

The Amazing Burial of Jesus, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 27:62–66

Code: 2400

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest and most essential attributes of God is His sovereignty, sometimes referred to as the supremacy of God. God rules over all things and controls all things. The ramifications of this doctrine are beyond our ability to comprehend, yet it is essential that we realize its truth. The Bible teaches unequivocally that God is the supreme ruler in the universe.

A. God's Sovereignty in Scripture

1. 1 Chronicles 29:11-13--"Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine. Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name."
2. 2 Chronicles 20:6--"O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? And rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the nations? And in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?"
3. Job 23:13--"He is of one mind, and who can turn him? And what his soul desireth, even that he doeth." God never vacillates between opinions.
4. Psalm 115:3--"Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."
5. Psalm 135:6--"Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places."
6. Proverbs 21:30--"There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord."
7. Isaiah 46:10--"My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."
8. Daniel 4:35--"[God] doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"
9. Ephesians 1:11--"[He] worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

B. God's Sovereignty in Action

Those verses tell us that God is in charge. All the billions of isolated circumstances in the world do not function at random. The designer has a purpose and objective for each one. It's enough for us to understand how rapidly a computer can come to a conclusion based on identifiable data. But to understand how the infinite mind of God can collect, collate, and harmonize every bit of data that exists in the universe and make it all work for His will is beyond our comprehension. To get a small grasp on that reality we need to realize two ways that God rules in the world.

1. Through miracles

At times God supernaturally interrupts the natural course of events to accomplish His purpose. He overrules natural law with supernatural power. There is no scientific explanation for a miracle.

- a) Creation was the greatest miracle of all--God created everything that exists in only six days (Gen. 1).
- b) Another miracle was a cataclysmic flood--God drowned the entire world except for eight people and two of each kind of animal (Gen. 6-8).
- c) Many supernatural plagues descended on Egypt, including the death of the first born of everyone who didn't believe in God (Ex. 5-13). God miraculously overruled the course of nature to lead His people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.
- d) God parted the Red Sea for the people of Israel to pass through, and then allowed it to

drown the armies of Egypt who followed in pursuit (Ex. 14).e) God brought water from a rock (Ex. 17:1-6).f) God provided manna from heaven and birds to eat when the people desired flesh (Ex. 16:1-13).g) On one occasion God caused the shadow of the sun to go backwards on a sundial (2 Kings 20:8-11).h) On another occasion God caused the sun to stand still, which means the earth stopped revolving. Amazingly enough that didn't result in total destruction (Josh. 10:12-14).i) During the rebellion of Korah, God allowed the ground to open and swallow all who rebelled against Him (Num. 16). The miracle was that the ground swallowed only those who had sinned and not the others.j) The walls of Jericho fell flat--apart from any natural phenomena--to allow entry to Israel's army (Josh. 7).k) Samson had such incredible strength that he was able to kill thousands of people (Judg. 15-16).l) God made an axehead float through the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 6).m) God raised a dead boy through the prophet Elisha (1 Kings 17:17-23).n) God miraculously provided food for a widow (1 Kings 17:8-16).o) On one occasion a donkey talked (Num. 22).p) God took Elijah to heaven without his dying. He caught him up in a whirlwind in a "chariot of fire" (2 Kings 2:11).q) During King Belshazzar's feast, handwriting miraculously appeared on a wall (Dan. 5).r) God closed up the mouths of lions to prevent them from eating the prophet Daniel (Dan. 6).s) Three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were not even singed after being thrown into a fiery furnace (Dan. 3).t) The prophet Jonah survived for three days in the belly of a great fish (Jonah 1-2). Then of course we the healings wrought by Jesus and the miracles of the apostles. There have been times when God accomplished His eternal purposes in ways that interrupted the flow of natural history.

2. Through providence

God also uses providence to accomplish His will in the world. You won't find the word providence in the Bible. It's like the word Trinity: The word isn't in there, but the theological concept is. Rather than overruling or interrupting the natural course of events, He manipulates and uses those events to accomplish His own ends. That's what is meant by the providence of God.

