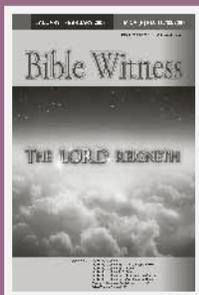


Bible Witness

THE LORD REIGNETH

Articles Inside:

- God's Sovereignty
- God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility
- God's Sovereignty and Prayer
- God's Sovereignty in Salvation
- God's Sovereignty and Providence in Our Lives
- God's Sovereignty and Our Business Plans
- Candy or Heathen, Selfishness or Love?
- Bible Trivia - Genesis 37



Editor
Prabhudas Koshy

Publishing & Circulation
Co-ordinator
Lok Kwok Wah

Technical Editors
Adrienne Foo, Carolyn Koshy, Jenny Lok,
Lok Kwok Wah, Mah Lean Choo

Cover Design
Melissa Neo

Layout
Kenneth Wong

Illustrations
Sharon Ng

Publisher
Bible Witness Media Ministry of
Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church,
Singapore

Printer
Chung Printing

Contact Information
By mail:

Bible Witness Media Ministry
510 Geylang Road, #02-06
Singapore 389466

Tel: (65) 6741-1910 Fax: (65) 6741-1016

Web-site: www.biblewitness.com

E-mail: editor@biblewitness.com

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GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

PRABHUDAS KOSHY

"Sovereign" is not a word that resonates well with modern people, especially in democratically governed nations. Its meaning, "a supreme ruler", "a monarch" or "a person ruling over the world as the pre-eminent one or as the one with supreme and independent power", is an intolerable idea to most people of our time. In fact, there is a strong aversion towards the idea of sovereignty in the minds of people. The modern philosophy is that there are no absolutes, even in the spiritual and moral realms; and because of this, monotheistic thinking is highly unpopular everywhere. Nonetheless, we are taught in the Bible that God is sovereign.

In fact, none else is sovereign, in its absolute sense, but God. In the words of Charles Hodge, "Sovereignty is not a property of the divine nature, but a

prerogative arising out of the perfections of the Supreme Being." According to Arthur W. Pink, God's sovereignty is "the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the godhood of

God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that God is God." To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the "only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15).

He reigns supreme, not only in heaven, but also on earth. "Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine" (1 Chronicles 29:11a). He is also sovereign above all His creatures. Not even a tiny atom is allowed to spin out of His design and control. "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). These portions of

**"The earth is the LORD's,
and the fulness thereof;
the world, and they
that dwell therein"**
Psalm 24:1



SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Scripture and many more show us that the sovereignty of God is universal. It extends over all His creatures from the highest to the lowest.

His sovereignty is also absolute. None can limit His authority. "Thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all" (1 Chronicles 29:11b). He doeth His pleasure in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. He "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1:11). If God is not sovereign over all things, He is not God at all.

Another important aspect of God's sovereignty is that it is unchangeable or immutable. None can challenge His sovereignty and forfeit it. It is truly unassailable and unstoppable. "Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Psalm 115:3). The sovereignty of God is limited by nothing outside God. "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Daniel 4:35).

Sovereignty characterizes the whole being of God. The concept of sovereignty encompasses the entire plan of God in all of its intricate details of design and outworking. Although He often allows things to take their natural course according to laws which He designed, it is the sovereign God who is working all things according to His wise plan. His sovereignty also encompasses all His attributes. In other words, He is sovereign in all His attributes. He is sovereign in the exercise of His power, His mercy, His love, His justice, etc.

The doctrine of God's sovereignty is not a mere abstract, theoretical dogma which is devoid of

practical value. It produces a powerful effect upon the Christian character and actions.

This absolute, perfect sovereignty of God instills within us an awe-inspiring reverence for Him. It teaches us to fear God. It deepens our veneration of God. It calls us to worship Him in the beauty of holiness and with full preoccupation of His glory. Thus it also prevents our worship of Him from degenerating into a man-pleasing endeavour. Every service we engage in is but a "dead work" unless it be done for the glory of God.

It moulds the affections of the heart and gives a right direction to conduct. It teaches us to adore Him as our Lord at all times, and keep the world and the devil away from our lives. Because we think of Him as our sovereign God, we pray earnestly, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (Matthew 6:13).

It lays the foundation for His people's peace and confidence. They are assured that the Lord God omnipotent reigns supreme; and that neither necessity, nor chance, nor the folly of man, nor the malice of Satan can thwart God's good pleasure concerning them. It also helps them to have stability in thought and behaviour as they face times of troubles. While it produces gratitude in prosperity and patience in adversity, it affords comfort for the present and a sense of security concerning the unknown future (cf. Psalm 91).



GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

EPHREM CHIRACHO OUCHULA

God's sovereignty refers to the biblical teaching that God has eternal plans and He will carry them out without fail at His own appointed time, using His own appointed means and methods. Human responsibility refers to man being accountable or answerable to His Creator as steward of all that God has dispensed to him. God's sovereignty governs all the actions of His moral creatures, and man, as a free agent, is personally responsible for all his actions. God's sovereignty determines the

path and man is responsible to walk therein in order to attain the goal of life which divine providence has set before him.

The Harmony of God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility

God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are harmonious themes and inextricably intertwined. They are two faces of divine providence. Divine providence is "the unceasing activity of the Creator whereby, in overflowing bounty and goodwill (cf. Psalm 145:9; Matthew 5:45-48), He upholds His creatures in ordered existence (cf. Acts 17:28; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3), guides and governs all events, circumstances and free acts of angels and men (cf. Psalm 107; Job 1:12; 2:6; Genesis 45:5-8), and directs everything to its appointed goal, for His own glory (cf. Ephesians 1:9-12)" (*The New Bible Dictionary*).



