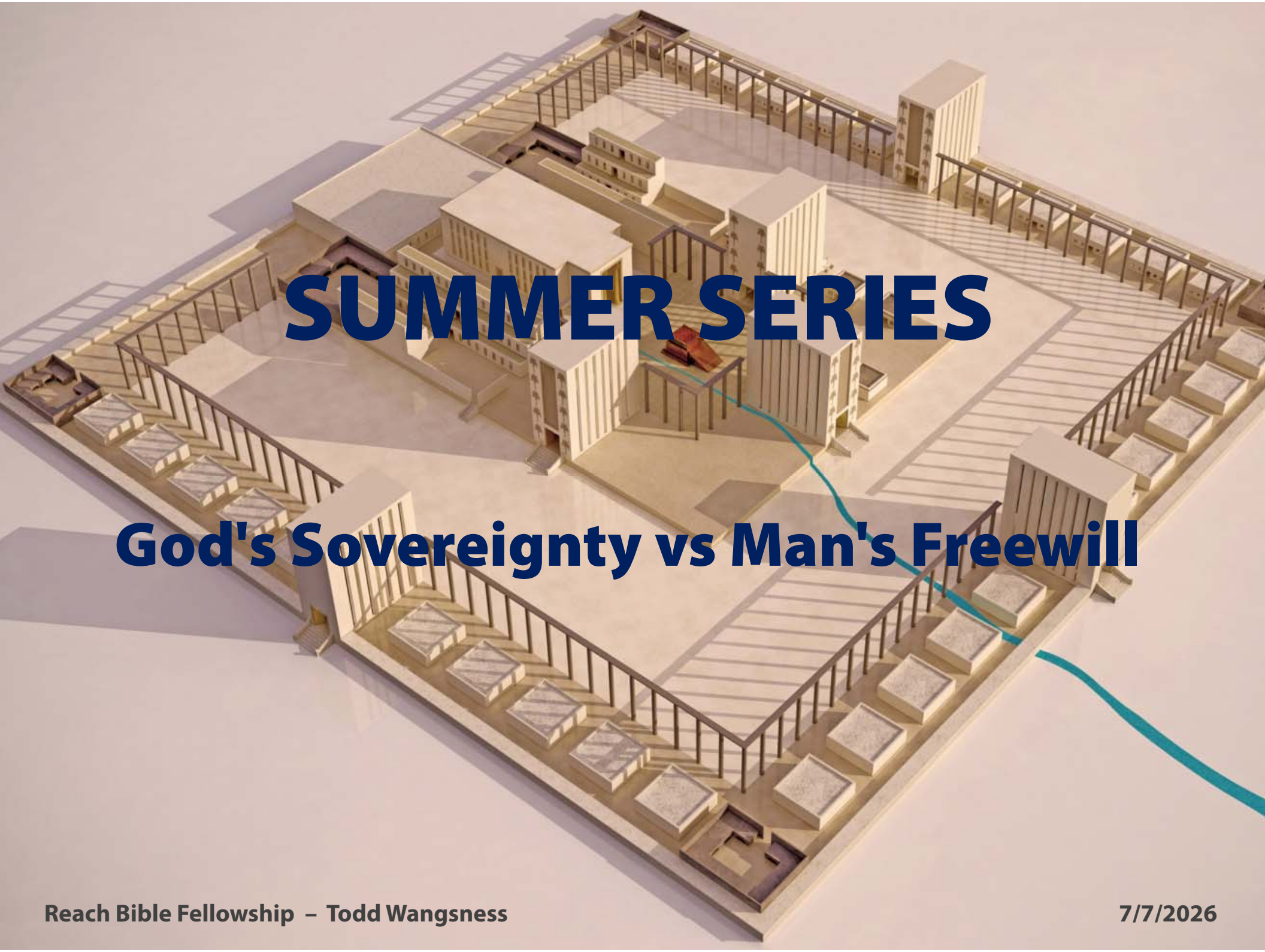


SUMMER SERIES

God's Sovereignty vs Man's Freewill

Reach Bible Fellowship – Todd Wangsness

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Summer Series: God's Sovereignty vs Man's Freewill

