

### Having a Common Purpose

- On September 11, 2001, terrorist hijacked 4 airliners, flying them into the World Trade Centers, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania, resulting in the deaths of 3,076 people.
- On April 20, 1999, 2 teenagers enter their highschool in Littleton Colorado and systematically murdered 19 people before taking their own lives
- On December 26, 2004, an earthquake in the Indian Ocean produced a tidal wave that destroyed coastlines from East Africa to Indonesia resulting in the deaths of more than 174,000 people.
- These three dramatic events - separated by time and great distances – would appear to have little in common
  - Each took their toll from different communities, under different circumstances
  - Each had different causes and consequences
  - But for all their differences, all three events shared at least one thing in common
    - All three events so shocked the conscience, so stunned the world by their horror and senselessness that all three prompted a common question:
    - How could a loving God permit such things to happen?
- Of the 7 topics I've chosen for my series on the Sovereignty of God, I imagine that none will make so obvious and yet at the same time so controversial an opening statement as the one I will make tonight:
  - God is sovereign over every event that occurs in all His creation throughout all of time
  - On the one hand, my statement is obviously true – because I'm sure we agree that there can be no higher power in all creation than the very Creator Himself
    - That the God who has the power to speak the entire universe and all that fills it into existence merely by His Word, must by necessity have all power and authority over it

- That there is no other power that could possibly intervene to contend with - much less match - the power of God
- That whether by His active intervention or by His willful restraint, God purposes all things to occur exactly as they do
- In fact, when we ask the question itself – *How can God allow such things* – we are indirectly acknowledging that God had the capability to prevent such things, which then causes us to ask why did He not?
- Charles Spurgeon said it far better than I ever could when he wrote:

I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam does not move an atom more or less than God wishes – that every particle of spray that dashes against the steamboat has its orbit, as well as the sun in the heavens – that the chaff from the hand of the winnowing is steered as the stars in their courses. The creeping of an aphid over the rosebud is as much fixed as the march of the devastating pestilence – the fall of . . . leaves from a poplar is as fully ordained as the tumbling of an avalanche.

- On the other hand, my statement, if we ponder it long enough, ultimately leads us to controversy
  - Because as soon as we begin to consider all that scripture has to say about God’s control over the events of History, we find ourselves wrestling with issues of evil, sin and man’s relationship to God
    - It’s as though we begin our search for the answer by drawing a line in the sand, and declaring that God’s sovereignty goes only this far and no more
    - Then we read scripture and across verses or details force us to erase our first line and redraw it a little closer to us and a little farther from God
- While I have no hope whatsoever of addressing every aspect of this complex and literally mind boggling area of God’s sovereignty, I do believe there is so much more that could be said on this topic than is typically addressed in pulpits across the country
  - And along the way, brothers and sisters, I hope I can show you why this is not an issue reserved for discussions among academics
  - This is not a topic that only pastors and theologians should tackle

- This is not some abstract, irrelevant, unprofitable debate
  - The issue of God’s authority and the extent of His control over the events of this world cuts to the core of our faith and its meaning
  - It is the foundation for our confidence in the prophecy found in the OT
  - It is the basis for our hope in God’s promises given in the NT
  - The ability to exercise control over all space, time and matter is the very definition of what it means to be the true living God – the Creator - the one we desire to worship
- So, make no mistake, this discussion truly matters
  - For if it were possible to cast doubt on the sovereignty of our God over all that He has created and all that He has declared by His word,
    - then we will have also cast doubt on His ability to carry it out and to fulfill His promises to us
    - And if there is doubt in God’s ability to carry out His promises according to His will, then as Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians, we are of all men most to be pitied
- So tonight my goal is to help you take a few steps toward understanding and appreciating the Sovereignty of God over world events, a Lesson entitled Having a Common Purpose
  - And as always, the understanding we seek is not philosophical, not worldly, not one that appeals to our pride – but rather the Biblical view
  - But in order to get where we’re going, it’s important to know when we’re starting from
- I believe you can group all opinion on the issue of God’s Sovereignty over his creation into essentially one of three groups (at least among those who believe in a higher power):
  - 1. There are those who believe that God created the world and the universe, and then like someone spinning a top, He now stands back to watch it work itself to conclusion
    - And like the spinning top, God’s hand never again touches His creation or intervenes in its course

