

# OpenTheo

## God's Sovereignty and Foreknowledge



### Isaiah: A Topical Look At Isaiah - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses God's sovereignty and foreknowledge in the book of Isaiah, with a focus on the last 27 chapters which emphasize God's power and sovereignty in various contexts. Gregg clarifies that God's sovereignty does not necessarily mean that He interferes with man's free will, but rather He rules over certain elements and delivers people to rulers to judge them. In chapter 48, verse 12-15, God's ability to advance His plans independent of human action is highlighted, emphasizing His sovereignty over creation. Ultimately, Gregg concludes that God is sovereign over all things, including the deity of Christ.

### Transcript

Our studies of the themes in Isaiah would certainly not be complete if we didn't take time to study a major emphasis in the book, especially a major emphasis in the Book of Comfort, the last 27 chapters, where the sovereignty of God is emphatically declared in many ways and on many occasions in several contexts. I'd like to develop that from the Book of Isaiah if we could, but I'd also like to say that the sovereignty of God is a subject that is not confined to Isaiah but is a major theme in all the prophets. In many cases, the prophets wrote in a social context where people were worshipping idols as well as Jehovah, and so God often emphasized his sovereignty to show that he was the real God as opposed to the impotent idols and to show the foolishness of worshipping idols.

The foreknowledge of God is also tied in with this in Isaiah. There's a lot of emphasis on God knowing the future and being able to tell in advance what he's going to do. Again, most of this is in the latter part in the Book of Comfort.

It's pretty densely filled with this kind of theme in that latter portion, but it's also found in the earlier portions. If I might show you some things outside of Isaiah first on this subject. When we talk about the sovereignty of God, we're talking about his power and prerogative.

When we talk about God's power, there's a theological word called omnipotence, which means omnipotence, all power, and that God has all the power necessary to do whatever

he wants to do. There is, of course, a trick question often asked of people. Can God make a stone that he cannot move? The first question is, can God do everything? And you trap yourself when you say, yes, God can do anything.

Because the next question is, can God make a stone or make a mountain that he could not move? And then you're trapped because you've just said God can do anything. And if you say he can't make such a stone, then you've found something he can't do. And if you say he can make such a stone, there is something he can't do.

He can't move that stone that he made. So it's a philosophical conundrum, but one escapes the problem by giving the right answer to the first question. The first question is, can God do everything? The answer is no, God can't do everything.

The Bible nowhere says that God can do everything. It says he cannot lie in Titus 1.2. That's something God can't do. It says somewhere in Paul's writings to Timothy, he says God cannot deny himself.

It says in James that God cannot be tempted with evil. And if he can't be tempted with evil, he can't do any evil either. There are some things God simply can't do.

And the reason he can't do them is not because he doesn't have the power to do it, but because it would go so against his grain and against his nature that it's impossible to. It's like if you said, could you go up and strangle your son Timothy? I could say no, I can't do that. It's not because I lack power.

It's that it's totally contrary to my character. I could not bring myself to do it. I have no interest in doing it.

I could not even be tempted to do it. And if I can't be tempted to do it, if I can't be made to want to do it, because it goes against my grain and everything that's in me, then I can't do it. It has nothing to do with restraints upon my power.

And so when we talk about God's sovereignty, we're talking first of all about his power. He can do whatever he wants to do. Can he make a stone that he can't move? I doubt it, because he doesn't want to.

And it would be against his nature to create something in the creator that would defy his omnipotence. And therefore it would seem to be against his nature to do it. I don't think he could do that.

But it doesn't matter. The point is we don't ever claim that there aren't things God can't do. There are some things God can't do because they go against his nature and he cannot deny himself.

But in addition to the question of what God can do and his power, there's the issue of his

prerogative, the right of God to do it. Can I open those lockers and see if there's any money in them and pocket any money I find in there and go and spend it on things? Yeah, I have the power to do that if no one's around to stop me. I can physically walk over there.

I can open the lockers. I have the muscle control. I have the energy.

I have the time. I can do that. I have the ability to do that.

Do I have the right to do that? No, I don't. Now do I have the right to say we're shifting a Thursday afternoon class to a Monday afternoon class? I have the right to do that. But I don't have the right to do some other things.

Now, a person who is a sovereign has the right and the ability to do whatever he wants to. And when we talk about the sovereignty of God, we're talking about two things, God's power to do whatever he wants to and his right to do whatever he wants to. Now, when it comes to in-depth theological discussions on the sovereignty of God, there are many things that are open to question.

How far does God's sovereignty extend, for example, in the choice of who is saved? The Calvinist view is the view known for emphasizing the sovereignty of God, and they extend the sovereignty of God so far as to say that God is the one who decides who will be saved. Not only decides on what basis he will save people, but decides what people will meet the conditions. He has the power and the prerogative to decide to save somebody and to bring about salvation, bring about a saving response in their heart.

And he has the power and the prerogative to not do that. And this is what Calvinism teaches about God's sovereignty. Non-Calvinist thinkers often say, well, God certainly has the power to do all that and even has the right to do it.

But the question is whether he chooses to do that, whether God has chosen to cancel out a man's will or to override a man's will, in order to guarantee that that man will be saved or in order to guarantee that that man will not be saved. Is it his nature, is it his desire to basically be the only will ultimately in the universe, or has he desired to share some freedom with creatures and for him to live with the results that he does not control of their choices? That is more of an Arminian kind of a thought. If you say that you have free choice over your own destiny, that you can choose freely to be saved or choose freely to be lost, the Calvinist says, then God is not sovereign in his universe.

You are sovereign. You are sovereign over your eternal destiny, not God, and therefore God is not in control and you've taken away from the sovereignty of God. I don't agree with that.

I don't think that does take away from the sovereignty of God. If God has sovereignly decided to give free will to people and nobody has forced him to do so, then his allowing

such freedom is something that he has sovereignly decided. If he wished he could revoke it, but if he chooses to give it, that is a function of his sovereignty too.

One guy I was talking to from the Nazarene church, which is an Arminian denomination also, he said, you know, if I give my children some blocks to play with and they make something and I don't control the thing they make, that doesn't mean I'm not sovereign over my children. I mean, I can go in and destroy what they make, I can take the blocks from them, I can dictate how long I let them play with the blocks or whether I let them do it in the first place. All of that is part of my control and governance of my household.

That I give my children some liberty to make whatever they want with blocks does not cancel out my sovereignty over the family or my headship of the family. And that is how the Arminian thinks about the sovereignty of God. God is in fact able to do whatever he wants to and he has the right to do whatever he wants to.

As the creator he owns everything so he can do whatever he wants with it. If I create some newfangled invention that no one has ever made before and I decide to use it for target practice to destroy it, that's my business. Some might say, oh, but that thing is so capable of doing wonderful things.

I mean, that invention is functional. Think of all the good things that can be done if you don't destroy it. Well, that's maybe so, but it's mine.

If I want to destroy it, I can destroy it. I made it, it's mine. I have the right to do with it what I want.

And God has that kind of right. If he wanted to just create human beings so that he could destroy them and had no other purpose in it, and some would argue, but these are people. These people have souls, eternal souls.

They're going to suffer in hell if you do this to them. He'd say, well, so be it. I made them, I can do what I want with them, right? This is how the Calvinist thinks.

I mean, maybe that's putting it a little more crassly than they normally would, but this is essentially what they think. God has the right to do that if he wants to. And who is to argue with God on that? Well, I agree.

