Things To Occur Before The Universe Was Created?

One of the issues in which Christians disagree with one another concerns what God may or may not have planned before He created the universe. Did God make certain pronouncement or decrees in the past? If so, when did He make them and what do they consist of?

Some Christians believe that He planned out everything before He created the universe. From eternity past, God decreed such things as the fall of humanity, which brought about the entrance of sin. This position argues that God's decrees are comprehensive to the point that they include everything which has occurred on the earth. These plans were made before anything was created.

Others think the decrees occurred after He created all things. In other words, the decrees came after the earth was created, not before.

There are others who reject the idea of God's decrees as they have been traditionally understood. They believe that this entire issue of God's

God's Plan

decrees has been misunderstood. Consequently, they offer an alternative interpretation to the doctrine of divine decrees.

It must be emphasized that there are good Bible-believing Christians who hold each of these views.

We also must consider another related question. Does it really matter as to when God decreed certain things? Does it make a difference as to whether they occurred in eternity past; after He created the heaven and the earth, or whether there was any decree at all? In other words, what is the relevance of this question?

God's Plan

Question 8

What Are The Specifics Of The Decrees Or Plan Of God?

Scripture gives some specifics about God's decrees or His divine pronouncements. He does have a plan for the world and the human race and He has revealed some parts of this plan to us.

They include the following things.

1. God Decreed That Jesus Christ Would Show Grace To His People

The fact that Jesus Christ would show His grace to His people was something that was planned before the universe was created.

When Paul wrote to Timothy he expressed this truth in the following manner.

God saved us and chose us to be his holy people. We did nothing to deserve this, but God planned it because he is so kind. Even before time began God planned for Christ Jesus to show kindness to us (2 Timothy 1:9 CEV).

God the Father has decreed that He would show grace to His people through God the Son, Jesus Christ.

2. The Death Of Jesus Christ Was Decreed

In the Book of Revelation, we find that Jesus Christ was destined to die even before the world was created. John wrote about this.

And all the people who belong to this world worshiped the beast. They are the ones whose names were not written in the Book of Life, which belongs to the Lamb who was killed before the world was made (Revelation 13:8 NLT).

Jesus was decreed to die before the world was formed.

God's Plan

3. God Promised Eternal Life To Those Who Believe In Jesus

Paul told Titus that before the world began, God promised that those who believed in Jesus Christ would have eternal life. He wrote.

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness--a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time (Titus 1:2 NIV)

Those who believe in Christ as Savior will be given the free gift of eternal life. This was arranged before the world was created.

Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians about this plan of God.

We do use wisdom when speaking to people who are mature in their faith. But it isn't the wisdom of this world or of its rulers, who will soon disappear. We speak of God's hidden and mysterious wisdom that God decided to use for our glory long before the world began. The rulers of this world didn't know anything about this wisdom. If they had known about it, they would not have nailed the glorious Lord to a cross. But it is just as the Scriptures say, "What God has planned for people who love him is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds!" (1 Corinthians 2:6-9 CEV).

God has eternally planned salvation from sin for those who trust Christ as Savior.

Paul also wrote to the Ephesians about God's plan to save certain people through the Person of Jesus Christ. He said.

How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ. Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes . . . and this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything

God's Plan

together under the authority of Christ - everything in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1:3,4,10 NLT).

According to the decree of God, there are certain people who will be saved. These are the one who have believed in Jesus Christ.

God has thus specifically planned that those who believe in Jesus Christ will be saved from their sin. This meant, of course, that Jesus first had to die in our place. Then each of us must personally accept the sacrifice which He has made on our behalf.

Here we have three specific examples of things that the Lord decreed before He created the universe. While the execution of the decrees has taken place in time, their formulation was in eternity. Therefore, the first point we should recognize is that God's decrees occurred before any part of the creation of the universe had taken place.

4. He Has Decreed The Stability Of Universe

There are other things which God has decreed. For one thing, God has decreed that the universe will remain stable. We read about this in the Book of Psalms. It says the following.

Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures. Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you (Psalm 119:89-91 NIV).

The universe will not be destroyed, but rather will remain stable because the Lord has declared such. This, of course, is comforting to us.

5. God Has Decreed The Free Acts Of Human Beings

God has decreed that humans can act either good, or evil. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus about this truth.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (Ephesians 2:10 NASB).

God's Plan

God has given legitimate choice to human beings. Among other things, we have been created for the purpose of doing God's work. This is something that we can willingly choose to do.

6. The Lord Has Decreed The Circumstances Of Nations

God has decreed the circumstances with which the nations of the world find themselves. Paul said the following about their fate.

From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand which should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries (Acts 17:26 NLT).

The nations of the world ultimately rise or fall because of God's will or desire.

7. He Has Decreed The Continuation Of The Nation Israel

God has decreed that the nation Israel will never perish. We read in about this in the Book of Jeremiah.

“Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,” declares the LORD, “will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me” (Jeremiah 31:36 NIV).

God compared Israel's survival to His unalterable decrees. No stronger statement could be made to guarantee their continued existence! As we have seen from history, their miraculous survival testifies to this decree.

8. The Length Of A Human Life Has Been Decreed

In the Book of Job, it says that God has decreed the length of a person's life. We read the following statement.

You have decided the length of our lives. You know how many months we will live, and we are not given a minute longer (Job 14:5 NLT).

God's Plan

The number of days we will live on this earth has been decreed by God. While He knows the length of our lives He has not communicated this to us! We have no idea how long we will have.

9. God Has Decreed The Way One Will Die

The Lord has also decreed the manner in which one will ultimately die. Jesus told Simon Peter concerning what would eventually happen to him. We read about this in the Gospel of John where it says.

Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he [Peter] would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!" (John 21:19 NASB).

This indicates that God has a plan for the manner of our death as He has a plan for our lives. All of the details are under His care.

10. God Has Decreed The Establishment Of Christ's Kingdom

God has decreed the kingdom of Jesus Christ will be established in the future. Paul wrote about the order of events that God has already decreed.

So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, Adam, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man, Christ. Everyone dies because all of us are related to Adam, the first man. But all who are related to Christ, the other man, will be given new life. But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised first; then when Christ comes back, all his people will be raised. After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having put down all enemies of every kind. For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. For the Scriptures say, "God has given him authority over all things." (Of course, when it says "authority over all things," it does not include God himself, who gave Christ his authority.) (1 Corinthians 15:21-27 NLT).

God's Plan

The kingdom of God is coming through the Person of Jesus Christ. This is God's unalterable decree. Nothing will be able to stop this from happening.

These are some of the specific things that the Bible says God has decreed. The decrees of God are in complete harmony with His other attributes including justice, knowledge, unchangeableness, and goodness. Everything is working together to complete God's perfect plan for time and eternity.

Summary To Question 8:

What Are The Specifics Of The Decrees Or The Plan Of God?

According to Scripture, the God of the Bible has made a number of decrees or divine pronouncements. These decrees reflect His eternal plan and purposes. The Bible says that God has decreed a number of specific things. We can list them as follows.

First, He has decreed that Jesus Christ will show grace to the human race. This, of course, was accomplished in time when Christ came to earth to die for our sins. Thus, the coming of Christ was also part of God's plan.

It has also been decreed that those who believe in Jesus Christ will receive eternal life. Therefore, the process of salvation with the coming of Christ, His death, and then the acceptance of His sacrifice by certain people, has been decreed by God.

The God of the Bible has also decreed the stability of the universe. The universe remains stable and will remain stable because of God's pronouncement. Much comfort comes from this decree!

God has also decreed the free acts of human beings. That is, humans can act either good or evil. This freedom we have is part of God's plan.

God has also decreed the circumstances of nations. It is ultimately up to Him as to which one will rise and which one will fall. While they may assume that they are in control of their destiny, they are not.

God's Plan

The Lord has also made pronouncements concerning the destiny of His chosen people, Israel. They will continue to exist because He has promised this will be so. Thus, nothing can cause them to be destroyed. Nothing!

God has decreed the length of a person's life. We only live as long as He allows. In other words, we take each and every breath because of His will.

The way one will die has also been made by God's decree. Indeed, Jesus told Simon Peter the manner of the death which he would experience.

Finally, God has decreed that the kingdom of Jesus Christ will rule over the earth. No power in heaven or on earth can stop this from occurring. Christ is coming back to set up His everlasting kingdom!

These various decrees of God are in harmony with God's attributes. In other words, everything fit together in God's great plan for time and eternity.

Question 9

How Does God's Sovereignty Work With Our Human Responsibility?

One of the most difficult issues that believers face is trying to harmonize God's sovereignty, or absolute control, with human responsibility. How can God be in total control of all things, and, at the same time, humans can make legitimate choices? A number of points need to be made about this important topic.

1. The Bible Teaches That God Is In Absolute Control Of Everything

The Bible teaches that God is sovereign. Among other things, this means that He is in absolute control of all events in heaven and earth. This is the consistent teaching of God's Word. For example, the Bible says.

And do not forget the things I have done throughout history. For I am God-- I alone! I am God, and there is no one else like me. Only I can tell you what is going to happen even before it happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish (Isaiah 46:9-10 NLT).

There is no doubt that the Bible assumes that the God of Scripture is always in charge of everything. He is in complete control.

2. The Bible Assumes That We Have Genuine Choice

Yet, the Bible also says that human beings are responsible for their own actions. We can, and do make meaningful choices, and these choices have consequences. We can illustrate this with just a few of many examples which we could cite.

Joshua Told The People He Chose To Serve The Lord

Joshua told the people that it was their responsibility to choose whom they would serve. He put it this way.

God's Plan

“You are accountable for this decision,” Joshua said. “You have chosen to serve the LORD.” “Yes,” they replied, “we are accountable” (Joshua 24:22 NLT).

Joshua made it clear that the people had a choice and that they were accountable for their choice. The people realized they were accountable when they responded to Joshua.

Elijah Told The People To Make A Choice

Elijah the prophet told the people they were to choose between the worship of the Lord, and the worship of the god Baal. We read about this in First Kings.

Ahab got everyone together, then they went to meet Elijah on Mount Carmel. Elijah stood in front of them and said, “How much longer will you try to have things both ways? If the LORD is God, worship him! But if Baal is God, worship him!” (1 Kings 18:20-21 CEV).

In this instance, there is the assumption that the people had legitimate choices with which they could make. Otherwise Elijah's question would be meaningless.

Jesus Pronounced Judgment Upon Jerusalem For Not Believing In Him

Jesus pronounced judgment over the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem for not receiving Him as their promised Messiah. He said.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Your people have killed the prophets and have stoned the messengers who were sent to you. I have often wanted to gather your people, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you wouldn't let me (Matthew 23:37 CEV).

This statement assumes that the people of Jerusalem could either accept, or reject Him. In other words, they had an actual choice.

Many more examples can be given. The point is that the Bible, from beginning to end, assumes that human beings have the ability to make

God's Plan

legitimate choices. There is nothing taught in Scripture that assumes humans are pre-programmed to make the various choices which we make; whether good or evil.

How Do We Reconcile Divine Sovereignty And Human Responsibility

The problem that believers have had, and still have, is how to reconcile these two truths. How can God be in absolute control of everything, but at the same time, humans can have genuine choices, and can be held responsible for these choices?

Traditionally, there have been three basic ways in which believers have dealt with the issues of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. We can simply state them as follows.

Some Have An Overemphasis On Divine Sovereignty

Unhappily, many have overemphasized the doctrine of the sovereignty of God to the point that *everything* that occurs has been pre-ordained by Him. It is as though we are just going through the motions in this life.