- 2. There is a second group who believe that God created the world and He continues to intervene in it to change the course of history from time to time
  - His intervenes in both natural and supernatural ways, and always for good purposes, ultimately to bring events to His desired outcome
  - Implicit in this second view is the principle that some things lie outside God’s control – outside His sovereignty
    - Evil, for example, is an independent force, one that operates apart from God’s desires and intentions and against His will
    - Many would also agree that men himself operates in freedom from the direct control of God – that God would not intervene to change the mind or will of man
- 3. Finally – our third group – are those whose view of God’s Sovereignty sees no limit. All things were created by Him and are sustained by Him.
  - He doesn’t just intervene to redirect history from time to time, He writes every page of history
  - He directs all things, controls all things, governs all events on Earth so that everything may happen according to a preordained plan
  - One example of this view can be seen in the 1689 Confession of faith for the historic Reformed Baptist movement in London:

God who, in infinite power and wisdom, has created all things, upholds, directs, controls, and governs them, both animate and inanimate, great and small, by a providence supremely wise and holy, and in accordance with His infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable decisions of His will. He fulfills the purposes for which He created them, so that His wisdom, power and justice, together with His infinite goodness and mercy, might be praised and glorified. Nothing happens by chance or outside the sphere of God's providence. As God is the First Cause of all events, they happen immutable and infallibly according to His foreknowledge and decree, to which they stand related. Yet by His providence God controls them, that second causes, operating either as fixed laws, or freely, or in dependence upon other causes, play their part in bringing them about.

- Some might criticize those who hold this view as merely adhering to fatalism, to which Charles Spurgeon, himself a member of this third group, replied:

What is fate? Fate is this – Whatever is, must be. But there is a difference between that and Providence. Providence says, Whatever God ordains, must be; but the wisdom of God never ordains anything without a purpose. Everything in this world is working for some great end. Fate does not say that. . . . There is all the difference between fate and Providence that there is between a man with good eyes and a blind man.

- I believe it is fair to say that most unbelievers today likely fall into the first of these three groups (assuming they are not atheists)
  - They are content to acknowledge the existence of some higher power, but their pride and hard hearts will never allow them to concede that this higher power actually has influence over them, much less controls their lives and their future
  - Sadly, even a few Christians fall into this group
- Most Christians, on the other hand, probably fall in group 2
  - Aware of God’s ultimate control over the larger events of the world and history. They believe in His prophecy, but they often attribute it to foreknowledge – His knowing the future – rather than to His providence – determining the future
  - But their belief in His Sovereignty turns to uncertainty when deciding where to draw the line in His control over smaller matters of everyday life, or over our personal choices and or over the effects of sin and evil
- Few Christians today, however, are willing to venture into category 3
  - In fact, few have even heard it suggested that there is no event –
    - That not the smallest meaningless events of our everyday lives,
    - That not our personal decisions whether impulsive or well-considered,
    - That nor even Satan’s choices and actions –
  - That remain outside His direct and constant control
  - And yet, when we all consider a great tragedy and are tempted to ask How could a loving God allow such things, we have unknowingly placed ourselves – if even for just a moment – into Group 3

- Even just by asking the question we are stating, for example, that we believe God could change the decisions and actions of two disturbed teenagers in Colorado
  - That He could have altered the paths and opportunities of 19 hijackers and thousands of other people on September 11<sup>th</sup> to prevent that destruction
  - That He could have held back the sea and calmed the earthquake that devastating hundreds of thousands
- Well, could He? What does the Bible say about God’s control over His creation
  - First, God is sovereign over the substance of the creation, over all weather, over all natural forces, over all the animal kingdom
    - The Bible abounds with examples, but to remind you of a few:
      - In almost every book of the OT, God is credited at times with bringing huge harvests, bringing famine, bringing rain, bringing drought, bringing lightening and thunder, bringing life and death

[Psa. 147:15](#) He sends forth His command to the earth;  
His word runs very swiftly.

[Psa. 147:16](#) He gives snow like wool;  
He scatters the frost like ashes.

