

**The Books in the Old Testament (II): The Historical Books**

Passages: Joshua–Esther

*Memory Verse*

“I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.” (Job 42:2)

<b>Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]</b>	<b>Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]</b>	<b>Good Works [Behavior]</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Learn a brief overview of the historical books.</li><li>2. Learn how God’s sovereignty is superior to mankind.</li><li>3. Understand how God’s sovereignty has affected history, nations, and our sins.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. God is almighty.</li><li>2. God has the power to enact His will.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Learn how God’s sovereignty should affect our daily lives.</li><li>2. Learn the importance of sealing God’s promises in our hearts, and of how trusting God can give us stability in our lives, even in tribulation.</li></ol>

*Overview*

**Events and Spiritual Teachings**

- A. Timeline and Overview of the Historical Books
- B. The Historical Books: A Demonstration of God’s Sovereignty
- C. God’s Sovereignty over Nations
- D. God’s Sovereignty over History
- E. God’s Sovereignty over Sin

**Life Application:** Finding Stability in God’s Sovereignty

**Memory Verse**

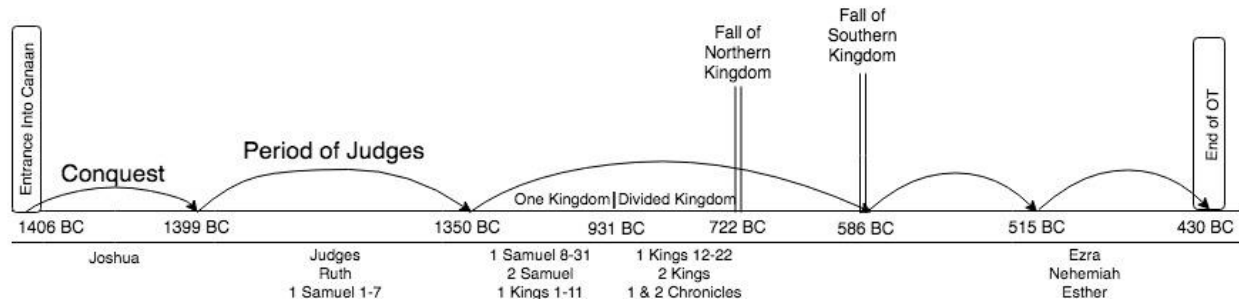
**Conclusion:** God is in control, from every moment of our lives to the progress of the entire world. He is truly the sovereign Lord who directs all situations, relationships, and events. By holding on to this knowledge, we can find refuge in His sovereignty, no matter what trials we face.

## Events and Spiritual Teachings

### Introduction

The Old Testament is composed of four main sections: the Torah, the historical books, the wisdom books, and the prophetic books. In today's lesson, we will focus on the second section: the historical books. These books record the Israelites' history from after Moses' death to their exile in a foreign land, which is a period that lasted approximately 1,000 years. This period is important to us because it not only reveals God's divine nature, but also reminds us of the trials and tribulations that the chosen people of God have faced and will continue to face.

### A. Timeline and Overview of the Historical Books



From this chart, we can divide the Israelites' history after their journey through the wilderness into four major sections: The conquest of the land of Canaan; the period of the judges; the period of the kings; and their exile and return to Canaan.

#### 1. The Conquest of the Land of Canaan (Joshua)

The Book of Joshua covers this portion of Israelite history. It describes the process of how Joshua and the Israelites conquered the promised land under God's power, as well as details how the land was divided among the twelve tribes.

#### 2. The Period of Judges (Judges; Ruth; 1 Samuel 1–7)

This period was a chaotic time during which the Israelites repeatedly strayed from God's teachings, only to return to Him when He allowed other nations to attack. Let's read Judges 21:25. In contrast to the Israelites' tendency to turn away from God, these books highlight God's faithfulness to His people, as well as His mercy and justice. This period concluded with Samuel, who was not only a high priest, but also the last judge of Israel.

#### 3. The Period of Kings (1 & 2 Samuel; 1 & 2 Kings; 1 & 2 Chronicles)

Despite the judges' repeated calls to return to God, the Israelites were unable to steadfastly follow God's rule. They eventually showed their ignorance of God's role in their lives by demanding a king like other nations. God granted their desire, leading to several years of prosperity under David and Solomon's reign. However, the line of kings ultimately led to the division of Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms, which was followed by the Israelites' exile as a result of their unfaithfulness.