God does have the right to do that. I don't know anywhere in the Bible that says he has done that or does do that, but he has the right to it. Anything God chooses to do with his creation, he has every right to do it, and he has the power to perform it.

So in God's sovereignty, there's three considerations. His power, his prerogative, which would be his right to do what he wants to do, and thirdly, his choice, that is to say, his desire. Does he want to do that? Is that what he chooses to do? His policy.

We could say his power, his prerogative, and his policy if we want to use alliteration here. His policy of giving man free will does not cancel out his sovereignty, although he could, of course, cancel that policy. He didn't have to follow that policy.

He could have made everyone robots. He could have made everyone animals. He didn't have to make any beings in his own image.

He was not compelled to do that. It was his sovereign choice to do that. But having done so, it is his policy not to make certain choices for them and not to intrude his sovereignty into certain decisions because that would violate his sovereign choice to give them freedom.

Now, I don't know if that's confusing to anyone, but the sovereignty of God is most often discussed in that context, in the context of God's sovereignty and salvation, and the two sides of the debate are usually the Calvinists and the Arminians. Now, in Isaiah, we do not find that kind of sovereignty in God. We do not find God having sovereign direction over the moral choices people make, the choice whether they will be good or bad, the choice whether they will be faithful or lost.

In Isaiah, the sovereignty of God is emphasized, but not to that extent. It is not his policy to force people to be good if they are not inclined to, even though he wants them to. For example, in Isaiah 66, actually, we will look at Isaiah 66, but just a moment, look at the previous chapter, 65, verse 12.

He says, Now, notice this. God is angry. He is going to punish.

Why? Because he called them, but they did not answer. He spoke, but they would not listen. And they chose, not God chose, but they chose something that he did not delight in them choosing.

He wanted them to choose something else. It did not please him, the choice they made. It is quite obvious that God is not claiming here sovereignty over the free choices of people.

Rather, he is disgusted with the choices they have made. They have gone against his wishes in this. They have chosen what he did not want them to choose, and he is angry.

Now, you see, the Calvinist view of this is that God has something called irresistible grace, which is also referred to as the effectual calling. In Calvinist theology, the sovereignty of God functions this way in salvation. God decides in a way that to us seems arbitrary.

They would say it is not arbitrary. God has his purposes. We just do not know what they are.

But God decides to save some and not others. It has nothing to do with any virtue in them. It has nothing to do with even any decision they will make.

He, in fact, has to make the decision for them because they are dead in trespass and sins and they cannot make any decision for themselves. Therefore, God unconditionally elects to save certain people. Furthermore, he has this thing called irresistible grace or the effectual calling, where once he has chosen to save someone, he calls them with this effectual calling.

And the word effectual is attached to calling to suggest it brings about the effect. He calls, it necessarily results in them coming. That is what irresistible grace means.

If God has elected someone and he calls them, they come. But Isaiah knew of no such effectual calling. God said, I called, but you did not answer.

Jesus said in Matthew, how many times I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing, but you would not. In Matthew 23, he said that to Jerusalem. God does not have, apparently, I won't say he doesn't have the power, but he does not exercise such power.

It is his policy to let people choose their own wicked ways if that is what they choose. It does not please him. And they often choose that in which he has no delight, but he still gives them that prerogative.

That is not a violation of his sovereignty, and his sovereignty does not extend so far in its functioning, in its operation as to cancel out human free will. Also in Isaiah, I mentioned verse 66. That's where we'll look now.

Isaiah 66. In verse 3, he says, He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man. He who sacrifices a lamb is as if he breaks a dog's neck.

He who offers a grain offering is as if he offers swine's blood. He who burns incense is as if he blesses an idol. All these things are bad.

Just as they have chosen their own ways and their soul delights in their abominations, so will I choose their delusions and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered. When I spoke, they did not hear, but they did evil before my eyes and chose that in which I do not delight. You recognize, of course, a repeat of chapter 65, 12 there.

But the first part of that is interesting, because he says in verse 3, They have chosen their own ways. Then verse 4, Therefore I will choose their delusions. This shows where the sovereignty and free will balance out.

Man chooses his own way. He often chooses that which God does not delight in,

according to the end of verse 4. God may not approve of the way the man chooses, but God does not interfere, at least not ultimately. God does interfere in the sense that he brings conviction of sin.

He sends his word. He often will put obstacles in the path of the sinner going about to do the wrong thing. I mean, God does interfere, but God ultimately does not prevent or forbid a person from choosing something God wishes they had not chosen.

They choose their own ways. The way you live is essentially your choice. But, he says, Therefore I will choose their delusions.

I'll choose the results of their ways. I choose to delude them. I choose to judge them.

Now, see, this is the thing. You can choose to live a life of sin, but you can't choose to live a life of sin with impunity. You know, if I were to choose a life of sin, I would want to also choose to live a life of sin for which I will experience no punishment.

I don't have that choice. I have the choice to live a life of sin, but I don't have the choice of whether I will be punished for that sin or not. God has that choice.

He chooses their delusions. They choose their ways. He chooses their consequences.

And this is where the sovereignty of God interplays with the free will of man. I called them, they didn't come. I spoke, they wouldn't listen.

They chose things I didn't delight in. They chose ways that I do not approve of. Therefore, since they've chosen their ways, I'm going to choose the consequences of their ways.

And so, God always has the final say. And this is one of the functions of His sovereignty. And so, we're going to look at the positive affirmations and outworking of the doctrine of God's sovereignty in Isaiah.

But I wanted to say at the beginning that Isaiah does not teach what seems to be the Calvinistic view of God's sovereignty, that God's sovereignty does not extend so far as to making people's moral choices for them and just putting it in them to make the right or the wrong moral choice. They choose their own ways in that respect. Now, what God does rule over, the Bible says, is two things in particular are emphasized.

He rules over nature and He rules over nations. He rules over nature and He rules over the nations. Sometimes the nations are likened to nature, like the raging sea and so forth, and He stills both.

But let me show you some scriptures outside of Isaiah first, and then we'll show how Isaiah develops this theme also. Daniel chapter 2. In Daniel chapter 2, in verse 21, Daniel declares this about God's sovereignty. It says that God changes the times and the

seasons, which apparently means He's the one who determines when spring gives place to summer and when summer gives way to fall and so forth.

He's the one who brings the changes of the seasons. He's the one who brings the sunrise and the sundown and the movement of the planets that determine times and seasons. He's the one who orders that.

He changes the times and the seasons. He removes kings and raises up kings. And He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.

In particular, that He removes kings and raises up kings is a statement that God is the one who ultimately controls the political texture of history. That when a king ceases to be doing something God wants him to do, He can remove him. Very frequently, this is through a coup or through war or through a defeat, through the death of a king.

In more civilized nations, it may well be that it be through elections or through some other means. But still, God is the one who raises up the rulers, and God is the one who brings them down, says Daniel. Likewise, in chapter 4 of Daniel, in verse 25, I'm only picking one of the verses in Daniel, which actually is one of several that say the same thing in this chapter.

It's a repetition. Three or four times it says the same thing in this one chapter. But in Daniel 4, 25, it says, They shall drive you from men.

This is speaking to Nebuchadnezzar. Your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.

God gives the kingdoms of men to whoever He chooses. Now, Nebuchadnezzar was not a godly man, but God was the one who had given him the kingdom. And when he got uppity about it and proud, God showed him that God could take it from him, too, and put him through seven years of humiliation.