APPROACH TO STUDY

- Various verses that discuss the topic of God's Sovereignty were compiled and sorted into unique categories (explicitly support, implicitly support, implicitly deny, and explicitly deny)
- The content of this study can be emotionally charged with strong opinions
- Study this as the Bereans in ***Acts 17:11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.***
    - Respect each other's views and refrain from contentious discussions
- Keep in mind that highly knowledgeable, God-fearing, Spirit-filled men and women have debated and discussed aspects of these issues for over two millennia, without a clear resolution
- It is good to adopt the following mindset when studying and discussing challenging texts of the bible:
    - Intentionally remove from your mind pre-existing opinions and ingrained biases regarding the subject matter
    - Pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit to help guide you in your studies
    - Read all the passages that discuss the topic with an open mind
    - Let the bible teach you and guide you
    - For issues that are "non-essential" to salvation, give grace to others with differing views

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between God's sovereignty and human free will stands as one of the most significant and enduring questions in Christian theology. Scripture repeatedly affirms both the absolute rule and purposes of God over all things and the genuine responsibility and choices of human beings. Throughout the Bible, these two realities are presented without systematic philosophical reconciliation, inviting believers to wrestle with the tension as it is revealed in God's Word.

This study does not seek to defend a particular theological interpretation. Instead, its sole aim is to let the Bible teach the topic by presenting the relevant passages in their own words. Verses and passages that emphasize God's sovereign rule, election, predestination, and providential control are gathered on one side. Passages that highlight human choice, responsibility, the universal offer of salvation, and the reality of genuine decision-making are gathered on the other. Some texts appear to hold both truths together in dynamic tension.

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That God predestines, and yet that man is responsible, are two facts that few can see clearly. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory to each other, but they are not. The fault is in our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If then, I find taught in one part of the Bible that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find, in another Scripture, that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths can ever contradict each other. I do not believe they can ever be welded into one upon any earthly anvil, but they certainly shall be one in eternity. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the human mind which pursues them farthest will never discover that they converge; but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring."

- **Charles Spurgeon**

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- Define tables for both God's Sovereignty and Man's Free Will that categorize verses to fall into the following:
  - Explicitly Support
  - Implicitly Support
  - Implicitly Deny
  - Explicitly Deny
- The only subjective areas of this study are the bins into which I dropped the various verses
  - The bin location of these verses are open to debate/discussion

- **God's Sovereignty**
  - Verses that explicitly state God is sovereign
  - Verses that imply God is sovereign
  - Verses that imply God is not sovereign
  - Verses that explicitly state God is not sovereign
- **Man's Free Will**
  - Verses that explicitly state Man has free will
  - Verses that imply Man has free will
  - Verses that imply Man does not have free will
  - Verses that explicitly state Man does not have free will

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DEFINITIONS

- **SOVEREIGNTY:**
  - Possessing supreme dominion and power above all
  - God's absolute right to do all things according to His own good pleasure
- **FREE WILL:**
  - Having both the ability and the will to make a free choice
  - Specifically in this context, the question is "does man have BOTH the ability and will to freely choose salvation from God?"
- **PREDESTINATION**: (Greek *προορίζω proorizō*)
  - This word is properly used only with reference to God's plan or purpose of salvation
  - The Greek word rendered "predestinate" is found only in these six passages, ***Act 4:28; Rom 8:29, 30; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:5, 11***; and in all of them it has the same meaning
  - They teach that the eternal, sovereign, immutable, and unconditional decree or "determinate purpose" of God governs all events

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DEFINITIONS (cont.)