[Psa. 147:17](#) He casts forth His ice as fragments;  
Who can stand before His cold?

[Psa. 147:18](#) He sends forth His word and melts them;  
He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow.

- The story of Moses in Egypt is a tour de force of God’s sovereignty over the forces of nature with hail, insects, animals, and even the heavens themselves responding in unison to God’s commands
- In the Gospels, we here the apostles exclaim as they watch Jesus calm the storm on the sea of Galilee that He even commands the wind and sea. Yes, He does.
- In the book of Daniel, we can read of God holding back the jaws of a lion
- in Numbers we see God speaking through the mouth of a donkey,
- In 1Samuel chapter 6, God directs two nursing cows yoked to a cart to go against their most urgent instincts and walk away from their newborn young so they may return the ark of the covenant to the Jewish nation

- Our examples could literally go on all night, but the conclusion is already obvious
  - There is no such thing as mother nature
  - There is nature and it has a father who will not share His control over it with anyone

[Psa. 135:5](#) ¶ For I know that the LORD is great  
And that our Lord is above all gods.

[Psa. 135:6](#) Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,  
In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

- Now you might be thinking that the fact that God can control all things doesn't mean He chooses to take that control
  - For example, was God responsible for the tsunami of last winter?
  - Did that tragedy happen because God made it happen, or did it happen by natural forces and God merely permitted it to happen
    - This is a false dichotomy – a distinction without a difference
    - Since we know from scripture that God can make waves respond to his word (remember the flood of Noah?)
    - We also know he could stop these events if He wished
      - He could have stopped that wave with one word from His mouth – just as He created all waters with His Word in the first place
- Therefore, whether he ordained that event by His initiating it or he ordained it by refraining from stopping them, in either case He ordained it – He wanted it to happen
  - It's like the little boy who stands in a park with a baseball, and tosses it straight up above his head, and as it falls he ponders whether to catch it or let hit the ground
  - Whether he chooses to take action and reach out to catch the ball or he chooses to withhold action and allow the ball to hit the ground, either way it was the boy's choice and his desire that determined the ball's fate – So it is with God

- The inescapable conclusion we come to is that all natural events happen because He desires them to happen
  - And this stands true even in the greatest of calamities, because God tells us He deserves the credit

[Is. 45:5](#) “I am the LORD, and there is no other;  
Besides Me there is no God.

I will gird you, though you have not known Me;

[Is. 45:6](#) That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun  
That there is no one besides Me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other,

[Is. 45:7](#) The One forming light and creating darkness,  
Causing well-being and creating calamity;  
I am the LORD who does all these.

[Amos 3:6](#) If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble?  
If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?

- Both Isaiah and Amos state the obvious – if we are prepared to give God credit for the good things that happen in His creation, than we must also be prepared to recognize that calamity occurs on His watch as well
- I believe part of our difficulty in accepting that God ordains such things to happen stems from our concerns over the loss of innocent life. We find it hard to accept that God would allow or even instigate the taking of innocent life
  - Here again, I believe the problem can be found not with God or His nature, but in our perspective
- Imagine with me a story of a woman living in a desert town. She leaves the gates of her city one day to walk a few miles to draw water from a nearby creek. As she turns to head back to her home and to her relatives, she is shocked to watch huge fireballs descend from the sky instantly engulfing her town, utterly destroying it and all its inhabitants in flames
  - With her city destroyed, her family killed, even her children, the woman falls to her knees crying to God in the way so many have done over the centuries. How could God have allowed such calamity to come upon her and her city...her beloved city of Sodom – a city God Himself chose to destroy
  - You see the problem is the world has a false understanding of how God defines innocence and guilt – of what makes a death justified and what makes a death unfair

[Rom. 3:9](#) ¶ What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

[Rom. 3:10](#) as it is written,

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

[Rom. 3:11](#) THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,

THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

[Rom. 3:12](#) ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,

THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

[James 2:10](#) For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

- Rom 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death – the payment due to all who sin is death –
- And the definition of sin does not depend on a conscience knowledge that we have sinned...even the Law has a provision for sacrifices to cover unknown unintentional sin
  - No, we inherit our sin nature from Adam
  - When Adam sinned, his very spiritual nature changed
  - Though Adam was created without sin, once he sinned he became a different creature, a fallen creature with a nature opposed to God
  - And since God had decreed during creation that both man and animal would reproduce after their own kind, Adam’s new fallen nature would by necessity be passed on to all who descended from him
  - So every person ever born has been born with Adam’s dead nature, a corrupt nature, a sinful nature – a nature opposed to God
  - No less a man then King David recognized this fact about himself when he wrote...