God's sovereignty in human existence is evident truth. Boettner puts it this way, "Every thinking person readily sees that some sovereignty rules his life. He was not asked whether or not he would have existence; nor when, where, or what he would be born; whether in the twentieth century or before the flood; whether white or Negro; whether in America or in China" (*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*).

This does not contradict the fact that man is a free agent in God's providential government. The Bible clearly shows that man exercises freedom of choice that is consistent with his nature. Therefore, in the Holy Scriptures, when certain crucial events have taken place, both God and man are said to be responsible in their own realms. For example, the betrayal, crucifixion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ were attributed both to God's sovereign providence and to the wicked acts of the people. Peter explains it this way, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs... Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:22-23; cf. 4:28). Here we can see the harmonious relationship of both divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

It was determined by the gracious providence of God that Jesus Christ should suffer and die to redeem His people from their sins (cf. Isaiah 53:4-8; John 10:11, 17-18). Yet, the Jews who caused Christ's suffering and death acted freely in accordance with their wicked devices. No one forced them to do this wicked act. Thus, they were perfectly responsible for their actions. Actually, when Pilate tried to persuade them not to crucify the innocent One, they cried out, "His blood be on us, and

on our children" (Matthew 27:25; cf. 26:21-25). They were acting consciously, calculatedly and with the full realization of their personal responsibility. Hence, God's sovereignty never nullifies man's personal responsibility for his actions. Therefore, both divine sovereignty and human responsibility belong together harmoniously in God's providence. Divine providence rules our lives, and yet, we are acting freely in every choice we make and in all that we do as God's moral creatures; and therefore, we take responsibility for all our decisions, choices and actions (cf. Isaiah 1:19-20; 3:10-11; Ezekiel 18:4, 20). Remember that the only proper response to the sovereign God is complete trust and submission.

We cannot blame the sovereignty of God for our sinful actions and unwise decisions (cf. Matthew 26:21-25). The Bible declares that our God does not abuse His sovereignty to put people into trouble. "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psalm 145:17); "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4). Therefore, God's sovereignty is a source of great comfort and motivation for great undertakings unto all who are willing to humbly submit to His divine will and walk uprightly before Him all the days of their lives.

The Relationship of God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility in Our Daily Labours

Proverbs 16:1-3 sets forth God's sovereignty and human responsibility in poetic parallelism. How should the weak, ignorant and finite man relate to the omnipotent, omniscient, infinitely sovereign LORD in order to be successful and fruitful in his daily labours?

How can we attain to the best and highest good that the sovereign God has appointed for our good and His glory?

We are responsible to make plans: Proverbs 16:1a speaks of “the preparations of the heart in man”. This phrase refers to making plans for future actions. Making plans is our own responsibility. And this involves a thorough thinking, careful evaluation and organizing and synthesizing of these thoughts into definite goals with much effort to achieve them in our lives. We cannot live an aimless life. We should strive to have definite goals in life. If you do not have a clear goal, you are going nowhere and you cannot accomplish anything worthy of God’s glory. God’s sovereignty does not discourage us from our duty. Rather, it inspires us towards greater undertakings within the scope of His divine providence.

We are responsible to submit our plans to God: “All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits” (Proverbs 16:2). The antithetical parallelism in this verse contrasts the evaluation of man and that of God. Here “all the ways of a man” refers to all that a man thinks, evaluates and judges at his very best capacity in order to make plans for his life, family, ministry or business. The phrase “in his own eyes” implies man’s own unaided judgment and evaluation. Man can easily justify that his motives and plans are pure and good. There lies the danger of self-deception. The second line of the parallelism is introduced by the adversative conjunction “but”. “But the LORD weigheth the spirits” means the omniscient God has a perfect judgment of our thoughts, motives and plans. Do not make final decisions until you get God’s seal of approval. Why? Because He alone knows what is best for you, and what is acceptable for the glory of His name and for

the edification of His people. God is the wisest Counsellor we can ever go to.

Even if there is nothing ethically wrong with your plans, still they could be outside God’s wise and holy will for your life (cf. 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Acts 16:6-10). Therefore, humbly submit your ways unto the LORD and wait patiently for His direction (cf. Proverbs 3:5-6). By doing this, first, we acknowledge His prerogative to govern our lives. Second, we receive assurance of the success of our plans, which are harmonious with God’s purpose for our lives.

God is faithful to make our plans fruitful: Proverbs 16:1b says, “And the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD.” The meaning of this clause is that the ultimate disposal of man’s plans is not in his hands; rather it is in God’s hands. God governs our actions for our own good and for the fulfilment of His glorious purpose. In Proverbs 16:1a and 2, God exhorts man to plan his life under the superintendence of the infinitely wise and sovereign God.

This is complemented by the exhortation in verse 3, “Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.” This verse is written in progressive parallelism leading the exhortation to its climax. When man commits both the planning and executing of his works, all of his life and its endeavours to God, then the gracious LORD will bring them all unto a glorious and fruitful end. The phrase “thy thoughts” refers to the plans and goals designed with God’s approval. The clause “shall be established” means all of man’s plans designed according to God’s will shall come to fruition by His wisdom and power. This promise is subject to our wilful submission to God’s sovereignty as well as His wise and holy will for our lives. It is neither in our hands

nor in our power to attain a successful end. It depends altogether upon God's faithfulness and power (cf. Zechariah 4:6-10). Regardless of our spiritual, social, economic or ecclesiastical status, we must learn to acknowledge humbly the fact that we can do nothing without the help of the sovereign LORD. On the other hand, we must trust God entirely. With God on our side, we can do all things through His enablement no matter how difficult our circumstance is. Thus, God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are joined pleasantly in our lives for our good and for the glory of our gracious Redeemer.