By the way, when Daniel spoke to King Nebuchadnezzar, in chapter 2, in verse 37, it says, You, O King, are a king of kings, for the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory. The teaching of the Scripture is that God is the one who gives the kingdom to kings to rule, and takes it from the ones who lose it. This is not something that is determined by man.

Now, that doesn't mean that there aren't human agents. Certainly, Nebuchadnezzar came to power through war, and through armies fighting on his behalf. Other people come to power through elections.

Others come to power by assassination and coups. These all involve human second



causes and third causes and so forth. But behind it all is the sovereign God, which means that even though men go out and do their thing, and aspire for mastery and so forth, the success of their efforts depends on God.

It's quite obvious that if God doesn't want an army to wipe out another army, he can open the ground and swallow up the army he doesn't favor, if he wants to do that. I mean, he can do whatever he wants. He can send an angel out to slay 185,000 sleeping Assyrian troops, and he's actually done that.

He can swallow up the most powerful army in the world in the Red Sea. He can do whatever he wants to change the political climate and status of things. Over in chapter 75 of the Psalms, Psalm 75, verses 6 and 7, Psalm 75, 6 and 7 says, For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south.

But God is the judge. He puts down one and exalts another. God is the one who raises up and puts down rulers and exalts people and so forth.

In Proverbs 21, it also says, Proverbs 21, 1, it says, The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord, and as the rivers of water he turns it whithersoever he will. Now, Proverbs 21, 1, it indicates that God holds the heart, or the decision-making processes of the king in his hand, and directs them as readily and as surely as he directs through the course of rivers. Now, you might say, but doesn't that involve God overriding free will? Well, maybe and maybe not.

It does not necessarily mean that every decision a king makes, God has personally intervened in. As long as a king is making decisions that God can tolerate, God may not intervene. But when a king is about to make a decision that would turn a nation in a direction God doesn't want it to go, God is able to intervene as he wishes.

That doesn't necessarily intervene with the man's free will to be a Christian or non-Christian, to be a good man or a bad man. But his political decisions that shape the course of history, God intervenes in because God is the one who reserves the right to shape the course of history. God can put pressure.

Yeah, rather than just actually sovereignly making the choice for the king, God might influence the king through pressure or through enlightenment or whatever to do the right thing or the wrong thing. I would say this, though. We do have the case of God hardening Pharaoh's heart.

We have the case of Cyrus. God put it in his heart to release the Jews. How he did that, we don't know.

All we can say is that the affirmation of Scripture is that God is in charge. I don't know that we would say, I cannot say that God is in charge of every personal decision President Clinton makes in his private moral life and orders those things. I would say that

the official decisions that Clinton makes that stand and are not overthrown are things that God has allowed to stand.

That doesn't mean they were good things, because God may wish to judge a nation by giving them corrupt leaders and corrupt laws. He delivers people over to fierce rulers if he wishes to judge them, the Bible says. And that being so, the very presence of wicked laws can be a judgment from God.

But unless we deny that God is in charge and governing these things, then we have to say God has a purpose in allowing it. That doesn't mean we shouldn't work against it, because God, through our labors, may overthrow it, too. I mean, God may want to judge for a while, or even just scare us a little bit to get us off our duffs, in which case he intends to use our efforts to change things for the better.

None of this talk about the sovereignty of God necessarily affects the question of our involvement, any more than the fact that God knows who is going to be saved and who isn't affects the question of our being involved in evangelism. God is working behind the scenes. We are the ones working in front of the curtain, you know, and he's working behind it.

We have to do our part to do the duties that God has for us to do. Now, that is outside of Isaiah, but in Isaiah, I'd like you to look at one of the key passages that emphasized God's sovereignty initially, and that's the first chapter in the Book of Comfort, which is chapter 40 of Isaiah. Isaiah 40.

We won't read the whole thing because our time would not allow it, but I would like to read a section of it, verses 12 through 28, which is not a small section at all. It says, Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, measured heaven with a span, and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure, weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord? Or as his counselor has taught him, with whom did he take counsel and who instructed him, and taught him the path of justice? Who taught him knowledge or showed him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, they are counted as the small dust of the balance. Look, he lifts up the isles as a very little thing, and Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor is its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering.

All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted by him as less than nothing and worthless. To whom, then, will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to him? The workman molds a graven image, the goldsmith overspreads it with gold, and the silversmith casts silver chains. Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution chooses a tree that will not rot, and he seeks for himself a skillful workman to prepare a carved image that will not totter.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heaven like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He brings the princes to nothing, and makes the judges of the earth useless. Scarcely shall they be planted, scarcely shall they be sown, scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, when he will also blow on them, and they will wither, and the whirlwind will take them away like stubble.

To whom, then, will you liken me? Or to whom shall I be equal, says the Holy One? Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their hosts by number. He calls them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and by the strength of his power. Not one is missing, referring to the stars.

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary, nor is there any searching of his understanding. Now, I read this entire section because I want to draw from it several verses in analyzing it into different parts in what it tells us about the sovereignty of God. First of all, we see that it does tell us of his sovereignty over nature.

In verse 12, it tells us that he is the one who created and measured out, like a workman measures out, or a carpenter measures out for building something, the earth and the waters and the mountains he weighs, and the hills and the balance, and so forth. God is so much bigger than the world and than the universe. He measures it with the span of his hand, which is the distance from the tip of the outstretched little finger to the tip of the thumb.

And so it speaks of how big God is that he measures the universe, which is, to our knowledge, 30 billion light years across. He measures that with the span of his hand, the implication being that he's mighty big and he's quite capable of doing whatever he wants to. Like, where does a 10,000 ton gorilla sit? You know, wherever he wants.

And that's what God... That's like God, he's so big, he measures the heavens with the span of his hand. He can do whatever he wants to do in nature. And it says in verse 22 also the same thing about his relationship to nature.

In verse 22 it says, it is he who sits on the circle of the earth and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in, referring to his creating the universe. And in verse 26 he says, with reference to the stars, lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number. He calls them all by name.

Now, how do we know he's talking about the stars there? Well, partly because it says

here he calls them all by name. If you look over at Psalm 147 and verse 4, it says he counts the number of the stars, he calls them all by name. Psalm 147 verse 4 says, he counts the number of the stars, he calls them all by name.

Isaiah 40 verse 26 is very similar. See who has created these things, who brings out their host by number and calls them all by name. He's talking about the stars.

Therefore, again, he's talking about God transcending his universe. He's the transcendent God. There are two worldviews, basically.

There is that which we could, for simplicity, maybe oversimplification, call the Eastern worldview, and then there is that which, equally overly simplified, is the Western worldview. By Eastern and Western, we're talking about conditions of maybe a century ago, where in the East there were mainly only Buddhists and Hindus, for the most part, and in the West, mostly Christians and Jews. And the Judeo-Christian worldview is very different than the Eastern Hindu-Buddhist worldview.

And in this particular respect, I mean, in many respects, but the principal foundational worldview difference between the Eastern and Western worldview is in the Eastern worldview, God is imminent in the creation. And in the Western worldview, or the Biblical worldview, he is transcendent over the creation. These are the two choices.

If there is a God, do we see him as imminent in nature? That is inherent in nature? Is God in the trees and the rocks? Is God in you and in me? Are we all gods? Is everything God? Is everything a part of God? That is what Hinduism teaches. That's what the New Age teaches, because it's just Hinduism and Western dress. But that's the Eastern worldview.

