

The Sovereignty of God  
Isaiah 44:6-20  
July 8, 2012

based on "God: As He Longs for You to See Him" by Chip Ingram

Why do you think your God is better than all the other gods of the world? How do you know your God is the true God? Has anyone ever asked you those questions? Maybe you've asked yourself those questions. Some of us might dismiss these questions as being silly or irrelevant, but in today's world these are very serious questions. The Christian who is ill-equipped to answer these questions will probably not have much success in evangelism.

We live in a pluralistic world that proclaims tolerance. Tolerance is a good thing until it is misapplied. Tolerance is good when it is defined as accepting other people's race, background, and culture so there are no barriers between us. But when tolerance takes on a philosophical meaning it becomes a tool of Satan. Today, our society defines tolerance as meaning that no idea or view is any more true or valid than another.

That sounds like a fine example of openness, but it doesn't hold up. If tolerance is to overarch everything, as today's world would like, there could be some disastrous results. For example, imagine you have a life-threatening infection. The doctor prescribes penicillin, but one of his nurses suggests several other drugs. How would you feel about the nurse advising the doctor to be open to all the options? After all, cumidin, cytoxan, and morphine are all very effective drugs. Would you think your doctor was intolerant because he chose one drug over the others? Of course not. In fact, I'm sure you would want your doctor to discriminate against all the other drugs and give you the drug that would save your life.

There are many people today who have bought into the lie that all "truths" are equal and valid – and their number is growing every day. These people are on the fast track to eternal separation from the one true God. If you engage one of these people in a conversation about God, you will likely hear the question, "How do you know your God is the true God?" Our study today is aimed at helping you answer that question for yourself, so you can answer that question when the unbeliever asks it.

I know that my God is the true God because he is *before* all things, he *created* all things, he *upholds* all things, he is *above* all things, he *knows* all things, he *accomplishes* all things, he *rules over* all things, and he *is in control* of all things. He is not just another -ism out there to be considered along with all the rest. My God is the true God because he is *sovereign*.

My God is like no other god of today or yesterday. My God has made outrageous, exclusive, and very "narrow" claims about himself. To that end, my God insists that he, and he alone, is to be worshiped.

I'm going to elaborate on the list I just gave you. To help you see from Scripture where these are found, you have a list of the Bible references for each.

God is *before* all; all things hold together in him. He was there before the mountains were born, he brought forth the earth, he is the Alpha and Omega, and he alone is immortal. (Ps 90:2; Col 1:17; 1 Tim 6:16; Rev 1:8)

God *created* all things, both in heaven and on earth, both visible and invisible. (Gen 1:1; John 1:3; Col 1:16)

God *upholds* all things, sustaining everything, holding it together by his Word. (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3)

God is *above* all things, specifically so that people in China, the U.S., South America, and everywhere may know him. (Is 45:5-12; Eph 4:6)

God *knows* all things. He isn't a limited God. God knows everything completely before it happens. (Ps 139:4, 6; Is 46:10)

God *can do* all things. Nothing is too difficult for him. Nothing - not anything - is impossible for him. (Jer 32:27; Luke 1:37)

God *accomplishes* all things. He orchestrates and determines what he is going to do in your life, in my life, in the president's life, in war-torn countries with rebellious rulers. Whatever he plans in this world and for this universe, he does. (Is 14:24, 46:10; Eph 1:11.)

God *rules over* all things. This is what sovereignty is. All strength and power are in his hands. (1 Chron 29:11-12; Dan 4:34-35)

God *is in control* of all things. Whenever the economy goes south, whenever earthly kings rage out of control, God is in control. When Satan wants to mess with your life, he has to ask God's permission. (Job 4:2; Rom 8:28)

If you put all of this together, it means that over all earthly kings and kingdoms, over all human events, over all the good angels, over Satan and all his evil angels, over all human actions and decisions God claims sovereign control. God claims himself as the ultimate source of all power and authority, and master of all that exists.

I've used the word sovereign several times and I'm sure not everyone has a firm hold and what that word means. So, let's stop here and get a definition of the word sovereign. Webster defines sovereign as: 1) above or superior to all others; chief; greatest; supreme; 2) supreme in power, rank, or authority; 3) of or holding the position of ruler; royal; reigning; 4) independent of all others; 5) excellent; outstanding.

If someone is sovereign, he's the boss. He calls all the shots. What he says goes. Most simply put, the key phrase here is "God is in control." Everything, and I mean

everything, is subject to God's command. If there is one thing God doesn't know – he's not sovereign. If there is one atom in the universe that doesn't respond to his wishes – he's not sovereign. If there is one thing God is not free to do – he's not sovereign.

Now, if you've gotten this far in explaining to a tolerant unbeliever why God is the true God, you might hear this question. "If what you say is true, that there is someone who loves me and has the answer to all my problems, I want to know him. But I need more evidence. How has the God of the Bible revealed his sovereignty?"

In the pages of Scripture, God has revealed his sovereignty in five different ways. First, God reveals his sovereignty through the titles he has chosen for himself. The gods of other religions are described as impersonal forces, or universal mechanisms, or maybe reincarnation. Vague and impersonal gods.

Compare this with the claims of our God. The titles God chooses for himself are so outlandish that they are either complete falsehoods or they are the very essence of truth. God says:

- I am sovereign.
- I am the Most High.
- I am the Alpha and the Omega.
- I am the King of kings and the Lord of lords.
- I am who I am, the eternal, self-existent one.
- I will be addressed in reverence because of my own greatness.