Of course, if one holds this view they ultimately will say, "Why bother?" There is no need to do anything seeing that God has ordained, or planned, everything that goes on. Indeed, when we sin we could attribute this to God's plan for us. Obviously this type of emphasis can lead to dangerous consequences.

Furthermore, this emphasis brings about an attitude of passiveness on the part of the individual. If everything is going to happen a certain way, then there is no need to get personally involved. Why expend all the energy for something that is going to happen anyway?

There is more. Since God is responsible for everything that occurs He is blamed for all evils in the world. We see Him as a God who not only allows evil, He actually plans evil. There are some Christians who actually believe this is exactly what the Bible teaches. They assume that since God is in total control of all things, this must include every aspect of our behavior.

God's Plan

Therefore, every event, whether good or bad, has been pre-ordained by God. This includes rape, incest and murder. They insist that God planned all of these things to happen to people.

However, nowhere is this taught in Scripture. To the contrary, while God is indeed in total control this does not mean that He pre-ordains all of the evils in the world. Evil occurs because the world is not what it is supposed to be! We live in a fallen world. Evil is not God's doing.

These are some of the many dangers that occur when the truth of God's sovereignty or His control over things is wrongly emphasized. We must not insist that because God is in control that He must be responsible for all events which take place; including everything which is evil. This is not what the Bible teaches.

Others Overemphasize Our Human Responsibility

There is also position that overemphasizes the passages in Scripture that speak of human freedom. When taken to extreme, it diminishes the character of God. He is no longer in control, we are. We are the ones who ultimately decide our fate with God watching on the sidelines. Some go as far as to say that God does not even know what will happen in the future. He has no real knowledge of what will occur.

Therefore, He, like us, is watching and waiting to see how humans are going to act. This makes God a Being that reacts to humanity, not one who is in total control. This attitude is just as wrong as assuming God allows no real choice for humans.

The Key Is To Recognize Both Are True

The key is to recognize that both divine sovereignty and human responsibility are true. This is also called compatibilism. While God is in total control of all events, human beings do make meaningful choices and are held responsible for what they do. Mistakes are made when one of these truths is emphasized over the other. We need to see this issue in the same way that God sees it.

God's Plan

There seems to be a great deal of evidence from Scripture that some type of compatibilism is the only way to reconcile God's sovereignty and our human responsibility. We can make only a few observations.

Gods' Promises Are Sometimes Conditional

The Bible teaches that some of God's promises are conditional. For example, we read in the Book of Proverbs.

With all your heart you must trust the LORD and not your own judgment. Always let him lead you, and he will clear the road for you to follow (Proverbs 3:5-6 CEV).

These promises assume action on our part. We must trust in the Lord, let Him lead us, and then He will clear the road for us to follow. This is human responsibility working alongside divine sovereignty.

The psalmist wrote something similar.

Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4 RSV).

We are promised that God will give us the desires of our heart. Yet, this is only true if we take delight in the Lord. We have a part to play and God has a part.

We Cannot Logically Understand How These Truths Can Both Be True At The Same Time

While we recognize both divine sovereignty and human responsibility are both true, this does not mean we will be able to comprehend how they can both be true at the same time. In fact, we cannot completely understand how this works. This is something which must be appreciated.

Examples Of Both Divine Sovereignty And Human Responsibility From The Life Of Jesus

God's Plan

We also find both divine sovereignty and human responsibility in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

1. **God Had An Eternal Plan For Jesus**

The Bible says that Jesus was “the Lamb” killed before the world was created. We read the following in the Book of Revelation.

And all the people who belong to this world worshiped the beast. They are the ones whose names were not written in the Book of Life, which belongs to the Lamb who was killed before the world was made (Revelation 13:8 NLT).

There is no doubt that the death of Jesus was in the eternal plan of God.

2. **Jesus Chose To Obey The Plan**

Jesus death was in the eternal plan of God. However, first He had to come into our world. The Bible says that He was born at the right time in history. Paul wrote to the Galatians.

But when the time was right, God sent his Son, and a woman gave birth to him. His Son obeyed the Law, so he could set us free from the Law, and we could become God's children (Galatians 4:4-5 CEV)

There was a certain time when these events were to take place. They could not occur before the appointed time neither could they take place after the appointed time.

After He came into the world, Jesus humbly lived as a servant, not a king. Paul wrote the following to the church at Philippi.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8 RSV).

God's Plan

While God the Father had an eternal plan for Jesus, God the Son, Jesus had to come into our world as a human being and execute the plan. There was nothing passive about His behavior. He had to actively fulfill it.

Examples From The Life Of Paul On How To Live With Both Of These Truths

From the life and teaching of the Apostle Paul, we find both divine sovereignty and human responsibility at work. We can cite the following examples.

1. Paul Taught That God Was Sovereign

The Apostle Paul taught that God was in sovereign control of everything in the universe. He wrote about this in his letter to the Romans.

In the Scriptures the Lord says to the king of Egypt, "I let you become king, so that I could show you my power and be praised by all people on earth." Everything depends on what God decides to do, and he can either have pity on people or make them stubborn (Romans 9:17-18 CEV).

Nothing could be more clearly taught. God is ultimately in control.

2. Paul's Life Serves As An Example To Us As To How We Should Live

While Paul taught that God is in ultimate control, he also told Timothy that his life served as an example to others. They were to behave as he behaved. Paul wrote.

But since I was worse than anyone else, God had mercy on me and let me be an example of the endless patience of Christ Jesus. He did this so that others would put their faith in Christ and have eternal life (1 Timothy 1:16 CEV).

He is to be a pattern for us and our behavior. In other words, we are to behave in the ways which he behaved.

3. His Belief In Divine Sovereignty Did Not Stop Him From Being Constantly Involved In Spreading The Word Of Christ

This next point is of utmost importance. The Apostle Paul, the man who taught the absolute sovereign control of God, did not let that stop him from being passionate in his role as an ambassador for Jesus Christ. From Scripture, we discover the following.

4. Paul Evangelized The Lost

While Paul realized that the God of the Bible was in control of all things, he thought it necessary to preach the gospel to the lost. We read in the Book of Acts.

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there (Acts 17:16-17 RSV).

Paul went from place to place tirelessly preaching the good news of salvation through the Person of Jesus Christ.

He also wanted preach Christ in places that where no one had gone. He wrote the following to the church at Rome.

And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was *already* named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation (Romans 15:20 NASB).

Paul had a burning desire to reach the lost with the message of Jesus.

5. He Had Difficult Times In The Ministry

Paul's life was anything but passive in his faithful service to the Lord.

For example, Paul suffered prison, shipwreck, and persecution. He wrote to the Corinthians about what he suffered for the cause of Christ.

God's Plan

Are they servants of Christ? I am a fool to talk this way, but I serve him better than they do. I have worked harder and have been put in jail more times. I have been beaten with whips more and have been in danger of death more often. Five times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes with a whip. Three times the Romans beat me with a big stick, and once my enemies stoned me. I have been shipwrecked three times, and I even had to spend a night and a day in the sea. During my many travels, I have been in danger from rivers, robbers, my own people, and foreigners. My life has been in danger in cities, in deserts, at sea, and with people who only pretended to be the Lord's followers. I have worked and struggled and spent many sleepless nights. I have gone hungry and thirsty and often had nothing to eat. I have been cold from not having enough clothes to keep me warm. Besides everything else, each day I am burdened down, worrying about all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:23-28 CEV).

Obviously, Paul experienced many difficult times in his service for the Lord. In all of this, he never acted in a passive manner. He was actively proclaiming the good news of Jesus to the lost, as well as instructing the believers in the truth of the faith.

6. Paul Did Not Have A Problem Living With These Truths

Since Paul said that his life was to serve as a pattern for others, we ought to act in the same manner as him. Like Paul, we realize that the Lord is in ultimate control of all things but we still have responsibility to obey His commands.

When we become passive, and do not assume our God-given responsibility, we are acting irresponsibly. We need to be zealous for the things of God.

This is our responsibility to Him. This is how we obey Him!

Conclusion: Divine Sovereignty And Human Responsibility Are Both Taught In Scripture

There is only one logical conclusion that we can come to. Both divine sovereignty and human responsibility are taught in Scripture, and both should be believed, and lived out in our lives.

While we should trust the Lord that He is in ultimate control of everything in the universe we should never let that cause us to be passive in our behavior. We have certain duties for which God will hold us responsible. It is our job to fulfill these duties. This is how we honor Him.

**Summary To Question 9:
How Does God's Sovereignty Work
With Our Human Responsibility?**

The Bible teaches that God is in absolute control. There is certainly no doubt about that. The God of Scripture runs the entire universe which He created. Nothing escapes His notice and nothing is beyond His power.

However, the Bible also teaches we humans have legitimate choices and are held responsible for the choices which we make. This is also taught in Scripture from the beginning to the end.

Unfortunately, there has been the tendency of Bible-believers to overemphasize one side or the other of this issue. When this is done, we have an incorrect view of God, as well as an improper view of how we should behave.

Indeed, some Christians argue that God is responsible for everything which occurs. This means that every crime is ultimately His doing. Every rape, murder, act of incest, and thievery can be attributed to Him. This, however, is certainly not what Scripture teaches. God hates sin! He cannot be the One to whom we blame for the sins of humanity.

On the other hand we do not want to go to the other extreme of leaving Him out of the picture entirely. Unfortunately, too many people do this.

God's Plan

They assume God has given us total freedom to do whatever we please. He is merely a spectator who watches what we do. This is not the picture of the God of Scripture.

The answer lies somewhere in the middle. The key is to believe all that the Bible says. God is in absolute control and humans make meaningful choices. While we cannot understand how this works, we do not have to. All we need to do is trust God and take Him at His Word.

Therefore, we do not ignore passages that speak of our human responsibility. Consequently, we should live as though our choices do count. We must tell people the good news about Jesus, live godly lives, and be zealous for the things of God. The commands that we find in Scripture need to be taken seriously.

At the same time, we must always acknowledge that God is in absolute control of all things. Ultimately what happens is up to Him. Therefore, a balanced view of God's control and our responsibility is what is needed.

God's Plan

Question 10

If God Wants Everyone To Be Saved Then Why Are Some People Lost? (1 Timothy 2:4)

It is a fact that not everyone who has heard the good news of Jesus Christ has personally accepted it. Indeed, there have been countless people who have rejected the offer of salvation from sin through the work of Christ. For whatever reason, or reasons, they have not trusted Christ as their Savior. Nobody denies that this has happened on a large scale.

But why is this the case? The Bible says that it is God's will, or desire, for everyone to be saved.

God wants everyone to be saved and to know the whole truth, which is (1 Timothy 2:4 CEV).

If God wants every person to be saved then why doesn't this happen? Why do some people accept the gospel message and others reject it?

Generally speaking, Christians have four different views on this question. They are: universalism, double predestination, God has a revealed will and a secret will, and finally God wants everyone to be saved but has left the choice up to us. They can be simply explained as follows.

Option 1: Everyone Will Eventually Be Saved: Universalism

This first position is known as "universalism." It holds the viewpoint that everyone will eventually be saved. Since God says that He wants everyone to be saved, then everyone will be saved. It is that simple. Indeed, since Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for the sin of every human being, sooner or later everyone will end up in heaven. It will happen either in this life or in the next. This is His will, or desire, for the human race. None will be lost.