God is inherent. He is innately in the creation. But the Biblical worldview is that he is transcendent to nature.

He stands above it. He exists apart from it. He does not exist in it, although he can participate in it.

His essence and his existence is independent of it. And that is what Isaiah is pointing out. He is sovereign over the nature.

He is transcendent over it. Also in this passage we read, in Isaiah 40, there are references to his sovereignty over the nations and over the political movements. In verse 15, Isaiah 40, verse 15, he says, Behold, the nations are as a drop in the bucket.

They are counted as the small dust in the balance. Now, the small dust in the balance is a reference to the marketing practices in the old-fashioned marketplace where coinage or gold or silver were weighed in balances to determine how much was to be paid. And usually the product, if it was grain or something like that, also would be weighed in balances.

Now, it's obvious that you're not going to want to do business with somebody who stacks the balances with such a few stones on the side of the balance that works against you. You want a true weight, a true balance. There's an old, I guess almost a proverbial trick that butchers used to do when they're weighing out the meat on the scales, and behind the scale they had their finger on the scale pulling it down.

It's unjust scales. I think Norman Rockwell had a picture showing a butcher and an old woman. There's the counter.

You're looking at it from the side. The butcher is on one side of the counter and the woman is... And you could see him subtly putting his finger on top of the scale as they were looking at it. And she had her finger underneath it.

He couldn't see. And they're pushing against each other looking at the dial. But I remember Mad Magazine had in one of those Don Martin cartoons had a cartoon about a butcher and a lady was buying something from meat farmers.

She says, You can't fool me. Don't try to cheat me. I see your finger there on the scale.

And the next picture showed his finger had been cut off and it was on the scale with the meat. But anyway, the idea is that the scales can be compromised. The scales can be biased unjustly.

And therefore, if somebody is trying to buy something, they're going to want to make sure there is no extraneous matter on the scale to compromise its reading. But if there's a little bit of dust on the scale, well, we don't have to worry about that. I mean, it's not going to affect the weigh-in.

It's not going to affect anything. Small dust in the balances, it doesn't make any difference. We can leave it there.

In other words, it's totally inconsequential. And what God's saying is the greatest of the nations is totally inconsequential. This, by the way, this view of things is very damaging to patriotism.

Because patriotism thinks that at least one nation is important, ours, whoever we may be. We may be Germans. We may be Jews.

We may be French. We may be Englishmen. We may be Americans or Canadians.

But patriotism is the view that at least one nation, ours, is important. All others may be worthless, but ours is important. No, that's not what it says here.

It says all the nations. The nations are as a drop in the bucket. They're counted as small dust in the balance.

There's really no exception given. In verse 23, he says he brings the princes to nothing and he makes the judges of the earth useless. So we see that Isaiah affirms God's sovereignty and transcendence over nature and his sovereignty over the rulers of the earth.

They're nothing compared to him. But there's several questions he asks, rhetorical questions, really, in order to underscore God's uniqueness in his sovereignty. One of the questions that is asked is to whom must God answer? The answer being, of course, nobody.

It's a rhetorical question, but it underscores that he is sovereign. He doesn't have to ask permission from anyone. The question is found, laid out, in verses 12 through 17.

We don't have to read all those verses again, but it does begin, who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and measured the heaven with a span? In verse 13, who has directed the Spirit of the Lord or as his counselor has taught him? Or with whom did he take counsel? Who instructed him or taught him the path of justice? Who taught him knowledge? He didn't have to answer to anyone. He didn't have to get instructions or counsel from anyone. God counsels himself.

God does according to his own sovereign counsel. What he wants to do is what he does. Paul brings this up in Ephesians chapter 1. Yes, Ephesians.

And chapter 1, verse 11. In Christ also we have obtained an inheritance being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will. When God works things, he does it according to the counsel of his own will.

To whom does he look for counsel? Only his own will. He doesn't take counsel from people. His own will counsels him what to do.

He is not answerable to any. And those questions in Isaiah 40, verses 12 through 17, for the most part, scattered throughout that section, bring that out. Another rhetorical question in this that illustrates God's sovereignty is the question, to whom can he be compared? The first question was, to whom must God answer? The answer, no one.

The second question is, to whom can God be compared? Same answer, no one. Beginning at verse 18, to whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to him? Then he goes on to point out the foolishness of idolatry because by making an idol to represent God you're trying to liken him to something and it can't be done. And verses 18 through 25 pretty much develop that question.

And then the last question is, who can question God's knowledge? He's not answerable to anyone. He's not comparable to anyone. Who can even question his knowledge? We read that in verses 26 through 28.

Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these things. And then in verse 27, why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God. Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, he neither faints nor is weary.

There's no searching of his understanding. How dare you question his understanding of things, his knowledge of things? This is really the point of God's sovereignty. It's really the upshot.

It's the human response to the knowledge of the sovereignty of God. If God, in fact, is incomparable to anyone, and he doesn't have to answer to anyone, then who am I to question his doings? You know, a lot of people try to work out what the book of Job is about. And we see Job suffering a great deal at the hands of the devil in the will of God.

God allows it, and he suffers greatly. He's a righteous man. He's not being punished for anything.

His counselors try to sort it out and tell him what's going on, and they don't understand it. He doesn't understand it. Elihu talks, and he doesn't know what's going on either.

Finally, God talks. Finally, God shows up in the whirlwind and spends about six chapters, I think it is, scolding Job. And we expect, you know, since the book is closing with God's monologue, that we're going to get there, the answer that has been so elusive to the counselors.

Why is God allowing Job to suffer in this way? And when you read the chapters of God's speech and you get no answer to that, what you get is rhetorical questions like this. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Who do you think you are? Can you feed the wild donkeys? Do you feed all the wild animals? Do you cause the constellations to come forth in their due time and so forth? The answer, of course, will always be no, no, no, no, no. And then he says, I mean, the implication is, well, then why do you think that I owe you an explanation of anything? I do all these things.

You can't do these things. The difference between you and me is so vast as to be almost infinite in terms of glory and magnificence and prerogative and sovereignty. How dare you even ask why I do these things? And, you know, that might sound to our ears as a little severe of God.

You know, isn't it legitimate to ask God? I mean, I've heard a lot of people say it's okay to complain to God. It's okay to question God. He's secure.

He won't be upset about it. Well, I believe he's secure, and I don't know that he's really upset about it, except I think he's disappointed that you can't just accept his will. I even read in a Christian magazine once about a so-called Christian treatment center, which is

one of these Christian psychiatric hospital treatment centers, and the leader, the founder of the organization actually was quoted saying, here people don't have to act religious.

It's okay to be mad at God here. I thought, it is? Then I don't want to go there. It's not okay to be mad at God.

In my book, is this a Christian treatment center? I wonder what kind of help these people are going to get if they're encouraged to be mad at God. It seems to me like the solution to their problems is to stop being at odds with God, not to get mad at God. But, no, it's not okay to be mad at God.

Do you remember Jonah? When God didn't do what he wanted? He got in a huff. He pouted because God didn't wipe out the people of Nineveh, and God says, do you do well to be angry, Jonah? And Jonah says, yes. And then God rebuked him.

Now, God didn't hit him with a bolt of lightning. God's patient. But God was not pleased, and he rebuked him for being angry.