[Psa. 51:1](#) ¶ Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.

[Psa. 51:2](#) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity  
And cleanse me from my sin.

[Psa. 51:3](#) For I know my transgressions,  
And my sin is ever before me.

[Psa. 51:4](#) Against You, You only, I have sinned  
And done what is evil in Your sight,

So that You are justified when You speak  
And blameless when You judge.

[Psa. 51:5](#) ¶ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me.

- Part of our inability to understand how God could be responsible for - or even just allow - events that cause death is that we fail to grasp the true depravity of the human heart – the degree to which the world justly deserves God’s wrath
  - As unbelievers, there is never a moment in the life of any human being prior to faith when we stand sinless and without blame before God
  - We were all conceived with a fallen nature – a nature that is opposed to Him and can never please Him apart from faith – and we all deserve judgment for it
- In fact, there has only ever been one innocent life who ever walked this earth, a man not born of man’s seed and therefore who did not inherit Adam’s sinful nature
  - But a man born of the Holy Spirit through a virgin...and even that one innocent life God saw fit to put to death – to suffer great violence for the sake of the greater good
- God has numbered our days, and it is in His control when, where and how each life comes to an end – as is the potter’s right over His clay
- But where then does Evil and the demonic realm fit into all this?
  - Some Christian and non-Christian alike are prone to elevating Satan to the point where we almost see him and God as opposite but equal
  - But the demonic forces are merely created beings, so they too fall under God’s authority
  - John wrote in his first letter that He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world – meaning God is greater than the Enemy
  - And we know that Jesus Himself commanded demons to leave the bodies of men and women, and they obey
  - In Mark chapter 5 Jesus,...

[Mark 1:27](#) They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.”

[Mark 5:11](#) Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain.

[Mark 5:12](#) *The demons* implored Him, saying, “Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.”

[Mark 5:13](#) Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand *of them*; and they were drowned in the sea.

- Remember Job...Job lost His family, his business, and his health because God permitted Satan to do it – Satan essentially was God’s agent in that action
  - Satan was never outside God’s control, He required God’s permission for His every act, God even set the limits of how far he could go
- But when we talk about God having sovereignty over the demons, we’re not simply talking about God holding back evil from time to time, restraining evil..
  - God frequently is seen commanding the demonic realm to do His bidding

[Judg. 9:22](#) ¶ Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.

[Judg. 9:23](#) Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,

[Judg. 9:24](#) so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.

[1Sam. 16:14](#) ¶ Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him.

[1Sam. 16:15](#) Saul’s servants then said to him, “Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you.

- Even in the death of His Son on the cross, God was in control of the Enemy
  - He again used Satan through a disciple Judas – a disciple that Jesus knowingly chose so that He would be betrayed – so that His Son would be put to death

[John 6:70](#) Jesus answered them, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?”

[John 6:71](#) Now He meant Judas *the son* of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.

- Then God granted Satan the opportunity to use Judas and the Jewish and Roman leaders to do his bidding in murdering His Son as we're told in Acts

[Acts 4:26](#) The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.'

[Acts 4:27](#) Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

[Acts 4:28](#) They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

- Perhaps the most power example of God' control over the demonic realm still lies in the future
  - In the final days in the book of Revelation, there comes a moment right before Christ returns to rule the earth, when the world has fallen under the control of a Satan-possessed man called the antichrist, also known as the beast
  - He rules the entire world with the help of 7 world leaders who answer to his dictatorial authority and have relinquished their authority to the antichrist, to the beast allowing him to do what he wishes with their armies
  - And in Rev 17 we hear why they do this

[Rev. 17:17](#) "For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.