Conclusion

God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are indeed harmonious themes and inextricably intertwined. God's sovereignty governs all

the actions of His creatures; and man, as a moral creature and a free agent, is personally responsible for all his actions. Therefore, we cannot blame the sovereignty of God for our sinful actions and unwise decisions. God's sovereignty is always tempered with His justice and goodness. Therefore, God's sovereignty is the source of great comfort and motivation for all who are willing to humbly submit to His divine will for their lives and walk uprightly before Him all the days of their lives. And all who obediently submit to God's sovereignty will be successful in their labours.

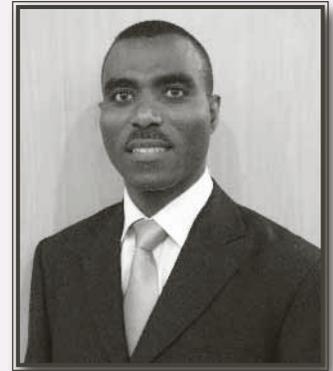
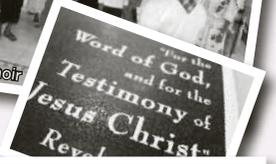
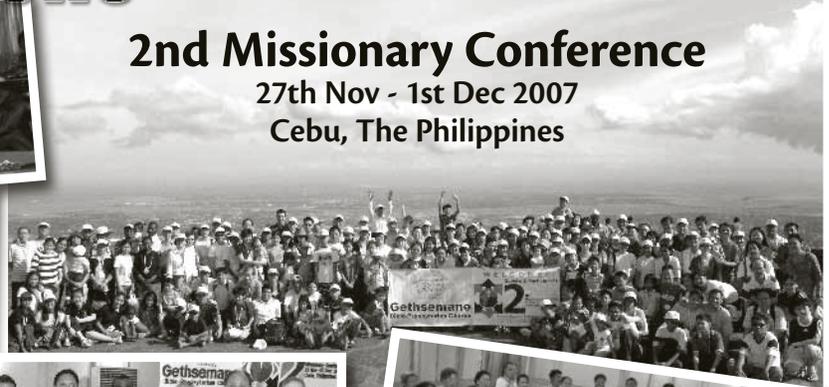


Photo News

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27th Nov - 1st Dec 2007
Cebu, The Philippines



GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND PRAYER

PRABHUDAS KOSHY

Unlike the popular notion, prayer is not a means of communication to persuade God to reconsider His plans (will or decrees) that our personal thoughts and desires might be fulfilled. The purpose of prayer is not getting God to change His foreordained plans. Rather, prayer is intended to be an expression of our submission to God's sovereign will and our joyful dependence upon Him for direction and help in our daily lives.

In the Scripture, we are clearly taught that our prayers must emerge from our lives in Him, and also that they ought to be based on His will. Jesus said, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). Our prayers must be in agreement with all that Christ's name stands for; and the way to do it is by asking only that which will glorify God in Christ. Jesus also said in John 15:7 that "if ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you". An effective prayer life is only possible when we abide in His words, which reveal His will concerning us. If we abide in His words, then the thoughts, desires and requests that we make known to Him in our prayers shall be pleasing to Him. That is why John the apostle wrote that our prayers must be according to

His will - "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 John 5:14-15).

Hence we can say that it is not God who is being changed by the activity of prayer, but the believer who is praying. Through prayer, the believer must seek to conform to the will of God, even in the most trying circumstances. We must be like Jesus, our Lord, who prayed as He faced His suffering and death - "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

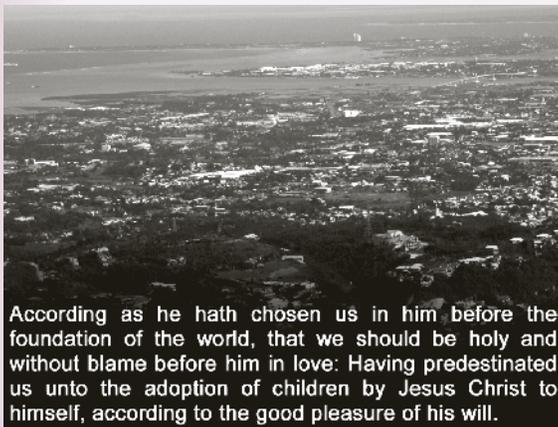
True prayer is a frank admission that God is sovereign. Every sincere prayer, even for a specific need, is an admission that every affair of our lives is in God's hand alone. When we pray ceaselessly, we are acknowledging without any hesitation that tomorrow, and all that it brings, is not under our control but under His sovereign providence. The present and the future are all in His hands and not in ours. Thus our prayer must affirm that God is sovereign.

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GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN SALVATION

REGGOR B. GALARPE

One of the wonderful truths that is well explained in the Holy Scriptures is the Sovereignty of God. I say wonderful, for it brings much comfort and assurance knowing that God is in control; that He is in charge. Any avid reader or serious student of the Bible cannot miss this great doctrine clearly taught in God's inerrant and infallible Word. The Bible says that God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1:11). And that He declares "the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10). Thus, what we see happening around us did not just occur by chance or accident, or for no reason at all. The truth is, there is a reason for everything. For they all fall under God's counsel and eternal decrees.