Specifically, what he got, he rebuked him for, he got mad at God. God didn't do what he wanted God to do, and God rebuked him for being mad about it. Now, God doesn't have to answer to us.

God is not comparable to anyone. And his knowledge is not even to be questioned. We say, well, why did God allow evil in the world? Why did God allow this tragedy to happen? Well, I'll tell you what.

If we're asking the question just for edifying information, in other words, if I'm saying, I wonder what God's going to get out of this. I mean, God must have something up his sleeve here. I'm looking to see what it is because I'm interested in seeing God work.

That's not bad. To ask God, do you mind telling me anything about this? I'm curious. But to demand answers, to demand that God explain himself and justify his behavior, that is what is not okay.

There's no searching of his understanding. To question his knowledge is audacious. Okay.

Now, there's other places in Isaiah that talk about God's sovereignty. In particular, his sovereignty over the nations is brought out in a couple of ways. He talks about the Assyrians that were going to come as a judgment to the northern kingdom.

Over in Isaiah chapter 10, verse 5 and following, it says, Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger, and the staff in whose hand is my indignation. I will send him against an ungodly nation. That nation is the northern kingdom of Israel.

And against the people of my wrath, I will give him a charge. To seize the spoil, to take



the prey, to tread them down like the mire in the streets. Yet he, the Assyrian, does not mean so, nor does his heart think so.

But it's in his heart just to destroy and to cut off not a few nations. In other words, Israel is just another nation to conquer to them. The Assyrians don't see themselves as the rod in God's hand that he's using to discipline his people Israel.

The Assyrian just sees himself as the big shot, conquering all these nations. Israel just happens to be one of those unfortunate nations in his path. And what God's saying is, even though the nation of Assyria does not acknowledge God, and does not in any sense consciously seek to do the will of God, they are inadvertently doing the will of God.

God is using them. God is holding them in his hand. And he talks about, in verse 12 of this chapter, he says, Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all his work on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, that he will say, I will punish the fruit of the ignorant heart of the king of Assyria.

Now, this king who is used as an instrument of judgment on Israel and Judah, says, well, when I'm done using him for that, I'm going to punish him. And the glory of his haughty looks, for he says, verse 13, By the strength of my hand I have done it. That's what the Assyrian claims about himself.

And by my wisdom, for I am prudent. However, God says in verse 15, Shall the axe boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw magnify itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up. Or as if a staff could lift up as if it were not wood.

In other words, for the Assyrians to boast of their victories, and claim their own strength as the explanation of why they were able to conquer these nations, a tool in the hand of a workman might as well boast of its own skill. A tool cannot even lift itself off the ground, much less skillfully do any work. Though a craftsman needs a tool, a good craftsman can do a better job with a poor tool than a good tool can do with a poor craftsman.

And obviously a tool by itself without a craftsman can't do anything. And therefore Isaiah is pointing out that a nation, even the greatest nation in the world at the time, Assyria, to think that it in some way operated independently of God, and that its victories somehow are to be interpreted otherwise than God purposed it, God used it, God wanted this to happen, that nation is foolish, as foolish as if a tool thought itself independent of the workman who wields it. In chapter 37, verses 26 through 29, also about the Assyrians and God's sovereignty over them, chapter 37, verses 26 through 29, he's speaking to Sennacherib.

Sennacherib was the Assyrian king who was at that time besieging Jerusalem. And he

says to the Assyrian king in verse 26, Did you not hear long ago how I made it, from ancient times that I formed it? Now I have brought it to pass that you should be for crushing fortified cities into great heaps of ruins. Therefore their inhabitants had little power.

They were dismayed and confused. They were as the grass of the field and as the green herb, as the grass of the housetops, as grain blighted before it is grown. But I know your dwelling place.

I've got your number. You're going out and you're coming in. And your rage against me, I've been staking out your place.

Because your rage against me and your tumult have come up to my ears, therefore I will put my hook in your nose and my bridle in your lips and I will turn you back by the way that you came. Now God says to the king of Assyria through the prophet Isaiah, You are not in control of yourself. I will hook your nose.

I will drag you back. You will not conquer Jerusalem. I'm going to cause you to retreat.

And besides, I want you to know that all those nations you conquered before, they had little strength against you because I gave them into your hand. So this here is an emphasis on God's sovereignty. And it should always play into our thinking about politics and government and war, things like that, because God is sovereign over things.

Now it doesn't mean that nations should never fight wars to defend themselves. God often brought about results through war as the medium that was used. But nonetheless, the outcome was God's outcome.

The battle is not to the mighty. The race is not to the swift. The victory is the Lord's.

Safety is from the Lord. It says in Psalm, no, in Proverbs, I'm afraid I don't remember what Proverbs it is, it says the horse is prepared against the day of battle, but safety is from the Lord. And so God is the one who determines the outcome of such things.

Also, moving from the idea of God's sovereignty over Assyria, at a later period when the Persians conquered Babylon, so as to allow the Jews to go back to Jerusalem, God moved on the heart of Cyrus, the Persian, to have his will over Babylon. Now we see this stated a number of ways. It says in Isaiah 41, verses 2 through 4, again rhetorical questions.

Who raised up one from the east? Who in righteousness called him to his feet? Who gave the nations before him, this hymn is Cyrus, and made him rule over kings? Who gave them as the dust to his sword, as driven stubble to his bow? Who pursued them and passed safely by the way that he had not gone with his feet? Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, am the first, and with the last, I am he. So he basically says of Cyrus, I'm the one who gave him these nations, I'm

the one who delivered them to his sword, and gave him safety in his expeditions and so forth. Claiming sovereignty over that particular thing where Cyrus conquered Babylon and took over the world, basically, at the time.

In chapter 43, in verses 14 through 17, again, Isaiah 43, 14 through 17, Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, For your sake I will send to Babylon, and bring them all down as fugitives, the Chaldeans who rejoice in their ships. I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King. Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, and a path through the mighty waters, who brings forth the chariot and the horse, the army and the power, they shall lie down together, they shall not arise, they are extinguished, they are quenched like a wick.

Now, here, God's destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, they're reminded of. He also mentions that he's the one who sends away to Babylon to bring them back. And that, of course, through Cyrus' decrees.

In chapter 44, we have, beginning at verse 24 and moving on into chapter 45, through verse 13, a passage too long for us to read in its entirety here. Isaiah 44, 24 through 45, 13. And it is an extended description of God's sovereignty, using Cyrus as an example of how sovereign God is, even over the most powerful men of the earth.

One thing it says, in verse 28 of chapter 44, it says, Who says of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and he shall perform all my pleasure. Even saying to Jerusalem, you shall be built, and to the temple your foundation shall be laid. Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held, to subdue nations before him, and loose the armor of kings, to open the doors before him, the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut.

I will go before you and make the crooked places straight. I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness, the hidden riches of the secret places, that you may know that I am the Lord, who call you by your name.

I am the God of Israel, for Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel my elect. I have even called you by your name. I have named you, though you have not known me.

Now, just like the Assyrians were used by God, though they didn't know it, Cyrus was used by God, though he didn't know it. He didn't know God, but God called him by name. God appointed him to the position.

And all of this is declared 200 years before Cyrus actually did conquer Babylon. So, God's ability to predict it is an indicator of the fact that he's the one who brought it to pass. And that's brought out also in Isaiah later on.

In chapter 48, verses 12 through 15, Isaiah 48, 12 through 15 says, Listen to me, O

Jacob, and Israel my called. I am he. I am the first.