- Consider those words again – God directed these kings to give their allegiance - even their very kingdoms - to the control of Satan himself, so that the words of God will be fulfilled
  - The kings will believe they are acting by their own initiative – they will think it's their idea – their purpose
  - But God gave them that purpose – He made them share a common purpose, controlling their decisions without them realizing it
- Those verses confirmed not only God's sovereignty over the demonic realm, but it also gave us our introduction into the final issue for tonight: God's sovereign rule in men's lives
  - No doubt this is the hardest issue for us to come to grips with – the one with which we struggle the most

- For example, how could God intervene in the decisions of men when our own perspective tells us constantly that we are the ones making our own decisions
  - I wonder how surprised those future kings will be to learn that God was the one who caused them to give over their kingdoms
- Even more troubling, since men act in sin yet God is not the author of sin, how can God be credited with men's actions?
  - Jonathan Edwards answered that point using an analogy of our Sun
  - By its very nature, the sun gives the earth light and heat, and when it drops below the horizon, it leaves the world dark and cold – but the sun is not the source of darkness and cold

If the sun were the proper cause of cold and darkness," he says, "it would be the fountain of these things, as it is the fountain of light and heat:

- But it is not a fountain of darkness and cold, and so it is with God
- God not the fountain of sin, nor does it please Him, yet He still has sovereignty over it and can control it and may determine where it leads and what it will do, so that He may turn all things to good...
- In truth, it's rather easy to point to example after example in scripture of men being directed by God, God controlling their lives and decisions
  - God using Pharaoh and his sin to display His glory throughout the world as He freed Israel from bondage
  - God using Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army to devastate Jerusalem and take the nation of Israel captive for 70 years as punishment for their ignoring the Sabbath over their land
  - God using the hatred of men in Jerusalem to scatter the early church and ensure the spread of the Gospel message, as we studied last week
  - Or God consecrating John the Baptist for a life of ministry even before he was born, by giving him the Holy Spirit even while he was in the womb and announcing that his life would be set aside for one purpose
- Did any of these men have a chance to object to how God decided to use them? Did they even understand in the moment that God was in control and not them? Do any of us ever take time to realize that?

- Tonight we will revisit probably the most famous example of God’s sovereignty over the events of men’s lives by looking at the story of Joseph
  - But due to length of that story, we will cover it a little differently than as a single passage
  - Instead, we are going to piece together the key details of his story from across scripture, paying close attention to how God acted through the lives of men
- The story of Joseph actually begins in Chap 15 of Genesis, when God confirms His covenant with Abram

[Gen. 15:13](#) *God* said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.

[Gen. 15:14](#) “But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.

[Gen. 15:15](#) “As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age.

[Gen. 15:16](#) “Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”

- God planned for the descendents of Abram to be enslaved for four generations in a foreign land
  - He gives a hint of why in these verses – because the iniquity of the Amorite was not yet complete
  - That God was not yet ready to judge the sin of the people living in the promised land, the Canaanites
  - But that doesn’t explain why the Nation of Israel must be enslaved during that time
- That answer comes in Chap 38 of Genesis
  - In chapter 38 we see Judah, the man from whom the Messiah would come, disobeying God’s direction and marrying a caananite wife
  - Together they produce three sons and a daughter
    - The sons are so depraved, that God literally puts one of them to death because he was so evil and then kills the other because he refuses to produce heirs for Judah

- Judah is so distraught, that he will not give His only remaining son to marriage fearing his death as well – so now the corruption by the Canaanites culture that God warned would happen is threatening to put an end to the Jewish line that would bring the Messiah
- So that brings us to Joseph
- We're told in Genesis 37 that Joseph receives a dream from God. Joseph tells his elder brothers that in the dream he would one day rule over them and over his parents, and naturally they became jealous and angry with him
  - They plotted against him and they determine one day to destroy him so that his dream could never come true

[Gen. 37:18](#) ¶ When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death.

[Gen. 37:19](#) They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer!

[Gen. 37:20](#) “Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, ‘A wild beast devoured him.’ Then let us see what will become of his dreams!”

- As they are considering killing him, at the last minute they see traders heading to Egypt, so the brothers took the opportunity to sell him into slavery instead

[Gen. 37:25](#) ¶ Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring *them* down to Egypt.