According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

The answer to the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) Q. 7 – "What are the decrees of God?" states, "The decrees of God are, His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." God has planned everything of the past, present and future for His own glory. And that includes the salvation of man!

"Salvation is of the Lord!" declares the prophet Jonah. In saying this, the prophet wholly attributed to God the work of salvation. So did the psalmist David when he wrote in Psalm 3:8, "Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people" (cf. Psalm 37:39; 68:20). Likewise, the great multitude in Revelation 7:10 when they cried with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

Man's Inability

Contrary to the unscriptural assumption that man has the ability to choose God by exercising his will, in his fallen and spiritually dead estate, man is not at all able to believe in Him. "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They

are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Romans 3:10-12).

Man's whole nature is totally sinful and corrupt, and so perverse that he is incapable of saving himself nor is he able to bring himself to respond to the Gospel. Given a choice, man will choose to reject rather than obey the Gospel. This is the reason why people often turn us down when we attempt to share the Gospel and why some of the Gospel tracts that we give out during evangelism end up in the garbage.

The Westminster Confession of Faith describes total inability as follows: "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto" (WCF IX:3).

By his own self, man is left with no escape from his eternal destiny. Man can do nothing to save himself. He is totally and utterly lost! He is condemned, deserving God's wrath and eternal punishment!

God's Sovereignty

Now the question is, "Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?" Answer: "God having, out of His mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer" (WSC Q. and A. 20). God, in His sovereign will, extends His grace and mercy that sinful men are enabled to escape the estate of sin and misery.

God's Sovereignty is Demonstrated in His Sovereign Grace: Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." It is purely by grace that sinners get saved. Salvation is not by works of man but all the works of God. It is wholly by the grace of God and not based upon any foreseen virtues in man. As the saying goes: "If anyone is saved, God does all the saving."

God's Sovereignty is Demonstrated by His Unconditional Election: God, in His sovereign will, elected particular sinners unto salvation. John 15:16, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain..." It is very clear that it was God who chose us out of His good will and pleasure and not we choosing Him. It must be stressed here that God's election is not based upon the foreknowledge of God as to who would believe. It rested solely on His own sovereign will.

This is also referred to by some as "predestination" since God's election was made even before the existence of those He chooses to save, even before the foundation of the world. Ephesians 1:4-5, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."

God's Sovereignty is Demonstrated in the Spirit's Work of Regeneration: From His sovereign act of electing, God's sovereignty is also demonstrated in the Spirit's work of regeneration. Man, because of the Fall (being spiritually dead to the things of God, with

his heart deceitful and desperately wicked), is totally unable by himself to respond to the Gospel. Thus the need for man to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit – to be “quicken” and be made spiritually alive whereby he is given a new nature – to enable him to respond in faith (Ephesians 2:1-8).

This is made effective through the special inward call whereby the Spirit convicts the heart of sin, and enables the sinner to understand the Gospel, and to believe in Christ. At this point, saving faith is imparted by the Holy Spirit, and it is not something that man contributes (as his part) to his own salvation.

God’s Sovereignty is Demonstrated in Every Aspect of Salvation:

There is not a part of man’s salvation wherein God’s sovereignty is not at work. Consider what Paul wrote in Romans 8:28-31, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”

Notice that it is all the work of God – from His calling to His providential care of those who love Him; from His foreknowledge to predestinating His own elect; and from His justification to His glorification of them. What a great comfort that we are forever secure in God’s special providential care of His people!

God’s Sovereignty – Hindrance to Evangelism?

In obedience to the Great Commission, Christians are to go and preach the Gospel – the work of evangelism. But there are those who say that if God is sovereign, then why evangelize people? Why preach the Gospel when God has already chosen and elected some unto Himself?

Properly understood, God’s sovereignty is the strongest motive for evangelism. We must realize that it is because God has chosen some to be saved that we are to preach the Gospel. Not knowing who are God’s elect and who are not, we are to preach the Gospel to all men. For it is through the preaching of the Gospel whereby the elect sinner is called to believe. He that believes is he that God elects!

Conclusion

The work of salvation is purely and entirely of the Lord. And I am thankful that it is purely His, for as Charles Spurgeon said, “If I have to contribute a stitch to my garment of salvation, I would be totally lost.”

Pondering upon God’s sovereignty in salvation, I am amazed at the thought that out of millions, why would God choose any of us? May every soul that is chosen and saved of the Lord be resolved to live a sanctified and consecrated life, showing forth the glory of God.

Thank you Lord for saving my soul!



Photo News

God's Provision of a Church Van for the Mission Church in Cebu



Ordination of Bro Reggor & Bro Ephrem



(continued from page 9)

If we pray in faith in the name of Christ with an obedient heart to His will that we might have all things to live unto God's glory, we can be assured that He will grant them. It is like Augustine's prayer, "Give what Thou commandest and command what Thou will."

The doctrine of divine sovereignty should be an incentive to pray, for the only kind of a God who can answer prayer is a sovereign God. His sovereignty should also motivate us to pray always. We should not be like those who say, "Since God is sovereign over all things, there is no point in praying for things." His sovereignty will commands us to pray. When

we pray, we yield ourselves to be in His plan for our provisions and progress. Not to pray is to go against His sovereign purposes. Our duty is to live submissively in harmony with all His decrees, including His will that we should pray.

So let us pray, as Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6:10, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." That is why we are instructed in the Shorter Catechism, "We pray that God, by His grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey and submit to His will in all things, as the angels do in Heaven" (Question 103).

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND PROVIDENCE IN OUR LIVES

TAN KIAN SING

Esther 6:1-11

¹ On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king.

² And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus.

³ And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.