God Is Love

The reason that everyone will end up in heaven is because God's primary attribute, or characteristic, is "love." This being the case, a loving God

God's Plan

would never send any human being, no matter how sinful or corrupt, to an eternal place of punishment. Furthermore, since each human being is made to exist for all eternity, they must spend eternity in His loving presence.

One of the key passages which is used for support of this perspective is the direct statement that "God is love." We read in First John.

God is love, and anyone who doesn't love others has never known him (1 John 4:8 CEV).

Love is assumed to be the primary attribute, or characteristic, of God. Thus, a God of love would never damn people to an eternal place of torment. Indeed, it would be unthinkable for a loving God to do so.

Add to this the fact that God specifically says that He desires that all people to be saved. Consequently, since it is His will is for all people to be saved they will indeed be saved. God always accomplishes His purposes.

Thus, it does not matter how people may respond to the gospel message in this life because eventually every human being will be in His joyful presence. This briefly sums up some of the arguments used for universalism.

Evaluation Of Universalism

While this position has been popular in some circles it goes against the plain teaching of Scripture. In fact, the Bible is clear that there will be "the saved," as well as "the lost," in the eternal state. There is no doubt about this. Indeed, we read of this judgment of the lost in the Book of Revelation. It says.

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God and books were

God's Plan

opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10-15 NKJV).

The passage is explicit. The wicked will be thrown into the lake of fire. There is no heaven for them, no reconciling with God. In fact, we read later in the Book of Revelation that these same evil people are actually kept out of the holy city. John wrote.

Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie (Revelation 22:14-15 NKJV).

It is clear that certain people are living in the Holy City while others are kept away from God's presence. Consequently, this idea has never been embraced by Bible-believing Christians who take the words of the Bible seriously. We can thus conclude that universalism is not taught in the Bible.

Option 2: God Has Determined Some Will Be Saved While Others Will Be Lost: Double Predestination

Another perspective which answers the question as to why some people are lost is known as "double predestination." This position holds that God has pre-determined certain people to be saved while others to be lost. The idea is that the choice of who goes to heaven and who does not ultimately rests with God.

According to this view, God has never desired that the certain people would ever be saved. He has destined some for heaven and others for hell. Basically, humans have no say-so in the matter. .

God's Plan

The biblical support is found in passages such as the following.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:11 NIV).

Since God works "all things" according to the council of His will it is concluded that He determines or controls all things. This control that He exercises has been determined in eternity past. In other words, everything which comes to past has been pre-determined by God. He is in total control.

There are a number of logical consequences for holding such a viewpoint. First, is that God does not love everyone. His love is limited to the "elect" or the "saved." It could not be otherwise if God has predestined certain ones for damnation from eternity past.

Thus, the gospel message is not so much an invitation to believe in Christ as it is a call for the "elect" to respond. Therefore, we have no such thing as a universal call for belief in Christ. Only the "chosen" can respond.

How They Respond To 1 Timothy 2:4

Those who hold to the idea of double predestination usually respond to the statement that God wishes all people to be saved in the following manner.

Usually, they interpret Paul's statement to mean that God wants "all types of people" to be saved rather than understanding it to mean that God wants all people to be saved.

God Chose Certain People Before The Fall

It is debated when this choice took place. Some believe that God's choice of who would be saved and who would be lost took place before the fall of the human race. This is known as supralapsarianism. This means "before the fall."

God's Plan

Others believe God decreed the fate of each human being *after* humanity fell into sin. This position is known as infralapsarianism. This position sees only one decree of God. They reject the idea of double predestination; that God predetermined some for heaven and others to hell before the fall.

Instead, after the fall, they believe that God decreed certain ones to be saved while others to be “passed over.” Those who are passed over will eventually end up in hell. Supposedly, this position resolves some of the ethical problems involved in God determining the fate of the lost and the saved.

Evaluation Of Double Predestination

Double predestination makes the idea of God's offer of salvation to everyone as an illusion. Since the Lord has already predetermined the fate of the lost, the fact that salvation is offered to certain people is not only meaningless, it is cruel.

Individuals will be judged for rejecting a message which, by definition, they could not accept since God has not “chosen” them. To many people, this makes God a “monster” who claims to love everyone yet does not give everyone an opportunity to accept His offer of forgiveness of sin.

In addition, how could anyone call the gospel “good news?” It certainly would not be good news for those whom the Lord has not chosen or “passed over.”

Indeed, the doctrine of double predestination makes the gospel meaningless.

Those who hold to God merely “passing over” the lost do not fare any better. By passing over certain people God has determined that they will not be saved. There is really no difference as far as the lost is concerned. Neither does this solve the ethical dilemma of God selecting some, rejecting others, while offering salvation to everyone.

God's Plan

Option 3: God Has Two Wills: A Revealed Will And A Secret Will

This position says that God has two wills. There is His revealed will and His secret will. Basically it says that God's desire, or will, is for all people to be saved. This is His revealed will. However, He has another will in which He has determined that only a limited number of people actually come to Christ for forgiveness.

While God desires all to be saved there is something else in His character that determines that certain people will be lost. This greater desire is His own glory. To display this, God must damn some individuals to hell to demonstrate His holy wrath against sin.

Like the previous option, the end result is that God has chosen some people to be saved while not choosing other people. How and why He does this has been explained in different ways. However, the conclusion is that God does not really want them to be saved. If He did, then they would be saved.

Evaluation Of God Having A Revealed Will And A Secret Will

This option also has its problems. For one thing, it claims that God has a "secret will." If this is true, and there is no biblical evidence that it is true, then secret means "secret." In other words, we do not know what it is. Therefore, it is meaningless to claim there is some secret will of God.

In addition, this so-called "hidden will" actually contradicts His revealed will! Indeed, since His revealed will is for all people to be saved why should we assume that there is some secret will that says otherwise?

Also, this view has the same problems as we find in the previous options; God offers something to human beings that they have possible way to receive.

In truth, if He has not selected them for salvation then they cannot be saved. A better answer is needed.

God's Plan

Option 4: God Has Two Wills: He Desires All To Be Saved But Has Left The Choice To Us

The fourth position is the one that most Christians have embraced. Generally speaking, it says that the Lord does indeed desire all people to be saved but that we as individuals have the responsibility to choose to believe.

In other words, He has done everyone possible for the person to be saved but in the end each individual must personally choose to accept what He has done for them. If they refuse to believe in Christ, then they are lost. Thus, it is God's will that humans exercise faith to receive the salvation He has provided.

Evaluation Of God Allowing People To Determine Their Own Fate

Those who object to this view argue that this allows humans, not God, to ultimately determine their own fate. It takes the control away from God and places it in the hands of sinful human beings. Supposedly this disparages the sovereignty of God by magnifying the choices of human beings over the power and plan of God. Thus, it elevates humanity and belittles God.

Yet this is not the case. If God has decided, in His sovereignty, to give human beings a legitimate choice for salvation, and He repeats that fact over and over again, we should not assume it belittles Him if He has made such a decision.

In fact, the plain reading of the text of Scripture will bring a person to this conclusion.

In sum, while the issue of God's will with respect to salvation has been a debated issue, the clear teaching of the Bible says that God has given each of us a legitimate choice to believe or not to believe.

While He wants all to come to know Him, He has left that ultimate decision up to us. Thus, it is our responsibility to believe.

**Summary To Question 10:
If God Wants Everyone To Be Saved Then Why Are Some
People Lost? (1Timothy 2:4)**

One of the most important questions that can be asked by human beings concerns God's activity with respect to the salvation of the human race. Does He "will" or "desire" that everyone is to be saved? If so, does this mean every human being will eventually go to heaven? If not, does this mean that He has more than one will, or desire, for the human race?

Christians have answered this question in four general ways. First, there are those who hold to the doctrine of universalism. Simply stated, universalism holds to the idea that it is God's will that everyone will eventually be saved. In other words, either every individual who has ever existed will ultimately end up in heaven. There is no eternal hell for the lost.

This contradicts the plain teaching of Scripture. There is a heaven for the saved and a hell for the lost. Not everyone will spend eternity in heaven.

Others also believe that God has one will for humanity but it is His will that some be saved and others be damned. He alone makes the choice and to who will go to heaven and who will not. Ultimately, humans have no say-so in the matter.

This too is contradictory to Scripture. God has given human beings a legitimate choice; we can believe in Him or reject Him. This is the consistent teaching of God's Word.

Some argue that God has not one will but two. He has an "expressed" will and a "secret" will. His express will is that all humanity be saved but His secret will is that some must be judged.

The obvious problem with this view is if there is such a thing as a secret will. Even if we do acknowledge that a secret will exists one may rightly wonder how we human beings know what it consists of.

If God has not revealed this to us then how can we, with any assurance, know what it is?

God's Plan

Furthermore, the so-called "secret" will which calls for God's predetermining the damnation of some is contrary to God's expressed will!

The best answer seems to be that God does indeed have two wills. On the one hand it is His will, or desire that everyone be saved. However, He has also decreed that only those who receive Christ, in faith, will be saved. Therefore, each human being is personally responsible to believe in Christ as their Savior.

Question 11

Do God's Plan Remove Human Freedom And Responsibility? (Fatalism)

One of the common arguments against the idea of God's decrees is that they remove responsibility from humans. It is often argued that God's decrees remove the free will, or freedom of choice, of human beings and angels. They cannot be held responsible for their actions because they had no real choice but to do what they were decreed to do. It seems that there is no freedom outside of God's decree. How do we respond to this?

1. The Decrees Do Not Remove Genuine Choice From Human Beings

However, this confuses the decrees with the execution of them. Although the Scripture is clear that God has decreed certain things it is equally clear that human beings have a choice as to whether to follow God or to reject Him. The Bible never says that God forced anyone to do something against their will.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is an example of this. It shows that God had decreed certain actions to occur, and that people were personally responsible for what they did. Before He went to the cross, Jesus said that His death was part of God's plan. We read the following words of our Lord in Luke's gospel.

For I, the Son of Man, must die since it is part of God's plan. But how terrible it will be for my betrayer! (Luke 22:22 NLT).

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter told the crowd that had gathered that Christ's death on the cross was all according to a set plan. In addition, Peter said that God used certain lawless men to carry out the plan. He said.

By using men who don't acknowledge Moses' Teachings, you crucified Jesus, who was given over {to death} by a plan that God had determined in advance (Acts 2:23 God's Word).

God's Plan

The plan of God had been determined in advance but lawless individual willingly chose to carry out the plan and crucify the innocent Jesus.

Later in the Book of Acts, we read about the personal responsibility of those who put Him to death. Again, this was all in the predetermined plan of God.

For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done (Acts 4:27,28 HCSB).

Therefore, from the things said about the death of Christ, we have both God's eternal plan at work as well as free choices made by human beings.

God allows us to make genuine moral choices but these choices always accomplish His purpose without robbing us of our freedom. How this can be is not explained to us in Scripture. Yet, nevertheless, the Bible says that it is true.

Furthermore, Scripture says that each of us will give an account of our lives to God. Paul wrote to the Romans.

Yes, each of us will have to give a personal account to God (Romans 14:12 NLT).

All of this assumes some sort of freedom on our part that we are responsible for our actions. Otherwise why would we have to give an account of what we have done?

2. It Is Not The Same As Fatalism

The decrees of God have been seen by some to be a kind of fatalism. Fatalism has the idea of some impersonal force controlling all events. Many people mistakenly attribute God's decree to some type of fatalism that He has placed in the universe.

Consequently, they ask, "If everything has already been decreed, then why exert any effort?"