In a sense providence is a greater miracle than a miracle. It seems to me easier for God to instantly overrule the natural flow of events than use a diverse number of events, circumstances, and attitudes occurring within the limited freedom of men and demons to accomplish His will. But that is precisely what God does! That's why the Psalmist says He has power over all.

a) The testimony of Scripture Throughout the Bible you can find God using thunder, lightning, rain, hail, frost, ice, snow, cold, heat, sunshine, bodies of water, rivers, animals, birds, beasts, nations, governments, kings, princes, rulers, and governors- -He uses everything and everyone to meet His desires. The seemingly random choices we make may appear to be detached from any sovereign control, yet God sets the birth and death of every man. He sees all we do, think, and say. He uses our good and our bad. He uses the free choices of men--and even demons--to fit perfectly into His eternal purposes.(1) Proverbs 16:1--"The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord" (NASB).(2) Proverbs 19:21--"There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."(3) Jeremiah 10:23--"The way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Men think they're doing what they want to do, but the fact is that what they do fits into a grander scheme.(4) Philippians 2:13--The apostle Paul said, "It is God who worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure." He controls everything--even sin. He allows some, prevents some, and limits it for His purpose.(5) Proverbs 16:9--"A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps."(6) John 5:17--Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Even though He was on earth, He affirmed that they were still working in concert to bring about God's eternal plan. Most of the time God does not use miracles to accomplish His will. He did use them in the days of Moses, Elijah and Elisha, Christ, and the apostles. Only during those four periods of redemptive history do we see miracles as anything near the norm. The remainder of the time God uses providence.b) The testimony of God's servants(1) Joseph(a) The decision of his brothers Joseph was one of twelve brothers. His brothers hated him because he was the favorite son, so they decided to kill him (Gen. 37:20). But after noticing a group

of traders traveling to Egypt, they decided to sell Joseph into slavery instead (v. 27). (b) The decision of Potiphar's wife In Egypt Joseph became the servant of a man named Potiphar (Gen. 39:1). Potiphar's wife liked the way Joseph looked, so she decided to seduce him. But Joseph didn't want to have anything to do with her, so he ran (vv. 6-12). She grabbed his coat as he ran, and then falsely accused him of intending to rape her. Joseph was then thrown into prison (vv. 13-20). (c) The decision of Pharaoh While in jail, Joseph met a prisoner who had an unusual dream. Joseph interpreted his dream (Gen. 40:1-19). Later, Pharaoh had a dream and asked if anyone could interpret it for him (Gen. 41:1-8). He was told that Joseph could interpret his dream (vv. 9-13). So Joseph was brought to Pharaoh, interpreted his dream, and Pharaoh made him prime minister of Egypt (vv. 14-44). So far in this story there have been no miracles. The decision of the brothers, the decision of Potiphar's wife, and the decision of Pharaoh have led Joseph from being sold into slavery to becoming the second in command of all Egypt. (d) The decision of Joseph Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream indicated that seven years of plenty would be followed by seven years of famine. During the seven years of plenty, Joseph collected a 20 percent tax from the people of all their food and grain and stored it to feed the nation during the seven years of famine (vv. 34-35, 48-49). As the seven years of famine began, the people in Joseph's homeland soon ran out of food. So they came to Egypt to beg for food (Gen. 41:57; 42:2). But to get some they had to go to Joseph. If Joseph's family had not gone to Egypt, they would have perished in Canaan. And that would have been the end of the twelve tribes of Israel. Genesis 45:4-5 records what eventually happened when the brothers came to Joseph: "Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me here; for God did send me before you to preserve life." "God could have picked up Joseph in a cloud, dropped him into Egypt, and instantly made him prime minister. That would have been a miracle. But God didn't use a miracle; He used providence. The seemingly random choices of many people accomplished God's perfect plan. Joseph further explained God's purpose, "For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in which there shall neither be plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me here, but God" (vv. 6-8). In Genesis 50:20 Joseph concludes, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (NASB).