- **FOREKNOWLEDGE:** (Greek *πρόγνωσις prognōsis*)
  - Used only of Divine "foreknowledge," *Act 2:23; 1Pet 1:2*
  - "Foreknowledge" is one aspect of omniscience; it is implied in God's warnings, promises and predictions
- **EXPLICIT:**
  - Fully revealed or expressed without vagueness, implication, or ambiguity
  - Leaves no question as to meaning or intent
- **IMPLICIT:**
  - Capable of being understood from something else though unexpressed
  - To involve or indicate by inference, association, or necessary consequence rather than by direct statement

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	Explicitly Support		Implicitly Support	Implicitly Deny	Explicitly Deny
God's Sovereignty	God Is Sovereign [Explicit]		God Is Sovereign [Implied]	God Is Not Sovereign [Implied]	God Is Not Sovereign [Explicit]
	Exo 4:11 Deu 32:39 2 Chr 20:6 Psa 103:19 Psa 115:3 Psa 135:6 Isa 45:5-7 Isa 46:10 Isa 55:11 Dan 4:35 Luk 1:37 Luk 22:22	Act 1:16 Act 2:23 Act 4:27-28 Act 13:48 Act 16:14 Act 17:26 Eph 1:4-5 Eph 1:11 Rom 9:11-13 Rom 9:22-24 Rev 17:17	Gen 18:14 Exo 4:11 Ecc 7:13-14 Jer 32:27 Lam 3:37-38 Amo 3:6 Rom 9:19	Gen 6:6 Exo 32:14 1 Sam 15:11 2 Sam 24:16 2 Pet 3:9 Jon 3:10	(No verses found)

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Verses that explicitly state God is sovereign

Exo 4:11	Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?
Deu 32:39	See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.
2 Chr 20:6	… "O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand You.
Psa 103:19	The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all.
Psa 115:3	Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases.
Psa 135:6	Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.
Isa 45:5-7	I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides Me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides Me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.

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Verses that explicitly state God is sovereign (cont.)

Isa 46:10	Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all My purpose,'
Isa 55:11	So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.
Dan 4:35	All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand or say to Him, "What have you done?"
Luk 1:37	For nothing will be impossible with God.
Luk 22:22	For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!"
Act 1:16	"Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus;
Act 2:23	this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

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Verses that explicitly state God is sovereign (cont.)

Act 4:27-28 For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your plan had predestined to take place.

Act 13:48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

Act 16:14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.

Act 17:26 And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place

Eph 1:4-5 Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

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Verses that explicitly state God is sovereign (cont.)

Eph 1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Rom 9:11-13 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Rom 9:22-24 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Rev 17:17 For God has put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

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Verses that imply God is sovereign

Gen 18:14	Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."
Exo 4:11	Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?
Ecc 7:13-14	Consider the work of God: who can make straight what He has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.
Jer 32:27	"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?
Lam 3:37-38	Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?
Amo 3:6	Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?
Rom 9:19	You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?"

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Verses that imply God is not sovereign

Gen 6:6	**And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart.**
Exo 32:14	**And the Lord relented from the disaster that He had spoken of bringing on His people.**
1 Sam 15:11	**"I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not performed My commandments." And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the Lord all night.**
2 Sam 24:16	**And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.**
2 Pet 3:9	**The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**
Jon 3:10	**When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it.**

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Verses that explicitly state God is not sovereign

No Verses Found

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	Explicitly Support	Implicitly Support	Implicitly Deny	Explicitly Deny
Man's Free Will	Man Has Free Will [Explicit]	Man Has Free Will [Implied]	No Free Will [Implied]	No Free Will [Explicit]
	(No verses found)	Deu 30:19 Jos 24:15 Joh 3:16 Joh 5:40 Act 2:21 Act 3:19 Act 16:31 Rev 22:17	Exo 10:1-2 Exo 12:36 Exo 14:17 Deu 2:30 Deu 29:4 Jos 24:19 2 Chr 25:20 Psa 105:25 Isa 44:28 Isa 63:17	Pro 21:1 Isa 6:10 Eze 36:26-27 Mar 4:11-12 Joh 6:44 Joh 6:65 Joh 8:43 Joh 10:26 Joh 12:39-40 Act 13:48 Rom 6:17 Rom 8:7-8 Rom 9:15 Rom 9:17-18 Rom 9:20-21 Rom 11:8 Rev 17:17