I am the last. Indeed, my hand has laid the foundation of the earth. My right hand has stretched out the heavens.

When I call to them, they stand up together. As the heavens and the earth stand in attention when I call. All of you assemble yourselves and hear.

Who among them has declared these things? The Lord loves him. He shall do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken.

Yes, I have called him. I have brought him, and his way will prosper. Him could be Cyrus, but more likely here, him is Israel, or Jacob.

God will prosper Jacob by judging Babylon by the hand of Cyrus. But the point is this whole transaction. The turning over of the kingdom of Babylon to Cyrus, and its result in the Jews going back to build their land.

All of this God takes full credit for. Well in advance of its occurrence. Now, why did God do this? Is God just playing a game of checkers, and he is moving all the pieces? Is there something that determines why God does what he does? Well, yes.

In Isaiah 48, verses 3 through 11. It says, I have declared the former things from the beginning. They went forth from my mouth, and I caused them to hear it.

But suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. Notice, I declared it before it happened, then I did it. Important point here.

Because I knew that you were obstinate, and your neck was an iron sinew. Meaning you have a stiff neck, you won't bow. And your brow bronze, nothing could get through your thick skull.

Even from the beginning I have declared it to you. Before it came to pass, I proclaimed it to you. Lest you should say, my idol has done them.

And my carved image, and my molded image have commanded them. You have heard, see all this. And will you not declare it? I have made you hear new things from this time, even hidden things, which you did not know them.

They are created now, not from the beginning, etc., etc. We are going to stop there. You have gone through verse 11 if you wish.

But the point I want to make here is this. God says, I have shown my sovereignty to you. Because I knew that you were obstinate, I wanted to convince you that I was a real God.

And you wouldn't give credit to your idols. Therefore, what I have done, is I have foretold

what I would do, and then I did it. That's what he says in verse 3. I declared the former things from the beginning.

They went forth from my mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and it came to pass. And he said, I did that because I knew you were hard of hearing, and hard hearted.

And in verse 5 he says, even from the beginning I have declared it to you. Before it came to pass, I proclaimed it to you. Lest you should say, my idol has done them.

Now, you see, it would be one thing after the event. Let's just say something good happens to somebody. And after the event, say, oh, God did that.

But a skeptic could say, well, you say God did it. What if I said, my God did that, a different God. What if I said it was chance? What if I gave some other interpretation to the cause of what you are doing, and did not see God in it? Well, they would be at liberty to do that.

However, if prior to the event, God said, I'm going to do this, this specific thing. And then it came to pass, then I'd be less inclined to say it's chance. I'd have to say, oh, God did it.

And that is his purpose in prediction. So when things come to pass, you will know that he is the one. By the way, Jesus said the same thing as far as giving the reason why he predicted things.

Look at John. In John chapter 13, if I can find it here. He says, Behold, I tell you these things before, so that when they happen.

It's verse 19. Now, I tell you before it comes. John 13, 19.

I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that ego eimi, I am he. Same thing God said. I told you in advance.

And then I made it happen so that you would know that it wasn't your idol that did it. It was me. John.

The passage in Isaiah we sprung from is 48, 3 through 5. Okay. And then Jesus said that in John 13, 19. He also said in John 14, verse 29.

And now I have told you before it comes, so that when it does come to pass, you may believe. So, the idea is God, the reason that God predicts things is not just so that we'll have an inside line of what's going to happen in the future. But when it actually does happen, we'll recognize, hey, he said that would happen.

He must be God. It must be God did that. Okay.

So, that's what he's saying. God's purpose is seen by his predicting it and making it happen. And he shows himself to be sovereign this way.

In Isaiah 43, verses 18 through 21. It says, Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I do a new thing.

Now it shall spring forth. Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The beasts of the field will honor me.

The jackals and the ostriches, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert to give drink to my people. This people I have formed for myself. They shall declare my praise.

The purpose of his doing the thing that he predicted that he would do is so that when he has done it, they will declare his praise. They were hard-hearted and obstinate, so he had to give them something convincing. And he did that so that it would fulfill his purposes.

Now, one thing that is very clear in Isaiah is that when God has purpose to do something, that purpose will not be thwarted. No one can stop him from doing what he has determined. And that is obviously a function of his sovereignty.

Let me show you some of the passages relevant to that. In fact, this might be a good time to check out the Lucifer passage because that is one of those times where God brings this lesson out. In Isaiah 14, I will have to take this briefly.

There are tapes in which I have taken both Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 at length. In Isaiah 14, beginning with verse 12, it says, This is how you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning. How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations.

Some powerful individual here. For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.

I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High.

Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the pit. Those who see you will gaze at you and consider you saying, Is this the man who made the earth tremble? Who shook kingdoms? Who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities? Who did not open the house of his prisoners? We can go on, but we will stop there. Now, this passage is about God's sovereignty never being able to be thwarted.

Here is a mighty personage who has plans of his own. In verse 13, his plan is, I'm going to ascend into heaven. I'm going to exalt my throne above the stars of God.

I'm going to actually be like the Most High. Verse 14 says, I'll ascend above the heights of the clouds. Those are lofty ambitions.

And there's indication that the person making these claims has some power perhaps to seek to make his wishes come true. He is, in fact, the one who weakened nations in verse 12. In verse 16, he made the earth tremble and shook kingdoms.

This is not a person of no power. It's a person of great power over many kingdoms, over many nations. However, not over God.

And although he seeks to take God's place as sovereign, God says, sorry, the position is not open. The position is occupied by me. And although you say those things, he says, verse 15, yet you will be brought down to shale to the lowest depths of the pit.

The opposite of your intention. Now, this is one of the passages that talks about God's sovereignty and God's purposes not being able to be thwarted by the puny efforts of lesser beings. No matter how powerful they may be in their own sphere, lesser beings cannot thwart the sovereign purposes of God.

This invites, irresistibly, a bit of a tangent. Though I don't want to take the length of tangent that I could be inclined to. The question is, who is this being? Who is this powerful person? Well, you say, it's simple enough.

It's Lucifer. It says so in verse 12. Oh, Lucifer.

And Lucifer is the devil, right? Or is that maybe the name of Lucifer before the devil fell? He was Lucifer, the angel who fell. Well, this is what I've been taught. And I dare say it's probably what you've been taught.

But the question is, is it what the Bible teaches? Fact is, the name Lucifer appears here and only here in the Bible. Therefore, we cannot cross-reference the name Lucifer with any other relevant passages to identify who is being addressed here. If Lucifer is the devil, and if we're to learn of it, it will have to be in this passage that we'll get the information, since Lucifer is not mentioned elsewhere.

In fact, if you don't have the King James or the New King James, you won't even find Lucifer here. The name Lucifer doesn't even appear in the Bible, if it's not in the King James or the New King James, because all the other translations translate Lucifer, which means bright morning star. That's verse 12, Isaiah 14, 12.

Star of the dawn, star of the morning, morning star. These are different ways that the name Lucifer is translated by different translations. But I think the Living Bible also uses the name Lucifer there.

But apart from that, no reputable translation other than the King James and the New

King James ever used the word Lucifer. They all translate it like they do the rest of the words in the sentence, which seems a reasonable thing to do. In other words, they don't even consider Lucifer to be somebody's proper name.

It's just referring to somebody as a morning star. Jesus is referred to as a morning star, and Revelation calls himself by that name. Therefore, this passage certainly isn't talking about Jesus.

