Few doctrines in Holy Scripture are stated as clearly as the sovereignty of Jehovah.

The earth is the Lord’s and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it (Psalms 24:1).

For the Lord Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth. . . . God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne (Psalms 47:2, 3, 7, 8).

Even though this sovereign rule is an undeniable doctrine, it is ignored! Modern man views himself as the master of his own fate, the ruler of his destiny. The consequences of this self-indulgent view are tragic. God is dethroned, and man precariously awaits divine judgment on his self-willed error. But this is not just a modern problem. Attempts to dethrone Jehovah began with Satan’s futile rebellion and have continued since Eden was purged of her rebellious pair.

The great sovereign rule of Jehovah is ignored by those who hold status and power in earthly positions. The prestige and authority of material “clout” has a way of blinding people to the truth of God’s sovereignty. An apt illustration of this is found in a historical reference to Napoleon. It is reported that at the height of his military career he was asked if God was on France’s side. Napoleon cynically responded, “God is on the side with the heaviest artillery.” Then came Belgium’s Waterloo, and Napoleon lost everything. Years later in exile on the island of St. Helena, the humbled military genius admitted, “Man proposes, but God disposes.” Napoleon had finally understood the majestic sovereignty of Jehovah God.

How do you view God’s “sovereignty”? Do you believe that the Lord Most High is to be feared as a great King over all the earth? (Psalms 47:2). How do you demonstrate a practical belief in God’s sovereign rule in your life?

From the Old Testament narrative, we are able to focus upon one event that teaches a marvelous lesson regarding God’s sovereignty. The narrative’s central figure is the great Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (cf. vv. 34-37).

REJECTING GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

Daniel 4 recounts the last record regarding Nebuchadnezzar in Scripture and reveals how God dealt with the powerful king. This text is an excellent explanation of God’s sovereignty. It opens and closes with a strong declaration about Jehovah’s reign (vv. 1-3, 34-37). In this chapter we are able to hear a pagan’s frank confession about God’s sovereignty.

As the events unfold, a dramatic tale is told. Nebuchadnezzar is the narrator, and through his words we learn how a pagan accepted God’s sovereign rule.

Chapter 4 records the third time that God spoke to Nebuchadnezzar. This time a dream revealed a great tree that was cut down (vv. 4-7). This was a warning to the king to change his ways or else face a terrifying fate (vv. 18-27). But Nebuchadnezzar’s stubbornness led to a rejection of God’s warning. He fancied himself a rival to Jehovah (vv. 28-30). Because of his persistent rebellion, he became insane and lived as a beast until he admitted God’s sovereignty (vv. 31-37).

At the end of his ordeal, King Nebuchadnezzar was forced to admit his insignificance. Even with all the wealth and might of Babylon, he could not even approach thoughts of equality with God! His pride was humbled by the Almighty’s sovereignty. At last the proud king
confessed God’s rightful rule:

But at the end of that period I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing. But He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What hast Thou done?’” (vv. 34, 35).

Nebuchadnezzar’s conclusion was clear. “Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, exalt, and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride” (v. 37).

This text is simple; its message is clear. The reader will reach the same conclusion as Nebuchadnezzar. No power is greater than or equal to the supreme majesty of God. His sovereignty rules all in earth and heaven. All are accountable, even the mighty Babylonian king.

THE TRAGIC RESULTS OF THIS REJECTION

Tragic results will occur when man rejects God’s sovereignty. These are illustrated by the king’s situation.

First, when God’s sovereignty is rejected, men’s reasoning becomes unsound (v. 34). Nebuchadnezzar lost his ability to “reason.” Sin had caused him to pervert his thinking so that he no longer admitted God’s majesty (vv. 29, 30). Second Peter 2:12 refers to this tragedy: “But these like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed.” All who refuse to admit God’s rule in their lives will live life by making foolish choices (cf. Romans 1:21ff.).

Second, when God’s sovereignty is rejected, His divine right to rule a man’s life will be usurped (v. 27). The Babylonian king had assumed the role of ultimate judge. He had placed himself as the absolute standard of right and wrong. To this proud king, the will of God did not matter at all.