God's Plan

Yet the decrees of God are not fatalistic. Human beings have the responsibility and privilege of cooperation in the execution of the decrees. We can choose to serve the Lord or not to serve Him. For example, in the Book of Joshua, we read.

But the people answered Joshua, saying, "No, we are determined to serve the LORD!" "You are accountable for this decision," Joshua said. "You have chosen to serve the LORD." "Yes," they replied, "we are accountable" (Joshua 24:21,22 NLT).

The people could choose whom they would serve. They were also held accountable for their decision. This is not consistent with fatalism. There was no impersonal force making them decide one way or another. Again, though God is in absolute control, He gives genuine freedom to humans.

3. People Can Resist His Will

There is something else that must be emphasized. God's decrees are not the same as the actions of humans or His revealed will for them. The actions of humans can go against the will and wishes of God.

For example, we are told in Scripture that God desires that those who believe in Him do not sin. John wrote.

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1 NKJV).

However, believers do sin. When we do sin, it is our responsibility, it is not God's. He has given us the choice.

God also desires everyone to be saved. Paul wrote the following to Timothy.

This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3,4 NRSV).

The God of Scripture wants everyone to come to the knowledge of Him.

God's Plan

We read the same sort of thing in Second Peter. He wrote.

The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent (2 Peter 3:9 NLT).

Yet not everyone is saved. People resist His will. This clearly points out the difference between God's decrees and His desires.

While God desires that Christians do not sin, they do still sin. While God desires that everyone comes to know Him in a saving way, many people reject His offer. Therefore, we cannot equate His eternal decrees with His desires. In addition, the fact that God's will can be resisted rules out any type of fatalism. We have choice.

4. God's Decrees Do Not Stop People From Being Saved

There is one more point that needs to be mentioned. God's decrees certainly do not stop someone from coming to Jesus Christ. They do not, in any way, hinder someone who wants to receive the forgiveness of sin offered through Jesus Christ. Everyone who comes to Christ in faith, and asks for forgiveness, will be forgiven. The Bible says.

Yet some people accepted him and put their faith in him. So he gave them the right to be the children of God (John 1:12 CEV).

Those who believe in Christ are His.

Jesus said that all who come to Him will be welcomed.

Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out (John 6:37 HCSB).

In this one verse, we again have the mystery of divine sovereignty as well as our human responsibility. The Father must "give them to Jesus and they will come to Him." However, whoever it is that does come to Jesus will not be rejected. Therefore, these divine truths are taught side by side.

5. People Are Still Responsible Before God

The Bible teaches that human beings are still responsible to God for their behavior. This is clear from the entirety of Scripture. The fact that God has decreed certain things does not remove our human responsibility.

In sum, we can conclude that God's plan and purposes for the human race do not remove our responsibility to obey. Indeed, one day each of us will be judged. This judgment will be based upon the way we have chosen. We will not be able to blame God if we refuse to believe in Jesus Christ. The choice is ours. Thus, fatalism is nowhere to be found in Holy Scripture.

Summary To Question 11:

Does God's Plan Remove Human Freedom And Responsibility? (Fatalism)

It has been argued that God's decrees remove the free will from humans. It also seems fatalistic to people. They assume "what will be, will be." There is no chance of changing it. Thus, God's decrees are compared to a fatalistic view of the universe.

These objections are without merit. The fact that God has decreed or declared certain things that will happen does not remove the free will from individual. People still make choices.

Indeed, God's decrees do not mean that all events are pre-determined in a fatalistic way. For example, the leader Joshua told the people of Israel to make a choice. They could choose to serve the Lord or choose not to serve. They realized their responsibility and chose to serve the Lord.

In the life of Christ we also find this to be true. While God pre-planned the death of Jesus Christ on the cross it was the freewill action of sinful humans which brought it about. They willingly chose to murder an innocent Person. There is no fatalism here.

In addition, we discover from Scripture that people can resist the will of God. Indeed, there are numerous examples of this. These facts rule out any sort of fatalism.

God's Plan

It is also important to remember that God's decrees do not keep people from being saved from their sins. If a person eventually goes to hell it is because they have chosen to reject the free gift of salvation offered by Jesus Christ. God cannot be blamed for their refusal to believe.

Thus, human beings are responsible before God. While He controls the entire universe God has given humans the ability to genuinely choose between the acceptance of Him and the rejection of Him. We are not robots. We can make meaningful choices.

God's Plan

Question 12

Do God's Plan Make Him The Author Of Sin?

If God has decreed everything that will occur, does this not make Him the author of sin? Can the responsibility of all evil be attributed to Him? How do we respond to these questions?

God Is Not The Author Of Sin

While it is true that God has permitted sin to exist, He certainly is not the one that has authored it. By giving His created beings a genuine choice, the possibility of sin existed. The fact that angels and humans chose to sin does not make God the instigator behind their sin. He did all that He could, without violating their freedom, to keep them from sinning. In the end *they* were the ones who chose to sin.

Three points need to be emphasized in this matter. They are as follows.

1. His Decrees Are Good

The Bible emphasizes that the decrees of God are good. We read the following in the Book of Psalms.

You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees (Psalm 119:68 NIV).

It could not be more clearly stated. God is good as are His decrees. This must be our starting point in answering this question.

2. God's Nature Is Without Sin

The idea that God could be the author of sin also contradicts what we know about His nature. The Bible teaches that the nature of God does not contain any sinful elements. The psalmist wrote about how the Lord always does what is right.

God's Plan

And they will say about you, "The LORD always does right! God is our mighty rock (Psalm 92:15 CEV)

Notice He always does what is right or righteous. This does not allow the possibility of Him being behind sin. Indeed, He cannot sin nor advance the cause of sin.

The New Testament echoes this thought. The Apostle John said there is no darkness whatsoever in God. He wrote.

This is the message he has given us to announce to you: God is light and there is no darkness in him at all (1 John 1:5 NLT).

God is absolutely perfect in His nature. This, of course, means that there is no sin to be found in Him.

3. God Does Not Have The Ability To Sin

There is something else we must appreciate. The God of the Bible does not possess the ability to sin. James testified

And remember, no one who wants to do wrong should ever say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either (James 1:13 NLT)

This could not be clearer. God does not lead people into sin. In fact, He cannot do this.

Paul wrote to Titus about the inability of God to sin. He put it this way.

Then they will have the hope of eternal life that God promised long ago. And God never tells a lie! (Titus 1:2 CEV).

While God knew of the possibility of sin, and included that possibility in His decree, He did not personally bring it about. Choice was given to both angels and humans. Choice is not sin. Indeed, it is something that is neutral, or harmless, in and of itself. Both angels and humans willfully chose to reject God's commands. The responsibility is theirs, not God's!

4. Certain Angels Chose To Sin

The Bible says that angels chose to leave their God-given position. We read about this in the Book of Jude. It says.

And I remind you of the angels who did not stay within the limits of authority God gave them but left the place where they belonged. God has kept them chained in prisons of darkness, waiting for the day of judgment (Jude 6 NLT).

Here the responsibility is squarely placed upon them. Nothing is said about God forcing them to leave His presence.

5. The Devil Has Been A Liar From The Beginning

We also find this to be the case in the life of Christ. Jesus said that the devil, the one who led the angelic rebellion, has been a liar and murderer from the beginning. He said the following to the religious leaders of His day.

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44 RSV).

As part of the permissive aspect of God's decrees, sin entered into the universe. However, God does not accept the responsibility for this occurring. Neither should He. The God of the Bible is not the author of sin. This is what Scripture says about this issue.

Conclusion: God Is Not The Author Of Sin

From the above discussion, we conclude that God is not the author of sin. When He gave human beings and angels the right to choose, this allowed the possibility for sin. When humans and angels sinned, it was because of their choice, not God's! Therefore, we should not equate sin in the universe with the God of the Bible. By giving genuine choice to

God's Plan

humans and angels He allowed for the possibility of sin. However, the ultimate responsibility belongs to those who have chosen to rebel.

Summary To Question 12:

Does God's Plan For The World Make Him The Author Of Sin?

The biblical decrees do not make the God of Scripture the author of sin as some have claimed. Indeed, we will find that nothing could be further from the truth when we examine all the evidence.

First, we discover that God has allowed for the entrance of sin into the universe without becoming its author. While He made it possible for the first human beings to sin, He also made it possible for them not to sin. The responsibility ultimately belongs to those who chose to sin. God gave them a choice and they chose to sin.

There are other things that we must take into consideration.

For one thing, the Bible says that the decrees of God are good, not evil. Therefore, He cannot be accused of being the author of sin.

In addition, God's character has nothing sinful in it. He has no sin. How then could He be accused of being behind sin? The simple answer is that He cannot.

Add to this, His actions do not allow for any sin. Indeed, He does not possess the ability to sin or to cause people to sin. This fact rules out the possibility that He can be behind any sin which is in the universe.

Consequently, His decrees must always be good because the decrees come from a good God who cannot do evil. We should always view them in this way. Therefore, we conclude that God cannot be charged as being the author of sin.

Question 13

What Are The Some Of The Practical Benefits Of Understanding The Plan Of God?

The Bible teaches that the Lord has made a number of decrees or divine pronouncements. They cannot be altered. The biblical doctrine of divine decrees has a number of practical benefits. They include the following.

1. We Gain Confidence Realizing God's Control Is Over Everything

Since God has decreed certain things will happen in the future, the believer can be confident that His Word will indeed come to pass. All things in the life of the believer are working together for good. In His wisdom, God has organized the circumstances of our birth, the surroundings in which we live, as well as our eventual death.

Therefore, we can be confident that He is guiding us all along the way. Paul wrote to the Romans.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family (Romans 8:28,29 NRSV).

Since the God of the Bible causes all things to work together for good for the believer, we have the assurance that His control is over all events. This certainly helps us with our peace of mind.

2. It Makes Us Humble And Thankful

It also instills humility in the believer that God is working out His eternal plan in each individual life. We realize it is He, and not us, that is ultimately in control. The psalmist emphasized that it is the Lord who has made us. He wrote.

God's Plan

Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture (Psalm 100:3 NIV).

Humility should also be a result from understanding God is the Creator of all things who has made us, His people. Furthermore, as His sheep He looks after us as the Good Shepherd.

3. It Gives People A Warning About Future Judgment

The fact that God's declarations will come to pass serves as a warning for unbelievers that there will be a judgment day for their sin. This judgment will be certain. Indeed, there will be no escape for the wicked.

We read in Proverbs.

The LORD protects the upright but destroys the wicked (Proverbs 10:29 NLT).

Here is the contrast. The righteous are protected but the wicked will be judged. The Bible has warned the wicked that judgment is coming. They have no excuse.

4. It Provides A Basis Of Hope For Escaping Judgment

With the warning for the sinner comes hope of forgiveness if that person will turn to Jesus Christ as their Savior. Therefore, God's judgment can be averted if one will ask Him for His forgiveness. The prophet Habakkuk wrote.

I have heard all about you, LORD, and I am filled with awe by the amazing things you have done. In this time of our deep need, begin again to help us, as you did in years gone by. Show us your power to save us. And in your anger, remember your mercy (Habakkuk 3:2 NLT).

Therefore, the possibility of escaping the divine judgment is there for the unbeliever who turns to the Lord for forgiveness. God is a God of mercy. He grants mercy to sinful humans who turn to Him. This is another benefit that comes with understanding God's decrees.