These claims set God apart as unique.

The second way God reveals his sovereignty is through his promises. There are two such promises. The first is in regard to Romans 8:28. "*We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*" Every Christian can look back on something in their life that seemed like a disaster and see how God used it for their good. To accomplish this, God must be all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise. God could not keep this promise if he weren't sovereign.

The second promise comes in Philippians 2:9-11. That is where we hear that the day will come when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That is a completely ridiculous promise unless God is actually the one who holds control over all history. That claim says that God is sovereignly guiding history to a specific end.

The third way God reveals his sovereignty is through *his story*. God is literally the author of all history. If you take the words *his* and *story* and you overlap the s's, what do you get? *History* is literally *his story*.

One of the best examples of God's sovereignty over history is the story of Joseph. A full 25% of the book of Genesis is devoted to Joseph. God took all the turns in Joseph's life, both the good turns and the bad ones, and he wove them into the fabric of his will to

preserve his chosen people.

Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, which took him to Egypt. In Egypt, Potiphar's wife lied about Joseph, which took him to prison. In prison, Joseph met Pharaoh's baker and cupbearer and he interpreted their dreams. Because Joseph interpreted those dreams, Pharaoh's cupbearer remembered Joseph when Pharaoh had a dream. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream, which landed him the second highest position in the most powerful nation in the world. And from that position Joseph was able to save God's people from starvation during a terrible famine. And all this happened because, long before this, God promised, and delivered, a baby to a man of 100 and his wife of 90. Now, is God in control of history?

Also, on your own, read the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> chapters of the book of Daniel. There you will find God predicting the rise and fall of the Babylonian empire, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. So, don't ever think that God is in heaven biting his fingernails hoping everything will turn out all right. And, if God can control all of history, then he can control the events of your life so that all things work for good.

The fourth way God reveals his sovereignty is through fulfilled prophecies. God is not some sideshow fortuneteller. God foretells the future 100% accurately 100% of the time. In today's reading, God challenges any other god to beat his track record. At the beginning of the reading God calls himself "*King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty*" (Is 44:6) and he backs up his claim by saying "*Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?*" (Is 44:8).

Jesus, as God made man, fulfilled hundreds of prophecies from the Old Testament. He fulfilled so many that the sheer improbability of anyone doing that proclaims he is God. To see one of the most moving prophecies, which Jesus fulfilled, read Psalm 22. There you will find a perfect picture of Jesus' crucifixion – hundreds of years before crucifixion came into use.

The last way God reveals his sovereignty is, of course, through Jesus Christ, the Messiah. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul tells us that Jesus came to earth *in the fullness of time* (Gal 4:4). If you have never considered that phrase before, think about it now. God sovereignly decided Christ's coming because, at that time, the world had a universal language – Greek. The Romans had conquered most of the known world and enforced a peace that aided in the spread of the Gospel. Roman roads made for easy travel and Roman soldiers guaranteed safe travel. *In the fullness of time* Christ came and the Gospel went out.

Jesus also displayed his sovereignty in his death. No one killed Jesus – not the Jews, not the Romans. Jesus said he was the one to lay his life down and he was the one to take it up again (John 10:18). That's just what he did. The resurrection story throws a shadow over all the other religions. Only the true God would claim to conquer death.

This brings us to how we are to respond to God's sovereignty.

First, we bow down before the sovereign God of the universe. Before you think that is a no-brainer and easily accomplished, let's look at what that takes. In order to bow down before the sovereign God, you must push aside, forever, all of the other gods in your life. If you're not sure what gods I'm talking about, let me help.

You must push aside the god of your time, the god of your money, the god of your talent, the god of your career, the god of your beauty and sexuality, the god of your interests and hobbies. And this is just the short list.

To bow down before the sovereign God means to give God the same place in your heart, soul and mind that he holds in the rest of the universe. The most intelligent move you can ever make is to surrender all that you are and all that you have to the One who loves you like no one else can ever love you and who is in control.

The second appropriate way to respond to the sovereign God is to believe. When you believe in the sovereign God, you are confessing that everything that comes into your life was either decreed or permitted by a good God who has your best interest in mind. Whether your problem is your marriage, your children, your finances, your health, your job, your loved ones, you need to believe that God loves you and he is in control.

If you can do that, you can adopt Oswald Chamber's foundation principle about our sovereign God – *absolutely refuse to worry*. If you truly believe in a good, sovereign God, you can stop trying to manipulate situations – trying to figure out how to make everything work out – because you know who is in control. You can rest in God's sovereign goodness.

The last response to our sovereign God is to behold the mystery and majesty of his sovereign rule. Too many people try to figure out the things of God that are beyond our understanding. God's sovereignty is one of those things. There are things about God we will never understand because, quite frankly, God is smarter than we are.

When Paul was overwhelmed by the greatness of God, he didn't become frustrated, he broke out in praise. *“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”* (Rom 11:33-34).

A proper understanding of God's sovereignty brings worship and praise. It brings awe and wonder. It brings a bowing of the heart in recognition of the fact that you are a small, finite person – and God is sovereign Lord.

Why do I believe that my God is the true God and he is better than all the other gods of all the other religions of the world? I believe the mountains of evidence God has given us in history and his Word. You see, God is simply before all and above all. He is infinite and wise, all-knowing and all-powerful. He is sovereign.