⁴ And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.

⁵ And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in.

⁶ So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself?

⁷ And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour,

⁸ Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head:

⁹ And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

¹⁰ Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken.

¹¹ Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

Introduction

Are our lives governed by chance? Is God in control of all situations in our lives? Is He in control of events, even when our actions are wrong or bad? Does He have ultimate command over our thoughts, whether good or evil?

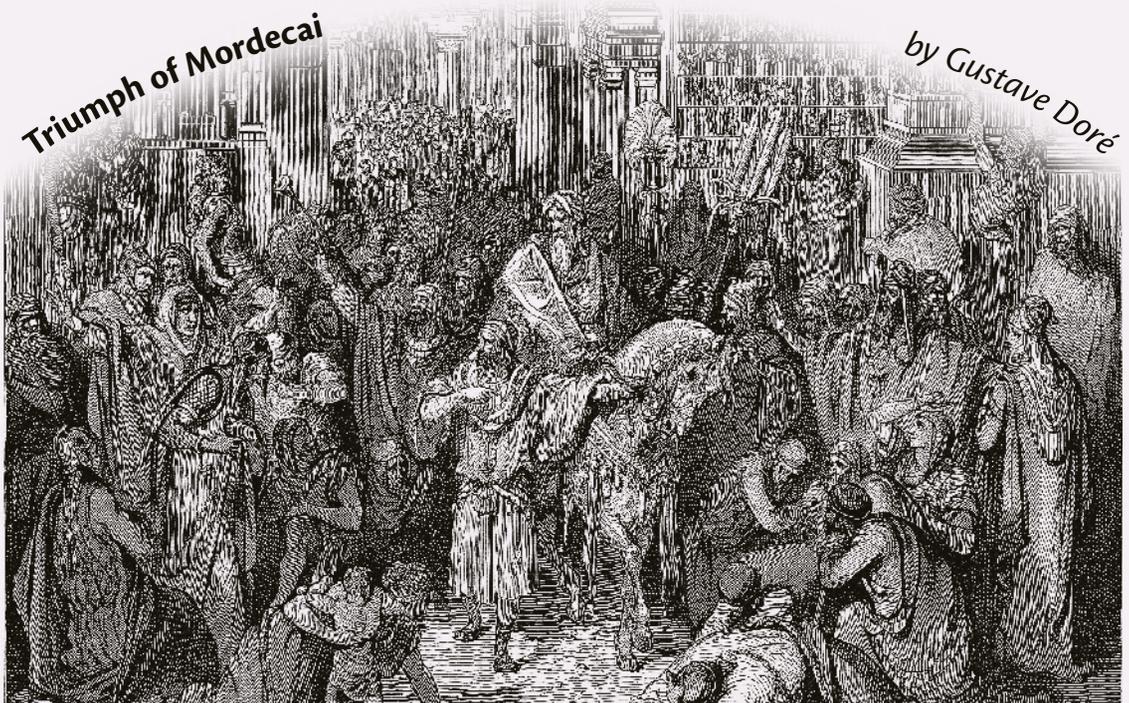
The Scripture says in Acts 17:28, "For in him we live, and move, and have our being." Likewise Psalm 37:23, 24 says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand." Furthermore, in the book of Esther, we notice that God's sovereign control and

providential guidance also influence the lives of unbelievers.

Let us look at how God's providence governs the ways and thoughts of both believers and non-believers so that the events of life might work out everything for the good of His beloved children.

God's Providence Governs Our Ways

In our text, we note that King Ahasuerus could not sleep in the night. We must acknowledge that God is the one who gives sleep. The Scripture says He giveth His beloved sleep (cf. Psalm 127:2). God is sovereign even over the matter of man's sleep. It was God Almighty



*Then took Haman the apparel and the horse,
and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback
through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him,
Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.*
Esther 6:11

who caused Abraham to fall into a deep sleep when He made the covenant with Abraham (cf. Genesis 15:12). The deep sleep was given to Abraham so that God could carry out His divine purpose and plan in the cutting of the covenant with Abraham. God wanted to show Abraham that He alone bore the full responsibility of the covenant that He made with him.

In an earlier incident, God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep in order to make Eve out of one of the ribs of Adam. It was also a divine sovereign act to carry out His plan and purpose. Again the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Saul's camp so that David could get so near to King Saul as to be able to take away the spear and the cruse of water from him without his knowledge. So we see that God, in His sovereignty and providence, uses sleep to accomplish His divine purpose and plan.

But, in our text, we see that King Ahasuerus could not sleep because the Lord had wanted him to do a certain important task that would eventually lead to the accomplishment of His plan. In that sleepless night, by God's providence, it was brought to the king's attention that his life was delivered by Mordecai the Jew from the hands of two of his chamberlains who plotted to assassinate him.

At the same time, God's providence also did not allow Haman, Mordecai's enemy, to sleep. So he was found in the outer court of the palace, just as the king was looking for a court official to advise him concerning what reward he should bestow on Mordecai, who saved his life.

This interesting turn of events was really no coincidence, but the working of the unseen

sovereign hand of God. The Lord was working out His good pleasure through the mundane events of man's life. Indeed, all our ways are controlled and directed by the Lord!

God's Providence Governs Our Thoughts

While the king was thinking hard as to how he could reward Mordecai, the wicked Haman was thinking about how he could obtain great honour from the king. It was by God's providence that Haman lost his sleep over thoughts of self-promotion and honour from the king. The Lord is all-knowing. He is also in control of all our thoughts; and He orders them as He wills. It is because of God, who governs the thoughts of man, that the thoughts of the selfish Haman, who planned evil against Mordecai, were redirected to honour Mordecai.