God's Plan

In sum, if we truly understand the decrees of God then a lot of practical benefits will follow. Consequently, we should not look at this subject as some mere theological doctrine which is irrelevant for daily living. Indeed, understanding the plan of God brings along many practical benefits.

Summary To Question 13: What Are Some Of The Practical Benefits Of Understanding The Plan Of God?

God has a plan for both time and eternity. The Bible makes this plain. History is going somewhere. It is not merely a series of unrelated events.

From a study of the Bible we find that there are a number of practical benefits that can be derived from understanding God's decrees or God's plans and purposes for the human race.

First, there is confidence that what God has decreed will come to pass. Whatever God says is going to happen will indeed happen. His Word always comes to pass. Consequently, we can be assured that His promises will come true.

This also brings humility to the believer. We are humbled to realize that the God of eternity has a plan for our lives. In fact, He is concerned for us down to the smallest detail.

Knowing the plan of God also has some practical benefits for the unbeliever. For one thing, it warns them of judgment to come. That's the bad news. However, the good news is that they can escape this judgment by turning to Christ for forgiveness. Thus, realizing God's plan provides hope of escaping this future judgment.

In all of this, understanding the decrees of God is exceedingly practical for both the believer as well as the unbeliever.

Question 14

Does God Play An Active Role In The History Of Humanity? (God's Immanence)

God has made His presence felt among humankind since the beginning of time. Sometimes it has been obvious, other times it is not so obvious. He has revealed Himself in many different ways.

All of these ways testify to the fact that He is intimately involved in human affairs. This is also known as God's "immanence."

God Has Acted In History

From the first chapter of the Bible until the last we find God intimately involved with His creation. We will give only a few examples of this involvement.

1. God Miraculously Delivered Israel From Egypt

When the children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt they cried out to the Lord for help. God supernaturally revealed Himself to Moses in a burning bush that was not consumed. The Bible says the following took place.

Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up" (Exodus 3:3 NRSV).

God told Moses that he would be that deliverer. The needs of the people would be met. They would be lead out of Egypt to their own land, a land that God promised them.

2. God Supernaturally Guided Israel In The Wilderness

The nation of Israel was delivered from the slavery of Egypt because of the supernatural work of God. Once out of Egypt, God guided the children of Israel in a supernatural way to the Promised Land. We read the following in the Book of Exodus.

God's Plan

The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night (Exodus 13:21 NASB).

Throughout the entire history of the Old Testament we find God intimately involved with the affairs of His people. He guided their destiny.

3. God Sent His Son To The World

The Bible is clear that God is intimately involved in the affairs of humankind. His greatest involvement was in sending His Son.

The writer to the Hebrews says.

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:1-3 NRSV).

God the Father's ultimate act of love and concern for the human race was sending God the Son, Jesus Christ to the earth. Jesus lived the perfect life so He could be the perfect sacrifice. He died in our place so that we could live forever in God's presence.

John the Apostle wrote the most familiar verse in the Bible, John 3:16. It says it all.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16 NLT).

God's love was indeed shown to the world by the sending of His Son.

God's Plan

4. Jesus Spoke Of The Father's Concern For Humanity

In the words of Jesus we also find God's concern for humanity. Matthew records Jesus saying the following.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31 NRSV).

According to Jesus, God the Father has tremendous concern for those who belong to Him. This concern includes the incidental details of our lives.

5. He Cares For Us

Thus, the constant testimony of Scripture is that God has a special care, or love, for those who love Him.

Peter wrote.

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about what happens to you (1 Peter 5:7 NLT).

Believers are not to worry about anything seeing that it is the God of the Bible who intimately cares for us.

Conclusion: God Has Acted In History From The Beginning Of Creation

The Bible tells us that the living God has been active in history from the beginning of creation to the present. His care has been constantly shown to humanity. Today, He is still intimately involved in the lives of humans.

Therefore, far from being an aloof Monarch the God of Scripture is lovingly concerned for His people.

**Summary To Question 14:
Does God Play An Active Role In The History Of Humanity?
(God's Immanence)**

The Bible speaks not only of a God who exists, but a God who is intimately involved in the everyday affairs of humanity. This is also known as His "immanence." He cares about what occurs and He especially cares for His people. We find this truth taught in both testaments.

In the Old Testament we find God's care and concern by guiding the children of Israel out of Egypt, and into the Promised Land. He was with them every step of the way. This includes the times they rebelled against Him. In fact, the entire Old Testament gives a consistent picture of a loving God who is actively involved in the lives of His people.

We also find this to be true in the New Testament era. Indeed, the supreme act of love was shown to humanity when God the Father sent God the Son into our world. Jesus came to our world to present Himself as a sacrifice for sin. We do not have to pay for our own sins because Christ Jesus paid the price. Greater love could not be shown.

In the teachings of we also find God's concern made evident. Indeed, Jesus spoke of the continual care which God the Father has for His children. This care and concern comes through loud and clear in all that Jesus said and did.

The rest of the New Testament repeats this message. We are to throw or cast our concerns upon Him because He cares for us.

Therefore, from the first page of the Bible until the last we find the consistent picture of a God who is intimately involved in the affairs of His people. He is the King but He is a King who truly cares.

Question 15

What Is The Providence Of God?

The Bible speaks of the providence of God. What is meant by this? In what sense is the God of the Bible the “providing God?”

The providence of God can be simply defined as the God of the Bible making all the events of the physical and moral universe fulfill His original design. In other words, He provides.

The Difference Between God's Creating, Sustaining, And Providence

We need to make the distinction between God creating the universe, His sustaining the universe, and God's providence in the universe. A number of points should be made.

Creation Has Ceased

In the past, God created the universe. Creation has now ceased. The Book of Genesis makes this clear. We read.

So the heavens and the earth and everything else were created. By the seventh day God had finished his work, and so he rested. (Genesis 2:1-2 CEV).

Note that God finished His work of creation on the seventh day. Creation is never spoken of in the Bible as something that is continuing. Thus creation has to do with the beginning of things, not the continuation of things. This is important to understand.

Preservation Of The Universe Continues

Creation is one thing, preservation is another. Preservation, or sustaining, has to do with the continuance of things that God created. God has not only created the universe in the past, He is active in keeping it running.

God's Plan

This is what He is presently doing and will continue to do. This is called "preservation."

Providence Deals With The Fulfillment Of God's Plan

Providence has to do with the development of, and the fulfillment of, God's original plan that He devised. Providence fulfills the plan that God created.

Stated another way, creation has to do with the existence of the universe, preservation with the maintaining of the universe, and providence with the care and control of the universe.

Scripture speaks of God providing for humanity. He designs all things and guides events according to His perfect purpose. This is God's providence. Both great things, and small things, are under His providing care. There are no exceptions.

The universe, from its widest reach, down to its smallest details, is the object of the Creator's oversight. The vast systems of galaxies, down to the smallest particles, are all under the divine loving care.

There Are Two Common Misconceptions About The Providence Of God

There are a couple of common misconceptions with respect to God's providence. These need to be cleared up.

Providence Is Not The Same As Fate

Often people confuse the providence of God with fate. This assumes, "what will be, will be." Things occur because some unknown, impersonal force destines them to happen.

However, there is no such thing as fate. It is only a superstition. The providence of God is the care and concern of a personal God who is intimately involved in the universe. He brings things into order.

Thus, there is a design and purpose to all things, not blind chance.

Providence Is Not The Same As The Laws Of God

Providence is not the same thing as the universal laws that God has established in the universe. God is behind and above every law in the universe. The laws are the tools that God has made but they are not the same as God Himself. Laws are not coequal with God neither are they some overruling force. They are an expression of His care for humanity.

Therefore, we should not confuse providence with the law of God for providence speaks of God's personal involvement with His creation to bring about its intended purpose.

This sums up some of the basic truths concerning God's providence.

Summary To Question 15: What Is The Providence Of God?

The providence of God concerns God's control and care of things He originally created, and now sustains. We must understand the different between creation, sustaining, and providence.

God created the universe at some distant time in the past. Creation is now complete. Therefore, no more creating is occurring.

Presently the Lord is preserving that which He created. Once He created all things He set the world in motion using secondary causes to keep things going.

Providence has to do with the fulfillment of God's plan. It is God providing for the His creation which He is now sustaining.

There are two misconceptions with respect to God's providence which must be cleared up.

First, we must be careful not to confuse God's providence with fate. The idea behind fate is that it is some impersonal force that works out all problems in the universe. However, fate does not exist. The force that works out all things in the universe is the guiding and providing hand of the God of the Bible.

God's Plan

Question 16

What Is The Unconditional Providence Of God?

The general, or unconditional, providence of God has to do with the governing and control of the entire universe. This type of providence is accomplished without any conditions; it is not dependent upon the action or inaction by its subjects. Also, it is not even necessary that anyone is aware that it is taking place.

The Bible says the following are under God's providential control.

1. **The Entire Universe Is Under God's Unconditional Control**

God exercises providential control over the entire universe. The writer to the Hebrews stated that Jesus sustains all things by His Word. He wrote.

And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3 NASB).

The psalmist recognized that God's rule is over all.

The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all (Psalm 103:19 NIV).

Daniel the prophet recorded the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar giving testimony about God's control over all things in heaven and on earth.

All the people of the earth are nothing compared to him. He has the power to do as he pleases among the angels of heaven and with those who live on earth. No one can stop him or challenge him, saying, 'What do you mean by doing these things?' (Daniel 4:35 NLT).

Paul the apostle wrote about the purpose of God which encompasses all things.

God's Plan

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11 NKJV).

Everything in the universe is covered by God's providence. This occurs, whether or not humans are aware of it, or whether they obey or disobey God's commandments.

2. Humankind Is Looked After Unconditionally By The Lord

It is not only the physical elements and the animal world that is under God's providential control, the human race is also unconditionally looked after by the living God, With respect to our basic needs, God looks after the entire human race. Jesus said.

So that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45 NRSB).

Paul spoke about God's providential goodness in giving rain and fruitful seasons.

Yet, in bestowing his goodness, he did not leave himself without witness, for he gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filled you with nourishment and gladness for your hearts (Acts 14:17 NAB).

The entire human race is under the care of the Lord. This is whether we know it or not.

Thus, the Bible teaches that everything on the earth, whether it may be the elements, or living creatures, they are all providentially provided for by the Lord.

3. The Affairs Of Nations Are In The Hand Of God

God's providential control extends to the affairs of nations of the world. The Bible says that they too are in the hand of God. In the Book of Job, we read.

He makes nations great and he destroys them; he spreads peoples abroad and he abandons them (Job 12:23 NAB).

God's general control of the universe also concerns the governing of the nations. Whether they realize it or not, they are ultimately controlled by the Lord.

Conclusion: God Looks After Certain Things Regardless Of Behavior

The living God takes care of everything in the universe regardless of behavior, or the knowledge that it is happening. This Bible specifically mentions forces of nature, and the animal and plant kingdom are under God's control.

In addition, human beings are also unconditionally provided for by the Lord. The fates of the nations of the world are also in the providential care of the Lord.

To sum up, His providence controls everything.

Summary To Question 16 What Is The Unconditional Providence Of God?

There is a general or unconditional providence of God that reaches the physical universe. Thus, we find that the animal world, the plant world, and every human being. This providence is not dependent in any way upon the actions of those that receive the benefit of God's providing care.

The idea behind the general providence of God is that God is looking after and controlling all the parts of the universe. The Bible specifically

God's Plan

speaks of God's control over the universe at large, the physical world, the animal kingdom, and the affairs of nations.