But if Jesus could be called the morning star, and this person could be called the morning star, the morning star must not be a proper name that applies to just one person, but some kind of a designation, a designation of power or authority or glory or something, but not a proper name. So really, biblically, I don't know that anyone on biblical grounds could say that Lucifer is the name of anybody. And to say that the person in question is, in fact, the devil that is being described here, one is at a great loss in my mind to prove this.

There's not any reference to the devil in the passage. There's no reference to an angel in the passage. These ideas are imported, whether legitimately or not, would have to be based on whether the doctrine is taught in other passages of Scripture.

I do not believe it is, but it is from this passage and from Ezekiel 28 that the doctrine is derived that Satan was an angel who fell. And the identification of Lucifer with Satan is the most common traditional thing in biblical exegesis since the days of Tertullian in the second or third century. So it's an identification that's been made a long time by Christians.

The question is, is it made by God? Is it made by Isaiah? Does the Bible make this identification? I would say that if we were not influenced by the traditional ideas of man, we would find nothing in this passage to insist that we are talking about the devil in the passage. The passage is a portion of a section, chapters 13 and 14, that are about Babylon. In Isaiah 13, verse 1, it says the burden against Babylon.

And chapters 13 and 14 are both about Babylon. In chapter 14, verse 4, Isaiah 14, 4, God instructs Isaiah that you take up this proverb against the king of Babylon. And say, now, from that point on where it says say, there's one unbroken oracle all the way to the end of the chapter.

It's all poetry, it's all unbroken, there's not any changing of which we're notified. It says in verse 4 that the oracle is to the king of Babylon. There is no place in the passage that indicates that another party is now intruding into the picture, that some other person other than the king of Babylon is in view.

Well, you might say, well, but how could one really take this passage in verses 12 through 15 and say that applies to the king of Babylon? For one thing, well, parts of it we



could see would apply to the king of Babylon. That he weakened the nations in verse 12 was true of Babylon. And that he caused the nations to tremble and shook kingdoms could be said of the king of Babylon.

But there's some things there that seem like, at least some people think, couldn't apply to the king of Babylon. For example, his boast in verse 13, I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.

I will sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I'll be like the most high.

Now, I've heard many preachers say, certainly no ordinary man could make such boasts. Really, you should read some of the things the popes said about themselves. Frankly, it's the rare king who doesn't say this kind of thing.

Most kings have exactly these kinds of aspirations. To be in the place of God. To replace God.

To have the sovereignty that belongs to God. To be independent of God. This is precisely what the rulers of this world are described in Psalm 2 as doing en masse.

En masse, the kings of this earth and the rulers of the people are conspiring together against the Lord and against His anointing. And let us cast His bonds from us and break His bands off of us. Rebellion against God and the desire to be independent of God and be like God.

In authority and dominion and power and glory is exactly what kings are very strongly tempted to do. And most of them succumb to. Now, in particular, the king of Babylon, as representing the nation that he reigned, Babylon, it's particularly appropriate to say that he said he would ascend above the stars of God and above the clouds of God.

Is this not how Babylon began? Where did Babylon begin? Anyone have an idea? The Tower of Babel. The Tower of Babel was the establishment of Babylon. In fact, in the Septuagint, the Tower of Babel was called the Tower of Babylon.

In Genesis 11, where we have the word Babel, the Septuagint reads Babylon. And we read in the passage that it was on the plains of Shinar that the Tower of Babel was built. Well, that's where Babylon stood later.

The foundation of the Babylonian system, over which a later king of Babylon reigned, was in the attempt to rise high into the heavens. The building of a tower whose top would be in the heavens, above the clouds, above the stars of God. Now, not all of that is spelled out in the same language in Genesis as it is here, but how totally appropriate for God to address Babylon and its current head and say, You thought that you would rise into heaven.

You thought you would come up and crowd God out of his sovereign throne. How sad for you. It's going to be the opposite.

You'll be cast down to hell. Now, let me show you something interesting here. In Obadiah, which is a hard book to find, it's right after Amos.

Obadiah is a short book, only one chapter. And it's entirely a prophecy against Edom, about the destruction of the kingdom of Edom. After Amos and before Jonah.

Between Amos and Jonah we have this little, single-chapter book of Obadiah. It's very clearly a prophecy against Edom. No one has ever suggested it's a prophecy about the devil or anything else.

It's about Edom. And in this, he says, in verses 3 and 4, The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock. The capital city of Edom was Petra, the rock city, which was carved out of sheer cliff sides and was thought to be impenetrable by invaders.

Whose habitation is high, you who say in your heart, Who will bring me down to the ground? Verse 4, though you exalt yourself as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord. Now, did Edom ever set its nest above the stars? I think not. This is hyperbole.

He's saying, no matter how high you succeed in attaining your goals of self-exaltation, you will not be beyond the reach of God who judges you and brings you down. Likewise, for the king of Babylon to say, I will ascend above the stars of God, is not anything wilder than saying, I'm going to set my nest among the stars. Now, look over at Matthew chapter 11.

In Matthew chapter 11, Jesus is decrying the cities where most of his works were done and which did not repent. One of them was Capernaum. And in Matthew 11.23, in speaking to the city of Capernaum, he says, You, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Sheol, or Hades.

Now, I think, let me see, if you look in the cross-reference in your margin, there will be a cross-reference to Isaiah 14.13. Now, why would that be there? Because what is said of Capernaum is the very same thing that is said of Lucifer. Now, that doesn't mean that Jesus interpreted Lucifer to be Capernaum. No, the passage in Isaiah itself identifies Lucifer as the king of Babylon.

But what is clear here is that he says the very same thing about Capernaum as is said about the king of Babylon. You would be exalted into heaven, would you? Well, rather, you will be brought down to Sheol, to Hades. Hades is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Sheol.

So, Jesus is taking a line directly out of the prophecy we are considering in Isaiah 14 and applying it to a city. And if it could apply to a city, why could it not apply to a nation of Babylon, or to its king? Now, furthermore, there is evidence that the person addressed in Isaiah 14 is not a supernatural being, but is a human being. In verse 16, Isaiah 14, 16, Those who see you, still speaking to Lucifer, the morning star, Those who see you will gaze at you and consider you, saying, Is this the man who made the earth tremble? A man is talking to you.

He is not talking to an angel. He is not talking to a superhuman being. He is talking to a man.

How anyone could have taken from this passage the idea that this talking about an angel is beyond me. The context before and after make it very plain. It is a man, and in particular, it is the king of Babylon that is addressed.

There is absolutely not one line in Isaiah 14 that would identify Lucifer with anyone other than the king of Babylon. Not one hint that we have a superhuman person here. So, I mean, this is our tangent.

I will end it now so we can get back to our main subject. But, what the passage does illustrate is that this powerful potentate who is the king of Babylon, or even if a person wants to make it the devil, powerful as he is, cannot have his way against the purposes of God. God's purposes will not be thwarted by petty created beings.

In the same chapter, Isaiah 14, verses 24 through 27, it says, The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying, Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, as I have purposed, so it shall stand, that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and on my mountains tread him underfoot. Then his yoke shall be removed from them, and his burden removed from their shoulders. This is the purpose that is purposed against the whole earth, or land, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all nations.

For the Lord of hosts has purposed, who will annul it? His hand is stretched out. Who will turn it back? So, again, more rhetorical questions. The idea is, no one is going to turn God's hand back.