A similar event in the book of Genesis comes to mind at this juncture. Joseph's brothers plotted to get rid of Joseph. But behind those thoughts, God was working out His plan for Joseph to become the prime minister of Egypt in order to save many from famine. The brothers meant it for evil, but God meant it for good (cf. Genesis 50:20). Most certainly, God's providence governed all the events that took place in the life of Joseph.

Proverbs 21:1 tells us how God controls the ways and thoughts of even those who have the rule over us. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."

Are you applying for a place in the university? Are you waiting for a reply to a job application? Are you waiting for an approval from some government office? Do your part and then leave them all in God's hands. He is sovereign

and in control. The Lord will work out His will for you even though it involves secular authorities.

Now I would like to share briefly an event that has helped me to taste the goodness of His sovereign working. When the Lord called me to enter full-time ministry, I decided to resign from my job and enter the Far Eastern Bible College for theological studies. When I tendered my resignation, my boss told me that he was very disappointed with my decision to leave the company. He had plans to prepare me to run his company together with him. So he tried to persuade me to stay on in the company. But the Lord gave me the strength and courage to tell him the true reason for my resignation. Although my boss was not a believer, I took courage to explain to him my calling into the ministry. I felt that it was necessary to tell him the matters concerning my calling into the ministry as he was having wild thoughts about my reason for resignation. He thought that I was leaving his company for a rival company because they offered me a better pay. By God's providential working, my

explanation was accepted and all speculations and rumours were put to rest. But the best thing that happened through these events was that I had the opportunity to bear witness of my Christian faith in an open letter to the bosses and staff of the company. It then led to more opportunities to witness to many more of my colleagues. I could see God's providence in governing the events that had taken place during my resignation.

Conclusion

God is sovereign and is in control. We can rest assured that His providence will govern the unfolding of events for His glory, in and through our lives. Surely our lives are not governed by chance, but by the sovereign hand of God. Amen.



Your Generous Support is urgently needed!

This year, Bible Witness Media Ministry has embarked on producing the following:

- *Gospels tracts in English, Burmese, Tagalog, etc.*
- *Children's Gospel tracts, Sunday School materials*
- *Children's animation and video DVD*
- *Bible study materials and books for youths and adults*

Funds are urgently required for (i) the above projects, (ii) acquiring the necessary audio and video equipment, and (iii) the support of full-time staff.

BWMM is praying for God's provision of S\$30,000.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND OUR BUSINESS PLANS

RICHARD M. TIU

One particular passage that outlines God's sovereignty in relation to business planning is found in the Epistle of James. "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For

that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil" (James 4:13-16).

We often hear of business corporations audaciously declaring their five-year or ten-year growth plans for the future. These long-term plans may sound impressive but a closer look at them will reveal that these are all but human schemes that can go haywire in one moment or the next. Consider this question: Did anybody ever plan for the stock markets to crash or for the currencies at the foreign exchange to devalue? Obviously, the answer is no. Yet these things happen and such factors greatly affect most businesses. And when the markets crash, even the best-laid business plan also goes down the drain. The Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 are stark reminders of this reality.

But, in spite of the uncertainties of tomorrow and the sovereignty of God, many businessmen have been mapping out their plans as if the opposite is true: that tomorrow is certain and God's control over it is not. To such godless



planning, this passage in James issues an indictment as well as a sober reminder in order to teach the lesson that God indeed has sovereign control over business enterprises. A careful consideration of the following points will put business planning in its proper perspective:

A Serious Indictment – “Go to now, ye that say” (v. 13)

James here is calling out to those who are saying that they can plan their future business portfolios without any regard for God and His will. These people have been carefully laying out their schemes and devices with nary a single mention of Christ. They seem to have thought out their plan very well in fixing the date of their travel (“today and tomorrow”), their place of business (“such a city”), the duration of this activity (“continue there a year”), what sort of business (“buy and sell”), as well as their desired goal (“and get gain”).

This meticulous and diligent planning may appeal to the worldly businessman but James calls it boastful and evil rejoicing. Why? Because such arrogant and godless planning is tantamount to the sin of pride and presumption (cf. Psalm 19:13). It is founded on a wrong view of self. It shows a spirit which is forgetful of our dependence upon God and forgetful of the uncertainty of the future. The higher hand of God rules and overrules every business venture, for these can only succeed as God allows and enables. To exclude Him in any business plan is to be like the fool that said in his heart, “There is no God” (Psalm 14:1).

The indictment here is clear: to plan for the future apart from God is sin. It is a presumptuous and pretentious boast of knowing what God alone knows. “But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is

evil” (James 4:16). Godless planning is not just bad planning – it is sinful, unholy planning.

A Sober Reminder – “For what is your life?” (v. 14)

Thus James has to remind his readers about the brevity of human life. He likens it to a vapour that is here one moment and is soon gone. In other words, James is trying to point out that every business plan must ultimately depend upon the continuance of life. But if life is as fleeting and uncertain as a mist, the question is, “Will one live long enough to see the fruition of his business?”

Who knows if over the course of “buying” that a businessman is able to come to the point of “selling” and eventually “getting gain”? As he considers travelling on a business trip “today or tomorrow”, will the weather permit his flight to take off on that day? If it does take off, will it be able to land safely? If he will indeed arrive at “such a city”, will he surely “continue there a year”? What if an illness or misfortune overtakes him? These situations are certainly beyond our foreknowledge and absolute control. The point is, “Ye know not what is on the morrow”, for we may never even get to see that day.