Therefore every part of the universe is directly under the control of the general providence of God; nothing is beyond His control.

Question 17

What Is The Special Providence Of God?

The general, or unconditional, providence of God teaches that God looks after everything in the universe. This includes the plant and animal kingdom as well as the general well-being of humanity. In addition, God has control over the fates of the nations. In short, God takes care of all things.

There is also what is known as the "special providence" of God. This refers to God looking after the special details of a person's life. This special providence is directed at both believers and unbelievers. The Bible says that God's special providence works in the following ways.

1. One's Birth And Purpose In Life Are Under God's Providence

A person's birth and place in this life is all part of God's providence. The psalmist wrote about how our lives are ordered by the Lord.

Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:16 NIV).

Jeremiah the prophet wrote about the Lord setting human beings apart before they were born. In fact, the Lord said to him.

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you (Jeremiah 1:5 NAB).

Paul acknowledged that his particular ministry was determined before His birth. He wrote about this to the Galatians.

But then something happened! For it pleased God in his kindness to choose me and call me, even before I was born! What undeserved mercy! Then he revealed his Son to me so that I could proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. When all this happened to

God's Plan

me, I did not rush out to consult with anyone else (Galatians 1:15,16 NLT).

The Lord told Samuel whom He wanted as the King of Israel.

The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king" (1 Samuel 16:1 NIV).

Though the people chose Saul, God has chosen David to be their king. These passages show that our entire life, from birth until death, is under God's providential control.

2. Success Or Failure Is Under God's Care

The success or failure of individuals is also in the hand of God's providence. The psalmist testified to this when he wrote.

Our LORD and our God, victory doesn't come from the east or the west or from the desert. You are the one who judges. You can take away power and give it to others (Psalm 75:6,7 CEV).

In Luke, we read about God exalting the humble by causing failure among the rulers. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, said.

He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly (Luke 1:52 NAB).

Whether we succeed or fail in this life is ultimately up to the Lord.

3. Even Seemingly Insignificant Things Are Under God's Providence

God's providential care extends to those things that we sometimes think are insignificant. Jesus spoke of the general providential care of God the Father.

God's Plan

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (Matthew 6:25 NASB).

The smallest of details are under God's providential care.

In Proverbs, we read about the Lord being the ultimate determiner of the very steps that we take.

We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps (Proverbs 16:9 NLT).

This is a comforting thought. God care extends to everything that we do.

4. God's Care Can Be Without Our Knowledge

God's providential care someone comes without the knowledge of the person. The Bible says that selected King Cyrus without the knowledge of the king.

I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me (Isaiah 45:5 NRSV).

The Bible emphasizes that God is good to everyone; regardless of whether they know it or not.

The LORD *is* good to all, and His tender mercies *are* over all His works (Psalm 145:9 NKJV).

Whether we realize it or not, God's providential care is occurring.

5. Providence Extends To The Sinful Acts Of Humans

God's providence also extends to sinning humanity. He allows sinful acts to fulfill His ultimate purposes. We read the following in the Book of Second Samuel about the Lord causing someone to curse King David.

God's Plan

But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" (2 Samuel 16:10 NRSV).

The Bible says that God incited David to number Israel.

Once again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he caused David to harm them by taking a census. "Go and count the people of Israel and Judah," the LORD told him (2 Samuel 24:1 NLT).

Paul wrote that the disobedience of humans leads to God extending His mercy to them. In the Book of Romans, it says.

For God has imprisoned all people in their own disobedience so he could have mercy on everyone (Romans 11:32 NLT).

The true intentions of the heart become known because of God's providential dealings. Paul wrote.

So God will send great deception upon them, and they will believe all these lies. Then they will be condemned for not believing the truth and for enjoying the evil they do (2 Thessalonians 2:11,12 NLT).

Consequently, we find that the special providence of God covers a number of areas.

6. God Exposes Sin And Punishes The Wicked

At times, God exposes the sin of the wicked, and then punishes them. The psalmist wrote.

If a person does not repent, God will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. He will prepare his deadly weapons and ignite his flaming arrows (Psalm 7:12,13 NLT).

In another place, the psalmist said the following about the fate of the wicked.

God's Plan

On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and sulfur; a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup (Psalm 11:6 NRSV).

Peter about how God rescues the godly but judges the wicked.

So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials, even while punishing the wicked right up until the day of judgment (2 Peter 2:9 NLT).

God's special providence extends to His punishment of sin and exposure of the deeds of the wicked.

7. **Providence Extends To The Free Acts Of Human Beings**

The providence of God extends to the free actions of humans. We read the following in the Book of Exodus.

And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them *what they requested*. Thus they plundered the Egyptians (Exodus 12:36 NKJV).

In Samuel, we read about the Lord delivering Saul into the hands of David.

You have just now told me of the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me (1 Samuel 24:18 NIV).

Saul realized that it was the Lord who delivered him.

In the Book of Proverbs, it speaks of the Lord guiding the reply of a person.

To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the reply of the tongue (Proverbs 16:1 NIV).

In another place in the Book of Proverbs, it emphasizes that God's purpose will be established.

God's Plan

We may make a lot of plans, but the LORD will do what he has decided (Proverbs 19:21 CEV).

Jeremiah acknowledged that it is ultimately the Lord who directs his steps.

You know, O LORD, that man is not master of his way; Man's course is not within his choice, nor is it for him to direct his step (Jeremiah 10:23 NAB).

Paul told the Philippians that God is working His purpose with them.

God is working in you to make you willing and able to obey him (Philippians 2:13 CEV).

God has prepared His own for good works. Paul wrote to the Ephesians.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (Ephesians 2:10 NASB).

The Lord wants us to honor Him in our lives.

The Lord Looks After The Righteous In A Special Way

The Bible teaches that the Lord looks after those that are righteous in a special way.

He Is Always Protecting The Righteous

God's providence extends to the protection of the righteous. The psalmist took comfort in this thought. He wrote.

My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me (Psalm 63:8 NIV).

The psalmist noted how God rescues His people from trouble.

For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from the fatal plague (Psalm 91:3 NLT).

God's Plan

Paul wrote how God causes all things to work together for the ultimate good of those who love Him.

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

The Lord protects those who are His.

God Meets The Needs And Desires Of His People

God's providence is seen in that He meets, or fulfills, the desires of His people. For example, Abraham told his son Isaac that God would provide a sacrifice for them.

Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together (Genesis 22:8 NRSV).

We also read in this chapter in Genesis.

Abraham named the place "The LORD Will Provide." This name has now become a proverb: "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided" (Genesis 22:14 NLT).

Moses wrote about the provision that God made for Israel in the wilderness. He provided them manna to eat.

He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to you and your fathers, in order to show you that not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:3 NAB).

Paul told the Philippian church that God Himself would fulfill all of their needs.

And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19 NLT).

God's Plan

God has promised to meet all of our needs of those who put their trust in Him.

Summary To Question 17 **What Is God's Special Providence?**

The Bible speaks of the special providence of God. This means that the Lord is specifically watching over the details of a person's life. For example, the birth and purpose of a person's life are under the providence of God. Whether one succeeds or fails is also due to God's providence. Even the things that are seemingly insignificant are also controlled by God's providence. Often times God's providence occurs without our knowledge.

The sinful acts of humans are not apart from God's providence. The exposure and punishment of the wicked also are in the hand of God's providence. Finally, even the free actions of human beings are under God's providential care. As we can readily see God's providence extends to all facets of a persons' life.

General providence concerns everything in the universe. God provides for all living creatures, as well as being in charge of the physical elements. Everything is under His general providential control. Special providence can be defined as God's providential control in the lives of individuals. This includes both believers and unbelievers. He is interested in the details of our lives. He also protects and provides for believers in a special way.

It is also important to realize that providence is not the same as the laws of God. God has set certain law in motion as He is sustaining the universe. Providence is God personally involved with the running of the universe to bring about its intended purpose.

Question 18

What Is Conditional Providence

This brings us to a third type of providence that we can call “conditional providence.” This is distinct from general providence and special providence in that it concerns only those who believe. It is based upon the believer obeying the commandments of God.

There Are Certain Conditions That Believers Must Meet

The subjects of this providence must meet certain conditions before God can extend His grace in these areas. The areas believers must meet are obedience, prayer, and faith.

1. Believers Are Commanded To Obey The Lord

God has certain things that He wants to give believers. However believers must first obey the commands of the Lord. John wrote.

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments (1 John 2:3 NKJV).

Paul commanded believers to live by means of the Spirit.

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16 NRSV).

If we live by the Spirit we will produce the fruit of the Spirit. Paul wrote the following about what the fruit of the Spirit consists of.

In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ (Jesus) have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25 NAB).

Believers are commanded to obey the Lord.

2. Believers Are Commanded To Pray To The Lord

A second way in which God's conditional providence is given to believers is through prayer. Jesus said that we should pray.

Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you (Mark 11:24 NASB).

We are to ask for things in His name, or by His authority Jesus said.

You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, because the work of the Son brings glory to the Father. Yes, ask anything in my name, and I will do it! (John 14:13,14 NLT).

Believers are to abide in Him as we ask for things. Jesus also said.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you (John 15:7 NKJV).

Paul said that we are to pray about everything. He wrote the following to the Philippians.

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6,7 NRSV).

James wrote the following about the necessity of prayer.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:14-16 NKJV).

God's Plan

When believers obey the Lord, then He has promised to do certain things. These conditional promises are based upon our obedience to Him.

We find the providence of God in answer to prayer. The psalmist gave testimony to the Lord meeting the needs of the people.

There your people finally settled, and with a bountiful harvest, O God, you provided for your needy people (Psalm 68:10 NLT).

Isaiah wrote about the uniqueness of the God of Scripture. He is the only one who answers the prayers of His people.

Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him (Isaiah 64:4 NIV).

Jesus told His followers to be unlike unbelievers; He knows what we need before we even ask Him.

So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him (Matthew 6:8 NASB).

Above all, we must seek God's kingdom. Jesus said.

All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides (Matthew 6:32,33 NAB).

The providence of God comes in answer to prayer.

3. Believers Are Commanded To Exercise Faith In The Lord

God desires that believers show faith in Him. Paul told the Corinthians that our spiritual walk is by faith and not by what we see.

We live by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7 NIV)

God's Plan

When believers exercise faith in His promises God is able to provide in special ways.

Therefore, God's conditional providence is only for believers. It can only occur when believers meet certain conditions.

Summary To Question 18 **What Is God's Conditional Providence?**

God's conditional providence is directed only at those who believe in Him. It is extended to those who meet certain criteria such as obedience, prayer, and faith. When believers obey the Lord in these areas then God specially provides for them.

Scripture emphasizes that God protects the righteous through His providence. His providing care meets the godly desires of people. Answers to prayer are determined by God's providence.

Question 19

How Does God's Providence Work With People Who Are About To Sin?

The God of the Bible is a providing God. He provides for His people in all circumstances. This includes people who are about to commit sin.

Indeed, the Scripture lists a number of ways in which God deals with people who are about to sin. They include the following.

1. God May Stop Someone From Sinning

Sometimes the Lord intervenes to keep the person from sinning. In the Book of Genesis it records God saying the following to the pagan king Abimelech who almost took Sarah, Abraham's wife, as his own.

“Yes, I know you are innocent,” God replied. “That is why I kept you from sinning against me; I did not let you touch her” (Genesis 20:6 NLT).