[Gen. 37:26](#) Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood?

[Gen. 37:27](#) “Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our *own* flesh.” And his brothers listened *to him*.

[Gen. 37:28](#) Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled *him* up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.

- So who's idea was it to sell Joseph into slavery? Was it the brothers' idea?
- Well, consider later that after Joseph becomes second in command of Egypt, his brothers eventually come seeking food during a great famine
- As they come before him not knowing who he is, they bow down before him – later the rest of his family – the whole Jewish nation joins the brothers in Egypt and pay their respects to Joseph

- And when that happens, the dream Joseph had has comes true
- So, now consider that God gave Joseph a dream that caused the brothers to get so jealous and angry. that they plot to kill Joseph
  - When they final decide to take action, the Scripture says they believe their choice will ensure the dream never comes true
  - But of course, their actions only ensured that the dream would come true...so who was making the choices: God or the brothers?
  - Psalm 105 explains it this way

[Psa. 105:17](#) He sent a man before them,  
Joseph, *who* was sold as a slave.

[Psa. 105:18](#) They afflicted his feet with fetters,  
He himself was laid in irons;

[Psa. 105:19](#) Until the time that his word came to pass,  
The word of the LORD tested him.

[Psa. 105:20](#) The king sent and released him,  
The ruler of peoples, and set him free.

[Psa. 105:21](#) He made him lord of his house  
And ruler over all his possessions,

[Psa. 105:22](#) To imprison his princes at will,  
That he might teach his elders wisdom.

- God sent Joseph to Egypt, not the brothers
  - It was God’s plan that Joseph be enslaved and later imprisoned so that Joseph might be tested

[Gen. 45:7](#) And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

[Gen. 45:8](#) So now *it was* not you *who* sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

[Gen. 50:19](#) But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place?

[Gen. 50:20](#) “As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

- And it was God’s way of teaching Joseph’s elders, his brothers wisdom...and it certainly had that effect
  - Are we saying that God caused the brothers to sin...absolutely not

- But as the brothers sought to sin, because their hearts were depraved by nature, God then directed it so that His good purposes would be met by their sin – yet they would still see consequences for their mistakes
- Our story is quite over, because for many years of the nation of Israel lived in Egypt, just as God foretold to Abram
  - God was waiting for the right time to judge the Amorites
  - Later, we learn that it was God’s purpose to destroy the Amorites and other peoples in Canaan by the hand of the Jewish armies
    - But of course in Abram’s day, there were no such armies
    - And even by Joseph’s day, there were still only 70 clans in the entire nation of Israel
  - So if God desires Jewish armies sufficient to destroy the Amorites, then it was necessary that the Jewish people continue to grow and prosper as a nation – while remaining separate and uncorrupted by the world around them
  - But if they remained in the land, they would have never survived long enough to become that nation much less a powerful people
  - Instead, they are taken to a rich country, and set apart from the Egyptians, later enslaved, so that the nation would have no opportunity to mix with other cultures
  - So that on the day appointed, on exactly the day God said it would happen, Moses brings them out of Egypt, nearly 2 million of them, just as God promised Abram 430 years earlier
- Now think about all the thousands of people who had to make millions of decisions in those 430 years to ensure that specific outcome would take place on that specific day
  - The marriages that had to take place, the children that were born
    - The many details of life both great and small that had to combine so that everything would happen as God directed
    - And were not simply talking about God predicting the future...we’re talking about God obviously controlling the future – in minute detail

- Because God can plan the end without also planning the means to that end
- And that means is you and I and millions of people like us
- It's stories like these that causes us to take a second look at where we've drawn that line in the sand between God's control and ours
  - And if you're like me, you've been forced by the truth and power of God's word to move it back and back and back until it's come right up against you and pushing against your pride
  - And it's staring you in the face and its asking you who are you to dare draw any line between you and God?
  - That's what where we all begin...with a line between us and God
    - God gets only what we want to give him in our lives
    - But that's God's role. In fact, He not only gets to draw the line, He created the stick, and the sand and He created you
    - But maybe you're someone who's drawn that line a long way away...so far that you can't even see God