(2) Ruth Naomi's son violated the law of God by marrying a pagan Moabite woman named Ruth. They lived with his mother, brother, and sister-in-law in Moab for ten years (Ruth 1:4). Then he and his brother died, perhaps as a result of divine judgment, leaving Naomi with her two daughters-in-law (v. 5). As a result of Naomi's testimony, Ruth said, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God" (v. 16). She came to faith in the true God. Out of the sin of a disobedient man God brought Ruth and Naomi together, which resulted in Ruth's salvation. Naomi took Ruth back to her land (v. 19). One day Ruth was gleaning in the field of a man named Boaz, who was related to her dead husband (Ruth 2:1-2). Under Jewish law Boaz could take Ruth as his wife, which he did (Ruth 4:9-10). She became the grandmother of David, putting her in the Messianic line (vv. 21-22). There was no miracle, just providence.

(3) Esther One of the most striking illustrations of God's providence in the Old Testament is the book of Esther. Surprisingly enough, the book of Esther never mentions the name of God. Yet clearly the main character in the book of Esther is God. There are no miracles recorded in that book, but God is at work in a way even beyond the miraculous. In an incredible series of providential events, God brought about His will. And in this case, His will was to preserve the nation of Israel. (a) The setting The setting is the kingdom of Persia, where the Jewish people had been taken in exile. The book begins by chronicling the deposing of Vashti, the queen (1:10-22). The king wanted a replacement for Vashti, and he wanted her to be the most beautiful girl in the kingdom (2:1-4). As it happened, a Jewish man named Mordecai was foster father to his beautiful niece, Esther. He was a keeper of the king's gate (2:19), and realized this might be a wonderful opportunity for her to live in

the palace of the king and be a good influence. So she entered the queen's beauty contest and won (2:16-17).(b) The plotNo one knew Esther was Jewish--Mordecai had instructed her to tell no one (2:10). Meanwhile, a high official named Haman persuaded the king to stamp an edict to annihilate all the Jewish people (3:8-11). Haman was actually seeking to kill Mordecai, whose devotion to God offended him (3:5).(c) The deliveranceEsther found out about the plot. Since she was in a position to influence the king, she pleaded with him on behalf of her people (7:1-6). The king favored Esther and Mordecai, spared the Jewish race, made Mordecai the prime minister, and hanged Haman on the gallows Haman had built for Mordecai (7:7; 8:17). Thus the nation of Israel was preserved. God was in control of every single event.Despite those incredible illustrations of God's providence, there is no more graphic account in all Scripture of God's sovereignty than the death of Jesus Christ. God used human and Satanic forces combined to kill His Son. He controlled the hatred of the Jewish leaders, the hostility of the Romans toward those leaders, the defection of the disciples, the betrayal of Judas, and the denial of Peter. Jesus came into Jerusalem on the very day Daniel prophesied He would (Dan. 9:25; cf. Harold W. Hoehner, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977], pp. 115-139). While the people were selecting their Passover lamb, He came as the true Passover lamb. He died on the very day the Passover lambs were slaughtered. Every single detail was covered. And it was all accomplished by the free choice of evil men and demons. But even that was the work of God.Acts 4:27-28 says, "Against thy holy child, Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the nations, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." With their own independent choices and within the framework of their sin, they all did what God laid out for them to do. As Psalm 76:10 says, "Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee."

REVIEW

In the burial of Christ we see the providence of God at work. And He accomplishes his will through three groups of people.

I. JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA (vv. 57-60)

Joseph was the man God used to fulfill two prophecies: that He would be with a rich man in his death (Isa. 53:9) and that He would be three days in the earth before His resurrection (Matt. 12:40).

II. THE TWO MARYS (v. 61)

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph were used by God to affirm the deity of Christ by giving testimony of the evidence of the resurrection.

LESSON

III. THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE PHARISEES (vv. 62-66)

A. The Context of the Scene (v. 62)

1. An important day (v. 62a)

"Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation."

That's a roundabout way of saying it was the Sabbath. The day of preparation was always Friday. All the meal planning had to be done in advance because the people weren't allowed to do any work on the Sabbath. This particular Sabbath was special--it was a Passover Sabbath, the holiest day of all in the Jewish calendar.