God stopped the king from committing the sin of taking Abraham's wife Sarah, for his own. He realized that Abimelech had been tricked by Abraham and Sarah. Therefore, God intervened before this king could sin.

We also read about God speaking to Jacob's uncle named Laban to keep him from sinning. We read the following in Genesis.

Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad” (Genesis 31:24 NIV).

The Lord warned him not to sin. Again, God's providence stepped in to keep someone from committing sin.

The psalmist acknowledged God's ability to keep people from sinning. He prayed that the Lord would guard him from committing sin. We read.

God's Plan

Don't let me do wrong on purpose, Lord, or let sin have control over my life. Then I will be innocent, and not guilty of some terrible fault. (Psalm 19:13 CEV).

This request of the psalmist assumes the Lord has the ability and willingness to intervene when someone is about to sin.

In the past, the Lord has intervened to keep the nation Israel from sin. The Lord said the following to the prophet Hosea.

But I will fence her in with thornbushes. I will block the road to make her lose her way. When she runs after her lovers, she won't be able to catch up with them. She will search for them but not find them. Then she will think, I might as well return to my husband because I was better off with him than I am now' (Hosea 2:6,7 NLT).

The Lord has intervened when people are about to sin. He is both willing and able to do this. This is the clear teaching of Scripture.

2. He Allows Others To Sin

At times, God keep people from sinning. However, at other times God does not intervene and allows the person to sin.

For example, the Bible says the Lord did not stop the good King Hezekiah from showing the treasures of the temple to the envoys sent from Babylon. We read about this in Second Chronicles. It says.

But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart (2 Chronicles 32:31 NIV).

This would have disastrous results. Years later, this same Babylonian Empire would return to Jerusalem and steal those treasures while burning the city and the holy temple. Hezekiah sinned in showing them the treasures. However, the Bible specifically says that God did not stop him from sinning. Thus, we find that God allows certain people to commit sin.

God's Plan

3. God Overrules Evil With Good

There are times when God overrules the evil with good. The brothers of Joseph had sold him into slavery. Yet, God used their sin to work for the eventual good of the people. Joseph told his brothers how God used their sin to work out His plan.

As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive (Genesis 50:20 NASB).

This is a tremendous truth! The God of the Bible will overrule evil with good. He will turn a seemingly disastrous situation into something that benefits everyone. We find this to be true in the case with Joseph. Indeed, our lives can also give testimony to God overruling evil with good.

4. God Determines The Boundaries And Effects Of Sin

In other cases, God determines the boundaries, and the effects that the sin will cause. When Satan wanted to tempt Job we discover that God placed certain limitations on him. We read about this in the Book of Job.

The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD (Job 1:12 NIV).

There were limitations as to how far Satan could inflict problems upon Job. This indicates that God determines the boundaries that sin will have.

The psalmist wrote of the Lord's protection of His people when their enemies meant to do them harm.

If the LORD had not been on our side when people attacked us, then they would have swallowed us alive when their anger exploded against us (Psalm 124:2,3 God's Word).

When the Lord is on our side, sin will have its boundaries. Indeed, God protects His own.

God's Plan

Therefore, we find God working in a number of ways in the lives of people who are about to sin.

Summary To Question 19: How Does God's Providence Work With People Who Are About To Sin?

God's providence works in a number of ways. This includes people who are about to sin. In fact, the Bible has much to say about this subject. Indeed, we find that God, at times, keep people from sinning. He also allows people to sin and there are times that He overrules the sin to bring about some greater good. The evidence is as follows.

Sometimes God keeps them from sinning. He uses a variety of means to keep the person from committing the sin. We find examples of this in Scripture. God intervened in the life of a pagan King Abimelech who was about to take Abraham's wife Sarah as his wife. God stopped him from doing this.

At other times, God allows people to sin and suffer the consequences. A classic example of this is King Hezekiah of Judah showing the treasures of the temple to the envoys of Babylon.

One hundred years later these same Babylonians destroyed the city of Jerusalem as well as the temple while removing the treasures from the temple. God did not stop Hezekiah from committing this foolish act. He did not intervene.

There are times that, God has overruled sin for the good. Such is the case of Joseph. As an innocent victim, he was sold into slavery by his evil brothers.

Yet God overruled the situation. Joseph was eventually made into a ruler over Egypt. This would not have happened had he not been sold into slavery. While his brothers did this for evil reasons God caused it to turn out to be something good.

We also know that God determines the boundaries of sin as well as its effects. In the Book of Job we are told that God put limitations on what

God's Plan

Satan could do to Job. In other words, he did not have freedom to do to Job whatever he pleased. The same holds true with us. We will not be tested above that which we can endure. God also protects us from sinning.

Therefore, we find a number of ways in which the Lord provides for His people who are about to sin.

Question 20

Did God Create Evil?

Evil exists in our world. There is no doubt about this. But where did it come from? Did God create it? Can we blame God for it? What does the Bible have to say?

What We Learn About Evil From Scripture

From Scripture, we learn a number of things about the origin of evil. They include the following.

1. Christianity Recognizes Evil

Unlike many religions, Christianity recognizes that evil does exist. The Bible, in both testaments, acknowledges that the world is presently in an evil state. There is no denial that evil is a reality. Paul wrote.

Christ obeyed God our Father and gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins to rescue us from this evil world (Galatians 1:4 CEV).

There is no question as to whether the Christian faith recognizes such a thing as evil in the world. Indeed, it does. Evil exists and it is horrible in the sight of God.

2. Humanity Is Responsible For Evil

However, the origin of evil in our world lies not with God, but with humanity. God created everything very good. In summing up creation, the Bible says the following.

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, *it was* very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day (Genesis 1:31 KJV).

When God created human beings He gave them a choice to obey or disobey. When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God they brought sin

God's Plan

into the world. Evil is the result of their freewill actions. It is not something that God originally created.

3. God Gave Humanity A Clear Choice

God did not create evil and neither is He to blame for the evil in the universe. God could have made people in such a way that they would be like robots. He could have programmed them as people program a computer. They would react exactly the way God wished them to act. But that would not give humanity any significance. Instead, God decided to make people in such a way that they could choose whether or not to obey Him.

Evil Was The Choice Of Humankind

The origin of evil was a result of the choice of humans. The Bible describes it as follows.

Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the creatures the LORD God had made. "Really?" he asked the woman. "Did God really say you must not eat any of the fruit in the garden?" "Of course we may eat it," the woman told him. "It's only the fruit from the tree at the center of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God says we must not eat it or even touch it, or we will die." "You won't die!" the serpent hissed. "God knows that your eyes will be opened when you eat it. You will become just like God, knowing everything, both good and evil." The woman was convinced. The fruit looked so fresh and delicious, and it would make her so wise! So she ate some of the fruit. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her. Then he ate it, too. At that moment, their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness (Genesis 3:1-7 NLT).

This is the biblical description of the origin of evil. As we can see it came about from the original disobedience of the first couple, Adam and Eve. Though they were warned of the consequences they chose to reject His warnings.

Furthermore, we must remember that much of the evil that we presently see in the universe is due to the direct choice of individuals. Murder,

God's Plan

stealing, lying, and things like this, cannot be blamed upon God. People choose to do these things and they must be held accountable, not God.

In sum, we find that the Bible teaches that evil was not a creation of God but came about from the freewill choice of the first humans, Adam and Eve.

Summary To Question 20: Did God Create Evil?

The Bible recognizes that evil does exist. Indeed, it emphasizes that this world is presently characterized by evil.

However, while this present world is in the grips of evil, the Bible says that God did not originally create evil. Evil came about as the result of humanity's choice. The Bible says the following happened.

God created everything "very good" in the beginning. At the completion of His creation there was no such thing as evil. The first two humans, Adam and Eve, were created perfect and placed in a perfect environment. The only thing which they were not allowed to do was to eat from one particular tree. These two people were given the choice to obey or disobey. They chose to disobey and evil entered into the perfect earth.

Therefore, humanity, not God, is responsible for the evil in our world. While God gave the ability to choose evil He also gave them the ability to refuse evil. Ultimately they made the wrong choice. Consequently, the origin of evil can be attributed to the human race rather than the God of the Bible.

Question 21

What About Natural Disasters Such As Earthquakes And Hurricanes? Isn't God To Blame?

The question often arises about the problem of earthquakes, floods, volcanoes, and famines? Humans do not cause them? Should not God be blamed for them? If He is in control of the world, then aren't these natural disasters His doing? How can anyone but Him accept the blame for such things?

1. Humans Are Indirectly Responsible For These Disasters

While humans do not cause natural disasters such as earthquakes and famines, humanity is indirectly responsible for their occurrence. They occur as a result of original sin.

When sin entered the universe *everything* was affected. Suffering and evil go together. The perfect working order is now tainted by sin. Originally, everything was good. The Bible records God's verdict on the original creation as follows.

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day (Genesis 1:31 NRSV).

At the beginning everything which He created was created "very good." There was no evil or sin anywhere.

2. Sin Entered At A Certain Time Into A Perfect World

However, at a certain point in time, sin entered into the world. The Bible says that the entire creation is now suffering because of the entrance of sin. The Lord said the following to Adam.

Then he said to the man, "You listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree, although I commanded you, 'You must never eat its fruit.' The ground is cursed because of you. Through hard work you will eat food that comes from it every day of your life. The ground

God's Plan

will grow thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat wild plants. By the sweat of your brow, you will produce food to eat until you return to the ground, because you were taken from it. You are dust, and you will return to dust" (Genesis 3:17-19 God's Word).

The sin of Adam and Eve brought consequences to the human race. Among other things, the ground became cursed as a result of the Fall. Adam would now have great difficulty in working the ground. Sin has its consequences.

All Creation Is Suffering

Indeed, we are told that all of creation is now suffering because of the results of sin. Paul made this clear when he wrote to the Romans.

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:19-23 NASB).

Our entire world is presently in distress from the results of sin. The good news is that there will be a day when everything will be made right. Until that time, we should expect to experience natural disasters because we live in a fallen world.

Summary To Question 21: What About Natural Disasters Such As Earthquakes And Hurricanes? Isn't God To Blame?

Natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes and events such like this are usually blamed upon God. Indeed, humans assume that they cannot be held responsible for these natural occurrences since they had nothing to do with them. We have no control over these things.

God's Plan

However, we humans are to blame. The fact that we see natural disasters today illustrates the fact that our world is in a fallen state. These types of events are a result of humanity's original sin.

While the world was originally created perfect it is now in a sinful state. The original disobedience of Adam and Eve had far-reaching consequences. As a result we have such disasters of nature because nature is not what it was originally created.

In fact, the Apostle Paul said that nature itself is waiting for the day when it will be made perfect once again. Until that time we should continue to expect to see such things occur.

Therefore, the God of the Bible cannot be blamed for the evil that continues to exist. Humanity is directly or indirectly responsible for all evil. Consequently, when a natural disaster occurs we should ultimately look to ourselves for the blame. The human race rebelled against God in the beginning and the sad results are still with us today.

God's Plan

Question 22

Does Isaiah 45:7 Teach God Created Evil?

Does God create evil? There is one passage of Scripture which seems to teach that God did indeed create evil. In the *King James Bible* Isaiah 45:7 reads as follows.

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things (Isaiah 45:7 KJV)

Does this mean that God is the Creator of evil? If so, then how can He be a good God? Furthermore, how can we explain the following verse in Genesis?

God saw all that He had made, and it was very good. Evening came, and then morning: the sixth day (Genesis 1:31 HCSB)

If God created everything “very good” then how can He be the Creator of evil? Is evil something which is very good? What is the explanation of this seeming discrepancy?