#### 4. Exile and Return (Ezra; Nehemiah; Esther)

The Book of Esther details an account of God's continual protection of His people even when they were living in exile. Eventually, after seventy years of exile, God showed mercy to His people and permitted their return to the promised land. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

contain details of the trials faced by those who returned as they rebuilt the walls and the temple.

## **B. The Historical Books: A Demonstration of God's Sovereignty**

Although there are many things that the historical books can teach us about God, today, we will focus on a single aspect: His sovereignty. Before we study this more closely, though, what does it mean when we call God "sovereign"?

According to the dictionary, a "sovereign" is one "possessed of supreme power," who is "an acknowledged leader," or "one that exercises supreme authority."<sup>1</sup> We know that God is sovereign in that He has the power to do anything. His omnipotence makes Him the sovereign of all sovereigns, and this is understood well by even King David, one of the greatest leaders in Israelite history. Let's read 1 Chronicles 29:11–12. "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all." Job also acknowledged God's sovereignty, saying, "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You" (Job 42:2).

The difference between the sovereignty of a man and the sovereignty of God is that God has the power to do anything. He is all-powerful, and nothing can stop what He intends to do. Ephesians 1:11 says, "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." His will is all that is needed for Him to make something happen. God's sovereignty has affected us directly in some obvious ways—He controls our lives, has given us everything that we have, and has granted us salvation through grace. But there are much larger things that His sovereignty has affected, and as a result, these larger things have changed our lives more subtly as well.

## **C. God's Sovereignty over Nations**

*"O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?" (2 Chr 20:6)*

King Jehoshaphat was a bold follower of God, leading him to many military victories through God's guidance. But his successor, his son Jehoram, did evil in the sight of the Lord and caused the nation to worship Baal instead (2 Chr 21:3, 6). Let's read 2 Chronicles 21:7. "Yet the LORD would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that He had made with David, and since He had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever.

This verse teaches us a deceptively simple truth: the kingship and authority of all nations are entirely in God's hands. We can see from Israelite history that it is well within God's abilities to raise up or remove leaders or entire nations, and this verse states clearly that it was God's choice not to destroy Jehoram because of a covenant that He would uphold for generations after the death of King David.

We know that nothing in the nations occurs without God's permission. He has the power to prevent anything that He chooses to, and likewise has the power to enact His will regardless of mankind's choices. Let's read Psalm 33:10–11. "The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster, s.v. "sovereign," accessed Jan 20, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereign>

the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations.”

#### **D. God’s Sovereignty over History**

*“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” (Prov 16:33)*

The Book of Esther is a great example of how God is not only sovereign over nations, but also how His sovereignty is such that He can orchestrate history. Although God’s name is not explicitly mentioned in the book, we can easily see His presence in every chapter. Each sequence of events was lined up perfectly to fulfill His plan and preserve His chosen people. But the book also teaches us something important about how God enacts His will. Let’s read Esther 4:13–14.

*And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: “Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”*

Esther’s fears were valid. If the king rejected her, she would certainly die. However, Mordecai told her quite clearly that even if she chose not to act, God would still preserve His people. His will would be accomplished with or without her. Everything she had gone through was likely for the purpose of bringing her to this moment in history, but in the end, it was still her choice to be a part of His plan. If she chose to, she would receive His blessings. If not, then her family would be “cast out”—either way, God’s will would be enacted. Mordecai understood this clearly: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD” (Prov 16:33).

#### **E. God’s Sovereignty over Sin**

*“[...] You will restore me and make me live. Indeed it was for my own peace that I had great bitterness; but You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.” (Isa 38:16–17)*

A key aspect of God’s sovereignty that cannot be imitated by mankind is His sovereignty over sin. He demonstrates this in His judgment of nations throughout the Old Testament, but also displays this sovereignty in the personal lives of the Israelites. There are many examples of this in the historical books, but we’ll take a closer look at just two examples: King Hezekiah and his son Manasseh.