The key fault was “pride.” Those who fail to submit to God’s rule in life actually become God’s rivals. They rob the divine king of His right to command our choices. Only God is able to sit and “judge righteously” (Psalms 9:4). Only a fool would dare suggest he knows better than God how to order choices in life!

Third, when God’s sovereignty is rejected, the rebel will descend to the depths of sin’s shame. Nebuchadnezzar harbored the heart of an animal. His choices were governed by this heart. Thus he lived as an animal (v. 32). Utter shame characterized him because he had rejected God’s right to order his choices in life.

This revelation is terrifying. We see it in the tragic events of life. All who reject God’s sovereignty must choose the only alternative. They must either serve God or Satan! No third option exists. Rejection of God’s sovereignty may appear appealing, but the tragedy of Nebuchadnezzar looms on the horizon.

These three tragic evidences came to Nebuchadnezzar because he failed to acknowledge God’s right to rule human lives. These same three tragedies are evident today. Multitudes have chosen to reject God’s right to govern their lives. Consequently, they have lost their reasoning as to what is right and what is wrong. They are dominated by pride and deluded into thinking they can set themselves as the ultimate standard.

A most appropriate illustration is found in Romans 1:18-32. Paul’s description of those in the passage reveals the horrible consequences when man tries to live without God. The situation is heartbreaking. Those who are caught by the rebellious deception have sacrificed joy in life. As Nebuchadnezzar of old, they condemn themselves to living life without the love of God and the peace of restful contentment.

Look at your life honestly. Have you followed the senseless choices of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 and those in Romans 1? Have you experienced tragic results because you have not accepted God’s sovereignty in your life? If God’s sovereign will is not the ruling force in your life, you must make the same admission as Nebuchadnezzar (v. 37).

LESSONS WE MUST LEARN

The narrative of King Nebuchadnezzar tells us what to do if we are not submissive to God’s sovereign rule. If you are not submissive to God, admit that God has a right to rule your life. You
need to imitate Nebuchadnezzar’s confession in verse 34. Since Jehovah is the Lord God of heaven and earth, He has every right to control your life. Those who are struggling with sin in life must learn this lesson.

If you are not submissive to God, do the four things which Nebuchadnezzar did. First, there must be a full understanding that God does have the right to tell us what we should and should not do in life (v. 34). This is the practical meaning of God’s sovereignty. Second, there must be a frank admission of the insignificance of mortal man when compared with God’s deity (v. 35). Since He is the supreme King, mortal power is far inferior to His strength. Third, there must be a confession of the truthfulness and righteousness of God’s ways (v. 37). Knowing that God is always true, we can be confident that He will rule our lives in the right manner. Fourth, there must be acknowledgment that man’s humility brings great reward and man’s rebellious pride brings sure condemnation (v. 37; Proverbs 3:34).

But here is the greatest lesson that is found in the text. If you are not submissive to God, you are among the lost! Admit the propriety of God’s right to rule your life. When you submit to God’s sovereignty, you will find a wonderful forgiveness and a comforting restoration (v. 36). An apt illustration of this great blessing is detailed in Romans 6:17-23. All who turn from rebellion to submission are willing to be baptized into Christ. This act of obedient faith is submission to God’s sovereign rule. In performing this act, one turns from serving self to serving the Lord. It is a marvelous day whenever one turns from rebellion to submission.

**CONCLUSION**

“The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake!” (Psalms 99:1). This was the truth that Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way. Is it possible that you have not learned this truth? Failure to let God rule your life will only multiply sorrow and exile joy.

Sin only offers a rebellious attitude toward the Almighty. Does anyone want to be in that position?

The sovereignty of God ought to make a big difference in our lives. Examine Job 42:2-6 and notice how it adds emphasis to the points covered in this lesson. A study of the passage will reveal these facts about God’s sovereign control. Since God is in control, we should be relieved of all anxieties in life (Job 42:2). Since God is in control, we do not need an explanation of life’s trials and tragedies (Job 42:3, 4). Since God is in control, we should be able to master our pride because we understand that He is far superior to all that we are (Job 42:5, 6).

All will react to God’s sovereignty in one of two ways. There will either be a response as those in Romans 1:32 who disobeyed God, or there will be a response as those in Romans 6:17 who were obedient from the heart. The choice is plain. Which will you choose?