No one is going to annul His purpose. If He thinks it, it's going to come to pass. If He purposes it, it's going to stand.

And that's that. No one is going to stop Him. He is the sovereign in His own universe.

In Isaiah 42, Isaiah 42, in verse 4, it says, We know it's of Jesus because it's quoted in Matthew 12 as being about Jesus. It says, The coastlands, by the way, some of them are still waiting for His rule, His law. The gospel has to go to all nations, and they're still waiting, some of them.

But, one thing that's interesting, it says He won't fail. Sometimes people think that the church is going to fail. In fact, it's written into the theology of some, in their eschatology, the church has to fail.

Some people don't have it in their eschatology, but they just look around and say the church is failing. Look at the move toward a one world government, toward a new world order. Look at the powerful people, the Rothschilds, the Rockefellers, the Trilateral Commission, the Council for Foreign Relations, these people, the most wealthy, the most powerful people in the world, they're conspiring to bring it about.

Do you think God gets discouraged about that? God has His purposes. He will not fail. He won't even get discouraged.

There are a few setbacks now and then He allows, but basically His purposes press on, and He's not going to be discouraged until they're fulfilled, until He rules the world in the hearts of all people. Chapter 46, by the way, that means not all are going to get converted, but the ones that don't allow Him to rule will be removed. About Babylon, Isaiah 46 and 47 are a dirge against Babylon.

In Isaiah 46, verses 9 through 11, it says, Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure, calling a bird of prey from the east, that's Cyrus, the man who executes My counsel from a far country. Indeed, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass.

I have purposed it, I also will do it. Now, here again we have the foreknowledge of God connected with His sovereignty. He is able to know because He is going to do it.

Now, I'll talk about this more a little later. Look at Isaiah 55, we don't have much time left. Isaiah 55, verses 8 through 11, says, For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down in the snow from heaven, and they do not return there, but water the earth and make it bring forth in bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word that be that goes forth from My mouth, it shall not return to Me void, it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I send it. God will have His way, His purpose will not be thwarted, the word He sends will not be wasted, just like the rain doesn't return to heaven before it waters the grass and brings forth something God wanted it to do on the earth, so when He sends out His word, it too will be effective, and nothing will prevent it from prospering.

Okay, now, because of this, because God, His purposes cannot be thwarted, He certainly knows without question, He knows certainly, what He is going to do. Now, what's going to happen? So He can predict it with certainty. In Isaiah 41, He makes it clear that this is the clearest sign of His sovereignty, that He can predict, and it will happen.

Why will it happen? Because He makes it happen. And only He can make such things happen. Idols can't do that.

In Isaiah 41, verse 20 and following, Isaiah 41, 20 says that they may see and know and consider and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it. Present your case, says the Lord, speaking now to the false gods, the idols. Bring forth your strong reasons, says the King of Jacob.

Let them bring forth and show us what will happen. Let them show the former things what they were, that we may consider them and know the latter end of them, or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods.

Yes, do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed and see it together. Indeed, you are nothing, and your work is nothing. He who chooses you is an abomination.

I have raised up one from the north, I, Jehovah, not the idols, I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come from the rising of the sun, that is from the east, that's Cyrus, he shall call on my name, whether literally or figuratively, he'll honor God's sovereignty, and he shall come against princes as though mortar, and as the potter treads clay. Who has declared from the beginning, that we may know the former times, that we may say he is righteous? Surely there is no one who shows, surely there is no one who declares, surely there is no one who hears your words. Now what he's saying is to the idols, if you really are gods, you should have some power.

If you have power, then purpose to do something and tell us about it in advance, call the shot before you shoot, tell us which pocket the ball is going in, and then make it go there. And he says they can't do that, no one can do that, but God can. If they could do it, we would know that they are gods, but we know that they aren't because they can't, and we know that Jehovah is, because he can, because he declares it, and then he brings it to pass.

In chapter 42, in verse 9, he says, Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare, before they spring forth, I tell you of them. The things he predicted before about Israel being established, happened. Now he tells of a new thing, and he says, I tell you about it before it happens.

Why? So that when it happens, you'll know that it was him that did it. In chapter 44, verses 6 through 8, it says, Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the

Lord of hosts, I am the first, I am the last, besides me there is no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for me.

Since I appointed the ancient people and the things that are coming and shall come, let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid, have I not told you from that time, and declared it, you are my witnesses. Is there a God besides me? Indeed, there is no other rock, I know not one.

Now, he says that he had appointed the ancient people, and he had appointed the things that are coming and shall come, and he told them in advance. So again, what he's saying is that he tells in advance, so that when it comes to pass, you'll know that he did it. Chapter 45, also in verse 21.

45, 21. The final verse for us to look at here in Isaiah today. It says, Tell and bring forth your case.

Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I the Lord? And there is no other God beside me, a just God and a Savior. There is none beside me.

You've seen several of these things declared that there's no other God beside him. Not only is he the big God, the biggest God, the most powerful God, the one who always has his way, but he's the only God. And that's an important thing, too.

He points out that the idols are not only powerless gods, they are no gods. There are no gods but him. He is the only contender for sovereignty of the universe.

There are no others around. This is a very important thing in confronting cults, because cults, one way or another, always deny the deity of Christ. And because the Bible says that Jesus is God, and they don't want to make him to be the true God, but something less, they have to say there's additional gods.

That's what cults are required to do. The Mormons believe that the universe is full of gods, and Jesus is one of them. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is a lesser God, created under Jehovah.

But Isaiah repeats again and again, There are no other gods besides me. I know not any. Look in particular at Isaiah 43 on this particular point, because the wording certainly rules out that Jesus would be a lesser God created by Jehovah.

Because he says in verse 10, You are my witnesses, says Jehovah. By the way, ironically, this is the verse that appears on the cover of the Watchtower every issue. The Jehovah's Witnesses take the name of their organization, that is Jehovah's Witnesses, from this verse.

You are my witnesses, says Jehovah. But they ought to read the rest of the verse, because it says, In my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he. Before me there was no god formed, nor shall there be after me.

Now, no god existed before God, and no god is going to be formed after God. He's the only one. None before, none come along after.

How then could Jesus be a god who was created by God? He would have had to be formed after Jehovah. But Jehovah said, No, no such gods are ever formed before or after me. And therefore, of course, when the New Testament tells us that Jesus is God, we're left with only one conclusion.

He is the God. He is, in some sense, incorporated in Jehovah. And, of course, the Trinity is one of the best ways to harmonize the biblical data to understand that.

Now, one of the questions about God's sovereignty that we did not address, and because Isaiah does not, is does God foreknow things that He doesn't cause? Isaiah emphasizes again and again that God can foretell what's going to happen because He's going to make it happen. But does God foreknow things that He doesn't make happen? The answer to that is yes, but we don't know how He knows those things. He knew Peter would deny Christ three times before the cock crew and He predicted it.

Though He didn't make Peter do that, because God doesn't cause anyone to sin. Peter did that on his own, but Jesus knew He would. But this is a different category of things foreknown by God.

Somehow God knows the future moral choices of people that God Himself does not take responsibility for. In Isaiah, however, He's talking about the larger movements of governments and larger movements of nations and the direction of history. And He says, I can predict the way history is going to go because I'm going to make it go that way.

I'm the sovereign God over all such things. And that brings us to the end of our time, so we'll stop right there.