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Verses that explicitly state Man has free will

- **No Verses Found**
  - **Except maybe Gen 2:16 (But that was from before the fall of Adam)**

    Gen 2:16 ***And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;***

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Verses that imply Man has free will

Deu 30:19	I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.
Jos 24:15	And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.
Joh 3:16	For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.
Joh 5:40	Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.
Act 2:21	And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.
Act 3:19	Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.
Act 16:31	And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”
Rev 22:17	The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

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Verses that imply Man does not have free will

Exo 10:1-2 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord."

Exo 12:36 And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

Exo 14:17 And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen.

Deu 2:30 But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, for the Lord your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that He might give him into your hand, as He is this day.

Deu 29:4 But to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.

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Verses that imply Man does not have free will (cont.)

Jos 24:19	But Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. (Note – this is 5 verses after "Choose this day whom you will serve…")
2 Chr 25:20	But Amaziah would not listen, for it was of God, in order that He might give them into the hand of their enemies, because they had sought the gods of Edom.
Psa 105:25	He turned their hearts to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants.
Isa 44:28	Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and he shall fulfill all My purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'"
Isa 63:17	O Lord, why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart, so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage.

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Verses that explicitly state Man does not have free will

Pro 21:1	**The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will.**
Isa 6:10	**Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed. (Note – this is the 3rd most frequently quoted passage in the NT)**
Eze 36:26-27	**And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules.**
Mar 4:11-12	**And He said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."**
Joh 6:44	**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.**
Joh 6:65	**And He said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless it is granted him by the Father."**

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Verses that explicitly state Man does not have free will (cont.)

Joh 8:43	Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.
Joh 10:26	But you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.
Joh 12:39-40	Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them."
Act 13:48	And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.
Rom 6:17	But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,
Rom 8:7-8	For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
Rom 9:15	For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

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Verses that explicitly state Man does not have free will (cont.)

Rom 9:17-18 For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

Rom 9:20-21 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

Rom 11:8 As it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."

Rev 17:17 For God has put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

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DISCUSSION

- **Is it beneficial to differentiate between God's Sovereignty and Man's Freewill?**
  - **Does this understanding make our salvation any more or less certain?**
  - **Is it *essential* to understand the arguments for and against?**
  - ***Heb 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.***

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- **Why is it good to review these types of topics?**
  - ***1 Pet 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.***
  - ***Eph 4:11-16 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.***

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

As this survey of Scripture demonstrates, the Bible consistently proclaims both the exhaustive sovereignty of God and the meaningful reality of human willing and choosing. Passages affirming God's kingship, foreordination, and effective will stand alongside clear calls to choose, repent, believe, and obey … often within the same books and even the same chapters. The tension is not avoided or artificially resolved by the biblical authors.

This presentation does not claim to settle centuries of theological debate, nor does it diminish the importance of careful doctrinal formulation. Rather, it underscores the necessity of holding firmly to everything Scripture affirms, even when our finite minds struggle to fully integrate the two realities. Many faithful Christians across church history have recognized both divine sovereignty and human responsibility as non-negotiable biblical truths, even while differing on how they relate.

Ultimately, these truths should drive us toward humility, awe, and dependence on God. They magnify His glory … He is sovereign enough to accomplish all His holy will, yet personal enough to invite genuine relationship. They also underscore human accountability: we are responsible agents who must respond to the gospel call. May this collection of passages spur deeper study of God's Word, more fervent prayer, and a life that rests confidently in God's sovereign grace while taking seriously the daily call to choose obedience, faith, and love.

The Shema

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One! You shall love the LORD your God with ALL your heart, with ALL your soul, and with ALL your strength.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

The Believer's Anthem!

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20