2. An uncommon alliance (v. 62b)

"The chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate."

The chief priests and Pharisees represent the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling body in Israel. The chief priests were Sadducees, and the Sadducees and Pharisees were theological enemies who had little to do with one another--except on one other occasion (Matt. 21:45-46). The one thing they could agree on was the need to eliminate Jesus Christ. Yet it wasn't enough for Him to be dead; they were afraid of one more thing. So they formed a contingent to meet with Pilate.

The phrase "came together unto Pilate" means they probably went into the praetorium or palace. The day before when they brought Jesus to Pilate, they sent Jesus in alone. They didn't accompany Him because they didn't want to be defiled for the Passover by entering a Gentile dwelling (John 18:28). Apparently this was a clandestine visit. As long as there was no one to see that the leaders were violating their own rules, they went right in. They also were on an important mission from their standpoint, so they weren't concerned about legalism. Murderers don't hold a high priority for ceremony. They hated Jesus more than they loved their own law, so they violated it.

B. The Command of the Leaders (vv. 63-64)

1. Subvert a prophetic claim (v. 63)

"Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again."

a) The leaders' contempt They referred to Jesus as "that deceiver." The pronoun translated "that" indicates their desire to keep Him far removed from them. Then they called Him a "deceiver"--a seducer of the people. They held Christ in great contempt. Their hatred extended even beyond His death. b) The leaders' concern The chief priests and Pharisees were concerned about Christ's claim that He would rise again after three days. He gave them that prophecy after certain scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign (Matt. 12:38). Jesus replied, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet, Jonah; for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (vv. 39-40). They understood what He meant. Jonah went into the fish and then came out. They understood Jesus to say He would be buried and then rise again. Even the disciples didn't understand that much--they thought He was talking figuratively. They didn't realize He was speaking of His literal death and resurrection (John 20:9). Nevertheless, the Jewish leaders wanted to prevent any rumors of resurrection from springing up.

2. Eliminate a potential fabrication (v. 64a)

"Command, therefore, that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead."

The Jewish leaders were still giving orders to Pilate. He continued to be intimidated by his fear of their reporting him to Caesar in the case of another conflict. The leaders weren't afraid Christ would rise; they were afraid the disciples would fabricate a resurrection to keep the movement alive. The irony is that the disciples had no such thought. They were afraid to do anything, let alone recognize the importance of the resurrection of Christ to their movement.

Jesus' Teaching about the Resurrection in the Gospel of Mark

Jesus taught the disciples about His resurrection many times. He taught them in Matthew 16:21, 17:23, and 20:19. Mark records numerous occasions when He taught His disciples this fundamental truth.

1. Mark 8:31--"He began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and by the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." Amazingly enough, Peter then rebuked Him (v. 32).

2. Mark 9:9-10--"As they came down from the mountain [after the transfiguration], he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying to themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean." The disciples couldn't handle that teaching because they couldn't believe He would ever die.

3. Mark 9:31-32--"He taught his disciples and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him."

4. Mark 10:33--Jesus said, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver

him to the Gentiles. And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him; and the third day he shall rise again."

The disciples still didn't understand His teaching. John 20:9 says that after Peter and John saw the empty tomb, "as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead."

3. Avoid a permanent deception (v. 64b)

"The last error shall be worse than the first."

They considered the first error to be Jesus' triumphal entry. Jesus came riding into the city on a colt, fulfilling prophecy (Matt. 21:2-5; Zech. 9:9). The people laid out their garments and branches before Him (v. 8). As Jesus rode into the city, the people cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest" (v. 9)! They showered on Jesus all the messianic accolades. The Jewish leaders saw that as a tremendous deception. The whole city went out to Jesus, thinking He was the Messiah.

The leaders threatened Pilate that if the first deception caused such an uproar, there would be even greater problems if the disciples were able to fabricate Christ's resurrection. That's why they commanded Pilate to put a guard around the tomb to prevent the disciples from stealing the body.