##### **1. Hezekiah’s Sickness, Pride, and Humility**

Hezekiah had been a good king who served the Lord (2 Kgs 18:3–5). Despite this, Hezekiah became severely sick in his life. Let’s read 2 Kings 20:1–6. In response to Hezekiah’s plea, God demonstrated His power over the life of mankind by not only healing his sickness, but also promising fifteen more years. Let’s read Isaiah 38:16–17. Not all sickness is due to sin, but we can see that after his recovery, Hezekiah wrote that God had “cast all my sins behind Your back.” Sin and sickness are both things that all the riches in the world cannot fix, yet God transformed Hezekiah’s life entirely because of one prayer.

Unfortunately, King Hezekiah did not repay the Lord’s favor. Rather than showing a God-fearing nation to visiting Babylonian envoys, Hezekiah proudly showed off the riches that he had accumulated because of God’s blessings (2 Kgs 20:13; 2 Chr 32:31). As a result, God told Hezekiah that all the riches that he had shown would one day be taken away (2 Kgs 20:17–18).

However, because Hezekiah humbled himself, “the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah” (2 Chr 32:26).

## 2. **Manasseh’s Sin, Punishment, and Repentance**

Unfortunately, Hezekiah’s son Manasseh did not follow in his father’s footsteps, as he did evil in the sight of the Lord. He restored the idols and high places that his father had broken down, revived evil practices, and led the nation of Judah into sin through idolatry (2 Kgs 21:3–6). In this manner, “Manasseh seduced [Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem] to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel” (v. 9).

The sins of Manasseh and the people greatly jeopardized their place in the promised land (2 Kgs 21:8). Let’s read 2 Chronicles 33:10–13. We can clearly see God’s sovereignty over the sin and rebellion of mankind from the punishment that Manasseh received. If we read the rest of the passage, we can see that Manasseh truly repented of his past transgressions. He proceeded to take away the idols that he had set up, repaired the altar, and “commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel” (v. 16). Manasseh’s sin led to his capture, and his repentance to his return.

For both Hezekiah and Manasseh, the consequences and results of their actions were entirely dependent on their sin or their repentance. Both may have been kings, but just like any other man, it was their sin, not their wills, that dictated the direction of their lives. God’s sovereignty over sin is shown in His ability to punish our rebellion, or to cast away our sins and grant us blessings.

### *Check for Understanding*

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- 1. What is different about God’s sovereignty compared to the sovereignty of mankind?** God’s sovereignty is far greater because He is all-powerful, and nothing can stop what He intends to do. But there are much larger things that His sovereignty has affected, and as a result, these larger things have changed our lives more subtly as well.
- 2. What does 2 Chronicles 21:7 teach us about God’s sovereignty over nations?** It teaches us a deceptively simple truth: the kingship and authority of all nations are entirely in God’s hands. It is well within God’s abilities to raise up or remove leaders or entire nations.
- 3. What was Mordecai trying to convey to Esther with the words, “If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place”?** Even if Esther chose not to act, God would still preserve His people. His will would be accomplished with or without her.
- 4. From the examples of Hezekiah and Manasseh, in what way does God’s sovereignty over sin affect our personal lives?** He can choose to cast our sin “behind us,” or He can choose to punish us for our sins. For both kings, the consequences and results of their actions were entirely dependent on their sin or their repentance. God’s sovereignty over sin is shown in His ability to punish our rebellion, or to cast away our sins and grant us blessings.

### *Life Application*

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#### **Finding Stability in God’s Sovereignty**

Today, we learned various aspects of God’s sovereignty, and why His sovereignty is far superior to even the greatest kings in history. He has the power to move entire nations according to His will, change history for the sake of His covenant, and alter the direction of an individual’s life based on their sin and repentance. This knowledge shouldn’t only make us fear God’s power, though. This knowledge should also make us realize that He can be our refuge in times of success, failure, or tribulation. By having a full

understanding of His sovereignty, we will come to understand that although He is invisible, He is our anchor. We simply need to pray and ask God to let us see His invisible works.