Possible Solutions To This Question

There are a number of ways in which this passage is addressed by Bible-believing Christians. They are as follows.

Solution 1: The Hebrew Word Should Not Be Translated Evil

Some people feel that the Hebrew word should not be translated “evil” in this context. The word translated “evil” is the Hebrew word *ra*. It also means sorrow, calamity, disaster, afflictions, and adversity. Modern translations have translated the passage with a different English word. For example, the New International Version reads.

I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things (Isaiah 45:7 NIV).

God's Plan

Here we have the word translated “disaster.” Therefore, the Scriptures do not teach that God was the originator of evil. Instead what this passage is saying is that on occasion God creates disasters to occur but that He did not create evil itself.

Solution 2: Some Believe God Has Created The Conditions For Evil

Others, however, believe that the Hebrew word does mean that God creates evil. However, they usually understand it in the sense that God creates the conditions for people to do evil acts, not that God does the evil Himself, or that He originally created evil. This view says that God creates circumstances where people can do good or evil and that people sometimes make the choice to do evil.

Therefore, in a sense, God creates conditions that people can do evil but these conditions also allow people to do what is good. Whatever the case may be, God did not originally create evil.

Hence, there are a couple of ways in which this passage can be understood in light of the totality of Scripture without making God the author of evil.

Summary To Question 22 Does Isaiah 45:7 Teach God Created Evil?

In the writings of the prophet Isaiah there is a passage which seems to teach that God actually created evil. In the King James translation, the Scripture records the Lord saying that He not only created light and darkness but that He also created evil.

The possibility that God created evil seems to be in contradiction to the world in which He originally created. Indeed, God pronounced His original creation as “very good.” How then can God be the Creator of evil? How can we reconcile these passages?

One solution sees the word translated as evil as meaning “calamity” or “disaster.” This has the Scripture emphasizing that God brings calamity

God's Plan

and disaster to the world but says nothing about the original creation of evil. If this is what this passage means, then there is no contradiction.

Others, however, see this as referring to God as the Creator of evil. It is not that He actually created something which is evil but rather that He created the conditions for evil to become a possibility. By giving human beings choice God opened up the possibility that humans would choose evil.

Scripture tells us that Adam and Eve did exactly that. They chose to rebel against God and brought sin into our world. Therefore, in one sense, God did create evil by allowing the conditions for evil to originate. Yet, at the same time, He did not force Adam and Eve to choose evil. To do evil was something they chose to do.

Question 23

What Does The Bible Say About The Problem Of Evil? (Theodicy)

One of the great questions facing those who believe in of the Bible is the problem of evil. Since evil exists, there are seemingly two ways to look at the problem of evil and the character of God: either God is a bad God who won't do anything about evil, or He is a weak God who cannot do anything about evil. This is also known as the problem of Theodicy.

Two Assumptions: God Is Either A Bad God Or A Weak God Because Of Evil In The World

The question is usually put this way. If God is all-loving and all-powerful, then why do we have evil in the universe? Did God create evil? If so, why did He do it? Would that not make Him a bad God?

The other possibility is that God is a good God, but does not have the ability to do anything about evil. This would mean that God is a good God, but not all-powerful.

So which is it? Is God a bad God and won't do anything about evil, or is He a good God and cannot do anything about evil?

The Third Possibility: God Is Neither Evil Or Weak

Actually there is a third possibility. God is neither a bad God nor is He limited in His power. It is true that if God created evil, then it would make Him a bad God. But this is not the case. Evil came as a result of sin, and sin is something that God did not want in the universe.

The Bible has a number of things to say about the problem of evil. Four points need to be made to understand the complete picture.

We Do Not Live In The World God Originally Created

The Bible recognizes that evil does exist. But evil was not part of God's original creation. Indeed, we live in a world that has fallen into sin.

God's Plan

Consequently we hope for a world without evil. Paul wrote about this desire.

For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, everything on earth was subjected to God's curse. All creation anticipates the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children, including the new bodies he has promised us (Romans 8:19-23 NLT).

This is not the world that God originally made. It has fallen from its perfect state. Indeed, the Bible says that our world was originally created perfect.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day (Genesis 1:31 NIV).

God said that His original creation was “very good.” Therefore, evil is something abnormal. It was not part of God's original design. How did it come about?

The Explanation Of The Origin Of Evil (The Sin Of Adam And Eve)

The Bible says that God created a perfect environment for the first couple, Adam and Eve. He gave them everything necessary. However, there was one negative commandment. They were told they were not allowed to eat of the tree in the midst of the Garden of Eden.

The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die” (Genesis 2:15-17 HCSB).

God's Plan

The result would be death, or separation. Unhappily, the first couple chose to rebel against God. We read further in Genesis.

Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate [it]; she also gave [some] to her husband, [who was] with her, and he ate [it]. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. (Genesis 3:6-7 HCSB).

The result of their rebellion was the entrance of sin into our world.

Therefore, the explanation of the origin of evil is found in the original sin of the first two humans, Adam and Eve.

God's Solution To The Problem Of Evil: The Coming Of Jesus Christ

The good news is that God is directly involved in solving the problem of evil. Jesus Christ, God the Son, came to earth to die for the sins of the world. In other words, He came to deal with the problem of evil.

Indeed, He died on Calvary's cross to free humanity from pain and suffering, sin and death. His death made it possible for evil to come to an end. The broken relationships caused by the fall of Adam and Eve will now be restored because of the death of Jesus Christ.

He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21 HCSB)

He became a sin offering so that we might be made righteous in God's eyes. Thus, the problem of evil has been solved by the God of the Bible.

There Is An Age To Come When Evil Will Be Done Away With

The good news is that evil will not win in the end. There will indeed come a day when it will be done away with.

God's Plan

The Book of Revelation speaks of such a time. John wrote.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will exist no longer; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away. Then the One seated on the throne said, "Look! I am making everything new." He also said, "Write, because these words are faithful and true" (Revelation 21:4,5 HCSB).

The end of evil has been promised by God and the God of the Bible always keeps His promises. According to Scripture, evil will not triumph in the end.

In fact, Jesus promised that He will bring justice to the world when He returns. He said.

So don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who plead with him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when I, the Son of Man, return, how many will I find who have faith?" (Luke 18:7, 8 NLT).

This is a comforting truth to believers. Justice will eventually occur. Paradise lost will be paradise regained.

This is a brief summation of what the Scripture has to say about the origin of evil as well as God's solution to the problem.

Observations About The Bible And The Problem Of Evil

Given the biblical picture of where evil originated as well as what the God of Scripture had done about it, we can make a number of observations about the problem of evil.

Observation 1: God Is Not Responsible For Evil

Evil came as a result from the choice of humanity, not the choice of God. By giving humans legitimate choice there was the possibility to choose evil.

God's Plan

Paul explained it this way in his letter to the Romans.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned (Romans 5:12 NIV).

It was through the choice of Adam and Eve that sin entered our world. It was not God's choice or God's desire.

Observation 2: God Allows Evil To Exist By His Permission

There is a second observation that we need to make. Although we do not understand why God permits evil in every instance, we know that it only exists because He allows it. If God did not wish for evil to exist, it would not exist. In other words, the God of the Bible remains in control of all things.

Observation 3: God Can Overrule Evil For Good

We find that, at times, God overrules wickedness for the good. In the account of the patriarch Joseph, which is recorded in the Book of Genesis, we are told that his brothers sold him into slavery. In doing so, they thought that they would never see him again.

By God's grace, Joseph became a ruler of all Egypt. Joseph made it clear that God was overruling the entire situation. He said the following to his brothers.

But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt" (Genesis 45:7,8 NIV).

It is within the capability of God to overrule evil. In this case, it is exactly what He did.

**Observation 4: Evil Is Not Logical:
It Does Not Always Make Sense**

There is something else that must be remembered. Evil, by definition, is not logical. It is random. Therefore we should not expect it to operate in a righteous way. Consequently evil things affect both the righteous and unrighteous.

**Observation 5: When People Break God's
Laws, It Will Have Consequences**

We must also recognize that breaking God's laws has its consequences. Paul wrote about this to the Galatians.

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow (Galatians 6:7 NRSV).

We cannot break the law of God without suffering the consequences. There is always a price to pay for sin.

These are some of the observations which we can make about the problem of evil and the solutions which the Scripture provides.

Conclusion: Christianity Has An Answer To The Problem Of Evil

The bad news is that evil exists. The good news is that Christianity has an answer to the problem of evil in the world. There will come a day when all evil will be done away with. Jesus Christ will return and triumph over the sin and misery in which our world presently finds itself. What a wonderful day that will be.

**Summary To Question 23
What Does The Bible Say About The Problem Of Evil? (Theodicy)**

God is a good God. He is also a powerful God. Then why doesn't He do something about the problem of evil? Is it because He cannot do anything about it or that He does not want to do anything about it? Is He a weak God or an unloving God? Either way, the problem remains unsolved. This is how the problem is often stated.

God's Plan

However, there is another way in which to look at the issue which shows that God is neither a weak God nor a bad God. We can discover this answer by looking at what the totality of Scripture has to say about the subject.

To begin with, the Bible recognizes that evil exists. Indeed, we do live in a fallen world where evil exists. Yet this is not the same world in which God created. Evil did not come about by God's original design.

The Bible says everything in our world was created very good. There was no sin, no pain, and no evil. God created two human beings and put them into this perfect environment. In doing so He gave them a choice. If they obeyed there would be no evil. However, if they disobeyed they would suffer the consequences.

Unfortunately, the first couple Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Their sin caused the entire world to become abnormal. The environment was no longer friendly; human relationships were now broken, and the animal kingdom was not always at peace with humanity. In addition, the perfect relationship between God and humanity was likewise broken. This was the result of sin.

The God of the Bible, however, was not going to allow things to remain that way. He promised that the original paradise would one day be restored. Two thousand years ago God the Son came to this earth to restore these broken relationships caused by sin. He took upon Himself the penalty for the sins of the world on the cross of Calvary. He promises eternal life to those who trust in Him.

This life consists of many wonderful things. One of them is the restoration of perfection. Indeed, the Bible talks about a world where there is a new heaven and new earth.

Consequently the God of Scripture cannot be blamed for the evil in our world. We are to blame. Evil temporarily exists today but it exists only by God's permission. We also find that God, at times, overrules the evil for the good.

God's Plan

Therefore, we find that the God of the Bible is neither a bad God nor a weak God. He has solved the problem of evil with the coming of Christ. The realization of this will be when He comes the second time. Evil will eventually be done away with.

About The Author

Don Stewart is a graduate of Biola University and Talbot Theological Seminary (with the highest honors).

Don is a best-selling and award-winning author having authored, or co-authored, over seventy books. This includes the best-selling *Answers to Tough Questions*, with Josh McDowell, as well as the award-winning book *Family Handbook of Christian Knowledge: The Bible*. His various writings have been translated into over thirty different languages and have sold over a million copies. His available books can be found on his website www.educatingourworld.com.

He also hosts the live television program “Breaking News” five days a week on His Channel (www.hischannel.com).

Don is now a full-time missionary with GoinChrist Ministries. His website educatingourworld.com provides free resources for those wanting to know what Christians believe, as well as why we believe. Currently there are 59 books on the site in PDF form, totaling about 13,000 pages of material while answering over 1,900 questions. Eventually we hope to record all the books, as well as translating the material in other languages.