The corporate world is often driven by the pleasure of profit. Business executives wear themselves out by trying to make a fortune that will eventually be spent for their own recuperation. Much time and effort are put into making lots of money that they may never even get to enjoy. Such was the case of the rich fool in one of Jesus’ parables recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

“The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have

no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:16-20).

Life on earth is not all about moneymaking or merrymaking, for these, too, are vanities. The fleeting nature of our lives should quicken us to ponder soberly upon the afterlife. Does your business plan include an eternal plan? Are you heaven-bound? If not, then take heed of God's Word spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6).

A Simple Lesson – "For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will" (v. 15)

A godly business plan must include the phrase "If the Lord will". This is actually an adjoining prayer that the Lord might be pleased to bless and prosper our plans. This is the proper way to plan every business because we are wholly dependent on Him for life, and just as dependent on Him for success. He alone can keep us and make our plans prosperous. The psalmist gives us a bigger picture of this truth. "The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them" (Psalm 89:11).

On the other hand, the Lord can easily thwart our best-laid schemes and frustrate us if He so pleases, for He has said that "without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). But we can achieve great things even with our frailties as He graciously aids us with His strength.

For He has also said, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness..." (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Many rush through each day with a litany of jobs to be done, neglecting to utter even a word of prayer and thanksgiving to the One who created us and has given us life. And the answers to these questions are soon forgotten: Who can give us good health and able bodies? Who causes the world to turn, the sun to shine, and the rain to fall and fill the earth? Who can keep us from evil and the temptations of the wicked one? Who can save us from our sins and from the madness of this world? How often do we remember Him? Consider what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." This should always be the first and foremost priority of the Christian businessman.

Conclusion

The truth remains that not one of us can really tell what the future holds. Everything here on earth, including business enterprises, big or small, is under the sovereign control of the Almighty God. Therefore, we must never ever leave Him out of our business plans. After all, the Lord Himself has said, "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 8:18).



Candy or Heathen, Selfishness or Love?

A real incident from the life of Jonathan Goforth, a Canadian missionary to China.

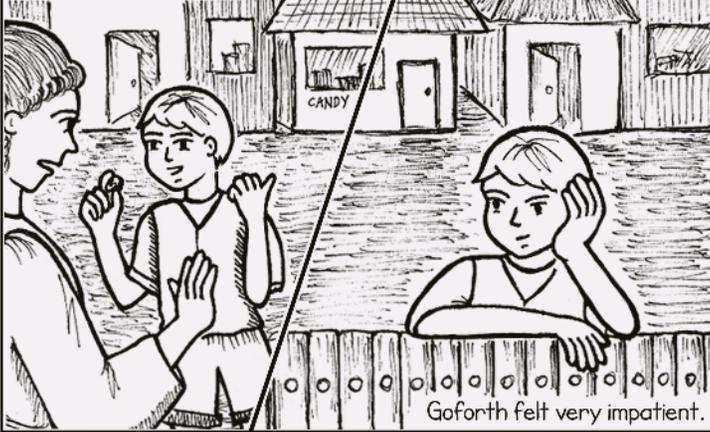
Bibliography: "Goforth of China" by Rosalind Goforth. The stories are written by Sis Ruth Low. Illustrations are done by Sis Sharon Ng.

When Jonathan Goforth was young, someone gave him 5 cents. At that time, 5 cents was a lot to the little boy. He felt happy and rich. He thought to himself:

"I can buy six sticks of candy!"



He ran to his mother for permission to buy candy from the nearby store. But she told him to wait until Monday. It was Saturday then.



Goforth felt very impatient.

Suddenly, a thought came to him.

"Little boy, shouldn't you give your 5 cents to the heathen?" (Heathen means unbelievers.)



Goforth knew there would be a missions collection the next day in church but he did not know who put the thought in his heart.

Goforth was more interested in his candy than in the heathen, and he was sure he was going to buy the candy. But the thought would not go away.



A big struggle arose - 5 cents for candy or 5 cents for the heathen?

When night came, Goforth could not sleep. He was still thinking - candy or heathen? Selfishness or love?



Finally, he decided on love and to give to the missions collection. That made him very happy and he slept soon after.

When Goforth awoke the next morning, the selfish desire to buy the candy returned, and his struggle between selfishness and love continued.

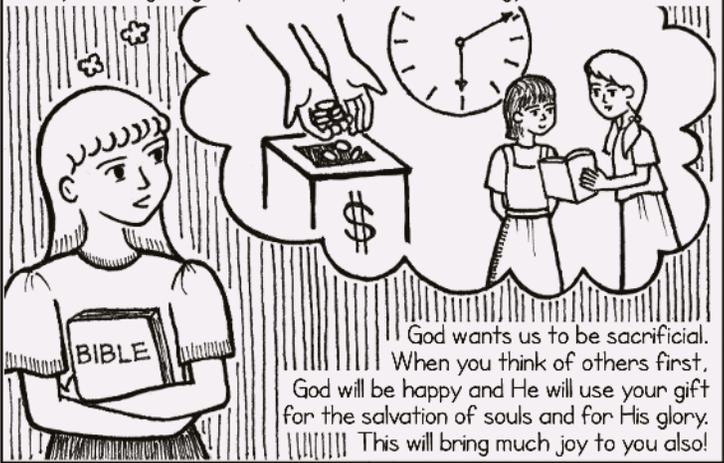


But thankfully, just before Sunday school time, the war between selfishness and love was won by love. Goforth dropped his 5 cents onto the plate that was passed around for the missions collection.



He felt more happy than if he was given the whole store of candy!