At times, though, it will feel as if God is not helping us at all. How do we continue to rely on Him when it feels like things are still going wrong no matter how much we pray? Here is a testimony about a brother who faced a difficult situation, yet still managed to emerge from his panic to find peace in the Lord, despite the difficulties that he faced.

*Teachers: The testimony has been added to the end of this document and to the student handout, so that you can print copies for your students if you wish.*

### **Discussion**

- If you were in their position, what solutions would you have hoped or expected from God when the problem first started?
- At what point did the young member's outlook towards the situation begin to change?
- What is the difference in attitude when the problem was first discovered and as the problems began to resolve themselves one by one?
- What do you think gave this member so much trust and peace in God?

As we have read in the testimony, we can find God's power and presence in us, working through the lives of His children. He is quiet and hidden from our eyes, but He is never silent, and is always at work. God is sovereign and can accomplish what concerns us today (Ps 138:7–8). However, He doesn't announce His presence with fireworks and trumpets! We need to be still so that we can look for and respond to His quiet promptings. When we pause and look closely, we will be able to see what He is doing in our lives. And as the young member testified, God does not always respond in the ways we expect Him to.

Let's read Job 42:2. "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You." When we ask for His help, He is able to completely exceed our expectations and go above and beyond anything that we can even imagine (Eph 3:20). Rather than establishing our own expectations for how He ought to respond to our requests, we need to trust that He knows what He is doing and believe in His sovereignty over all things. This knowledge can give us assurance that whatever happens to us, no matter how seemingly impossible the situation, God can help us.

### **Memory Verse**

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"I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You." (Job 42:2)

### **Meaning**

See *Life Application* section.

### **Conclusion**

At times, we will experience frustration when facing difficulties, or we may be swayed by temptations. We may even feel like we cannot see God in our lives, or we may find our faith lacking. But when we examine the historical books, we can clearly see that God is in control, from every moment of our lives to the progress of the entire world. He is truly the sovereign Lord who directs all situations, relationships, and events. By holding on to this knowledge, we can find refuge in His sovereignty, no matter what trials we face.

## Lesson 5 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. Explain the memory verse in your own words.  
*When we ask for God's help, He is able to completely exceed our expectations and go above and beyond anything that we can even imagine.*
2. What four major sections can the timeline of Israelite history be divided into?  
*The conquest of the land of Canaan; the period of judges; the period of kings; and their exile and return to Canaan.*
3. What is the difference between the sovereignty of man and the sovereignty of God?  
*While mankind is limited, God has the power to do anything. His omnipotence makes Him the sovereign of all sovereigns, and this is understood well by even King David, one of the greatest leaders in Israelite history. God's sovereignty affects us directly in both obvious and subtle ways.*
4. From the examples of Hezekiah and Manasseh, how are we affected by God's sovereignty over sin?  
*The consequences and results of their actions were entirely dependent on their sin or their repentance. God's sovereignty over sin is shown in His ability to punish our rebellion, or to cast away our sins and grant us blessings.*
5. How should our understanding of God's sovereignty affect our daily lives?  
*This knowledge should make us realize that He can be our refuge in times of success, failure, or tribulation. By having a full understanding of His sovereignty, we will come to understand that although He is invisible, He is our anchor.*
6. What kind of attitude should we have when making our requests known to God? Do you think you do this successfully in your prayers?  
*Rather than praying with expectations regarding how He should respond, we need to trust that He knows what He is doing and believe in His sovereignty over all things.  
Personal answers.*

## Testimony: Finding Stability in God's Sovereignty

– Anonymous

*(Edited to accommodate length and written format.)*

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I testify. I'd like to share my experience of how God was able to give me true peace in a time of trouble, and how I found comfort through prayer.

In July of 2020, I opened my MacBook expecting to work on some projects, only to find that the computer didn't turn on. An icon of a white folder labeled with a question mark appeared on the screen. I was originally really confused, and I thought I could solve this problem with a simple restart, but it would always pop up whenever I tried again. After a few days of attempting to solve this problem by retrieving possible backups, I began worrying about whether or not my files were actually gone.