C. The Complacency of Pilate (v. 65)

"Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch [or, "Take a watch"] go your way, make it as sure as you can."

He gave them a Roman guard. Pilate wanted only to brush this problem away. He had had enough of their commands by now.

D. The Consequence of Providence (v. 66)

"So they went, and made the sepulcher secure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch."

Sealing the stone doesn't mean they sealed it with glue. They probably put some wax on the stone and on the wall of the cave, and then ran some string through the wax. If anyone moved the stone, they would have to break the string. Thus the Romans would have known if the tomb had been tampered with. The wax itself may have been stamped with a Roman imprimatur so that the offender would know he was violating Roman law. Additionally a group of Roman soldiers were set as a guard in front of the grave. The tomb was very secure.

There are people today who believe that the disciples stole the body of Christ. But Matthew 27:66 proves they didn't. God made sure that a group of Christ's enemies made the grave secure. There was no way the disciples or anyone else could have stolen Christ's body. The only way Christ could have come out of the grave was by the resurrection. Once again God used the wrath of men to praise Him.

If there had been no guard to watch the tomb and no seal set on it, we would have great difficulty in preaching a message that Jesus rose from the dead without someone claiming it never happened. They could get away with saying that the disciples took His body, and that someone took on Christ's identity and made a few appearances. But the unbelieving world itself made sure that there's no other possible explanation for the missing body of Jesus Christ other than the resurrection. Later, in Matthew 28:11-15, the guards were bribed to deny the resurrection--another testimony to its reality.

CONCLUSION

God used Joseph of Arimathea to fulfill prophecy. He used the two Marys to give first-hand testimony to the empty tomb, evidence of the resurrection. And He used the chief priests and Pharisees to give forceful proof that Jesus indeed rose from the dead.

How does all that remarkable display of God's providence relate to you and me? Romans 8:28 says, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." All things are controlled by God to work together to fulfill His eternal purpose for His own beloved children. The doctrine of God's sovereignty and providence is not just

for theologians. When you can't explain the trouble you're experiencing, you need to understand the providential power of a sovereign God who controls everything in the universe for your good and His glory. Remember that He demonstrated His ability to do that in the death and burial of Jesus Christ. Everything that happens in your life--including trials--somehow fits into the plan of God. He is in control. He hasn't abandoned His throne. Our hope and confidence is in God, who providentially, and if need be miraculously, controls all things for His own eternal purposes.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is one of the most essential attributes of God?
2. What are some of the things Scripture teaches about that attribute?
3. Cite some examples of how God intervened through miracles.
4. What is the other method God uses to accomplish His will in the world?
5. What are some of the things God uses to meet His desires?
6. Cite some Scriptures that reveal how God uses men to fulfill His plans.
7. Explain how God used Joseph to preserve the twelve tribes of Israel.
8. Explain how God directed circumstances to put Ruth, a Moabite, into the Messianic line.
9. Explain how God used Esther to prevent the annihilation of the Jewish race.
10. What does Acts 4:27-28 teach about God's involvement in the death of Jesus Christ?
11. Why did the chief priests and Pharisees form an alliance to visit Pilate?
12. What concerned the chief priest and Pharisees about Christ's claim that He would rise the third day?
13. What did Jesus teach about His resurrection?
14. What was the first error the Jewish leaders believed Jesus had perpetrated on the people?
15. What is significant about the fact that Christ's enemies set a seal on His tomb and placed a guard in front of it?

Pondering the Principles

1. We saw how God providentially led Joseph, Ruth, and Esther to accomplish great things in His eternal plan (see pp. 5-7). Look back on your life both before you were a believer and after. Make a list of the things God did providentially to lead you to Christ. Then make another list of the things God has done to bring you to where you are now in your Christian life. Thank God for how He has led you in the past. Glorify Him as a result of His faithfulness to you.
2. Read Romans 8:28. As a result of this study, how do you plan to view the present and future circumstances you find yourself in? How will you respond when others make decisions that effect your life, whether good or bad? Remember to fulfill a key phrase in Romans 8:28, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (NASB, emphasis added).

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