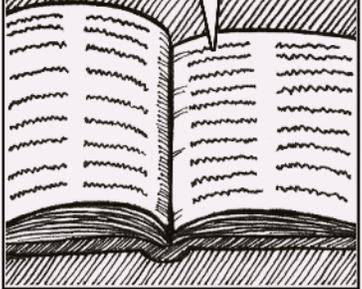
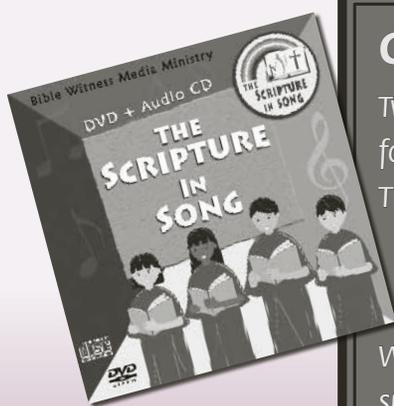
Children, God wants you to think of others more than your pleasures. Are you willing to give your money, time and energy for others' sake?



God wants us to be sacrificial. When you think of others first, God will be happy and He will use your gift for the salvation of souls and for His glory. This will bring much joy to you also!

Philippians 2:4 says,

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

Children's DVD Projects

Two special programmes are now being developed for children by the Bible Witness Media Ministry. They are:

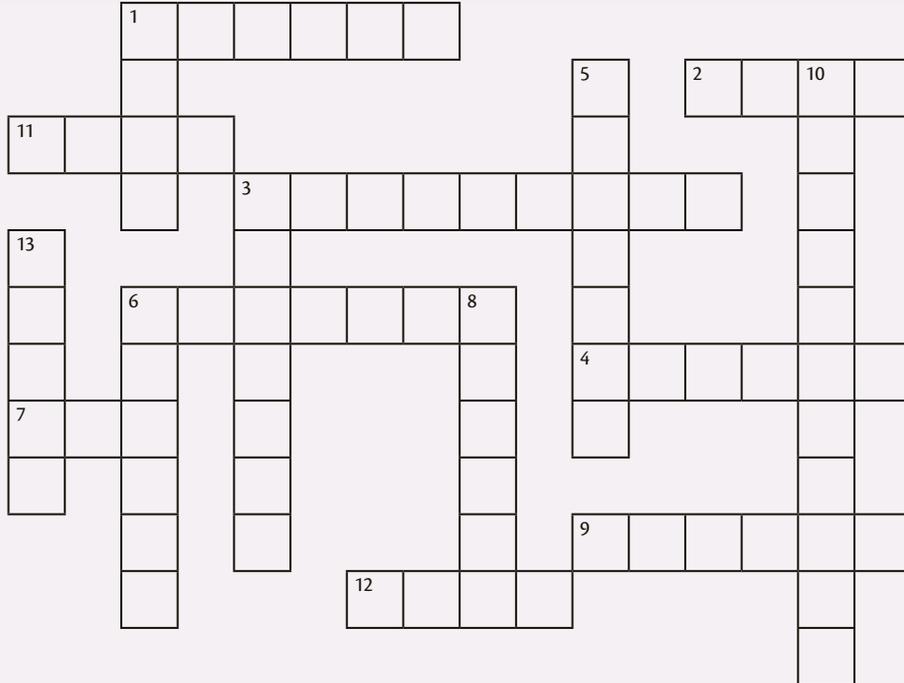
- (1) The Scripture in Song - 2
- (2) Animated Bible Lessons 1

We covet your ardent prayers and generous support, that these projects may be completed this year.

BIBLE TRIVIA - GENESIS 36 & 37

Sarah Yong

READ THE TWO CHAPTERS IN YOUR BIBLE, THEN USE THE CLUES GIVEN BELOW TO FILL IN THE CROSSWORD.



ACROSS

- 1) Esau took wives of the daughters of _____.
- 2) Esau dwelt in mount _____.
- 3) Joseph's age
- 4) Number of stars
- 6) Joseph's nickname
- 7) Joseph was cast into a ____.
- 9) Number of pieces of silver
- 11) Animal the brothers killed
- 12) Jacob _____ his clothes.

DOWN

- 1) Jacob made a colourful _____.
- 3) His brothers' _____ made obeisance.
- 5) Jacob's flock was at _____.
- 6) The brothers were at _____.
- 8) The oldest brother
- 10) Joseph was sold to a company of _____.
- 13) Land of bondage

Answers to Vol. 7, Issue 6 - Bible Trivia - Genesis 35

p. 23 - Reuben; Simone; Levi; Judah; Dan; Naphtali; Gad; Asher; Issachar; Zelulun; Joseph; Benjamin.

God changed Jacob's name to **Israel**. God said that he would be **fruitful** and **multiply**. A company of **nations** would arise from him, and **kings** shall come out of his loins. God also promised his descendents the **land** of their fathers.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God SHALL REIGN OVER THE HOUSE OF JACOB FOR EVER; and of HIS KINGDOM THERE SHALL BE NO END.

Gospel Light

Prabhudas Koshy

Prabhudas Koshy

1. From the land of ris - ing sun To the land of set - ting sun The
2. From the ris - ing of the sun To the set - ting of the sun The
3. Let Thy peo - ple rise for Thee Let Thy peo - ple shine for Thee That

light of the Gos - pel of Je - sus Christ Must shine ev - 'ry - where bright
truth of e - ter - nal per - fect Word Must be fu - lly preach'd a - broad
sin - ners be made com - plet - ly free And to Christ they may flee.

O Lord set us a - flame To go and pro - claim

The glo - ri - ous sav - ing name With - out fear and shame