I started praying about this, and I hoped that God would be able to restore the computer completely. I knew He was all-powerful, and this would not be a task that is too hard for Him. As I prayed, I began to feel more relieved and would expect my computer to work every time I opened it up. However, the problem persisted. My dad decided to bring it to a mechanic, who told him that its hardware was destroyed. There was nothing he could do to find my previous files, and... everything was gone.

At this moment, I began to panic, as there were four major problems that I had to deal with after hearing the news about my old computer.

The first problem was the loss of my digital artwork. I saved everything locally, meaning that everything was wiped. Almost every drawing that I ever did for the past five years was gone. On top of that, the file that I was going to submit to a digital art competition that month was gone. All that I had left was a low-resolution file that I had exported to show my parents.

The second problem was the loss of my video files. I was in charge of recording and editing the video project that our J2 class had begun work on over the summer. But now, all of the files and edits that I had made were gone. The only backup video was a low-resolution export that I had sent to my teachers for feedback. What frustrated me even more was how my R.E. teachers did not understand the gravity of the situation. One of them told me that this wasn't a valid excuse to stop our project, and that it was my responsibility to keep going. But how was I supposed to continue without a computer?

The third problem was the loss of my code. I had been developing a video game as a personal project that I could share with friends and publish on a website, but everything that I had worked on was gone. I could try redoing everything and rewriting the code, but it would just make me way too sad knowing that I had to waste so much time doing something I almost finished. I tried to avoid thinking about the project as this was one of the most valuable things that I lost that week.

The fourth problem was a choir video for Oahu church. One of their members contacted me a few weeks in advance about helping to edit their youth choir video, and I agreed. However, without my computer, I no longer had the editing software to help and couldn't continue. I was extremely stressed because I couldn't find someone to replace me and help with this project. I had already accepted the duty, and I felt really bad telling the church member that I couldn't uphold my end of the project.



After finding out about the amount of data I lost, I almost broke down because I'm the type of person who uses the computer every day. Almost everything I do can be found on my computer. I knew I couldn't handle it myself, so I decided to pray so that God could somehow alleviate my stress and resolve some of these problems that I faced. I didn't know what He would do next, but I knew that He was the only one who could help me during this difficult time.

As the days passed, I felt God slowly answering my prayers. One by one, He helped me with every problem that I faced after losing all my files on my computer.

For our R.E. year-end project, I thank God for helping our class figure out a way to present the video. Although the final presentation was super short and the blurriest video I have ever seen, I felt that we still got our message and story across. I also thank God for resolving the misunderstanding and miscommunication between the students and the teachers, and that we were at least able to export something instead of abandoning the project we worked so hard on altogether.

For the choir video that I had to edit, I thank God for finding a substitute for me. When I was about to respond to the Oahu church member and tell her that I could no longer help, I remembered that I had a close friend from previous spiritual convocations who might be available. I was unsure if he would want to be involved in this project since he had no prior experience editing videos, and I knew he was a very busy person. However, I thank God that he had a very willing heart to serve, understood my situation, and gladly took over for me.

For my code, I remembered that I had decided to back up my project to the cloud a month prior to this incident for no apparent reason. Reflecting upon this, I now feel that it was truly by the grace of God that my game files could actually be restored. It was most likely not just a random backup, but one that God did for me. I really thank God that He made me do it in preparation for this trial.

Finally, for my artwork, I was never actually able to retrieve any of my recent drawings. I ended up submitting a low-resolution file to the art contest and did not win. However, even though I lost so much, God still gave me peace. The peace that He gave me after I prayed was actually a lot more valuable than my art files because He taught me to trust and have faith in Him. When I count the considerable number of things that I had lost, I don't feel miserable about what happened. Being a pessimist, I tend to see things from a negative point of view, but I really do not see this event as a loss. Instead, I see this as an opportunity for me to draw closer to God and find the peace that He promises to us.

John 14:27 says, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." I feel like this verse really sums up this whole experience, as it touches upon the peace that God gives each one of us. For me, God touched my heart so that I no longer feel as sad about this difficulty. When we are facing troubles and don't get the outcome that we expect, we can pray for the peace that only comes from God. If we do so, I believe God will be more than willing to give us the peace that He promises and help us to have the right attitude when encountering different trials in our lives.

This concludes my testimony. May all the glory and honor be unto His holy name. Amen.