



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Searching the Scriptures without some reliable, biblical convictions is like setting out into open seas in a sailboat without a rudder. There's no way to guarantee you're on a correct heading. That's why sound theological convictions are essential for every Bible student to maintain in order to help steer them through difficult and confusing passages of Scripture. One of those theological convictions is the truth that God is sovereign—perfectly in control of every aspect of all of our lives and the universe in which we live. Not only is a firm grasp of God's sovereignty a reliable compass for navigating unknown straits of Scripture, it also proves a comforting doctrine in difficult times. Let's see why this is true in today's study from the holiday series *The Greatest Words*.



Getting Started: The King Learns a Lesson on God's Sovereignty

When searching the Scriptures, a helpful first step is to gather resources that will guide you in your study. For the individual messages in this series, we recommend you have a good Bible dictionary and theological commentary for both the Old Testament and New Testament as well as a theological dictionary and a Bible atlas. For each passage discussed, you will want to read and study what has been written about context, significant words, and the overall meaning of the passage.

Though in this message we will ultimately be looking closely at Romans 11:33–36, we turn first to a story in the Old Testament book of Daniel. Take some time to read through Daniel 4. Reading the entire chapter will help you become familiar with the setting.

Daniel is one of the Prophetic Books in the Old Testament. This grand book of prophecy tells the story of Daniel who had been taken captive from Judah and brought into exile in Babylon in approximately 605 BC. Because of Daniel's remarkable faithfulness to the Lord God and on account of Daniel's vibrant witness in words and deeds, the national leadership of the time was greatly impacted.

Locate a Bible atlas and find a map that depicts the region of Babylon during Old Testament times. You might find it on a map titled *World of the Patriarchs*

Quotable

In 1961, I came to terms with the fact that God isn't almost sovereign. He isn't partially in control. He is ever-present, ever-aware, and fully at work in my life and in the life of every other individual. I came to terms with the fact that God is in charge.

— Charles R. Swindoll



or something similar. Once you locate the map, trace your finger from the eastern shore of Mediterranean Sea straight east, across the Arabian Desert. You will find an area labeled Babylonia. Now locate a map that might be labeled *Assyrian and Babylonian Empires*. Take a few minutes to compare the two maps. Pay close attention to the boundaries. In the year 600 BC, for instance, how far does the Babylonian Empire stretch to the west? How much of what is known today as Israel would have been under Babylonian rule? What other observations can you make from these maps?

What kind of climate do you think would have been experienced during Daniel's years in Babylon? Why?

Now look up *Babylon* or *Babylonian Empire* in your Bible dictionary. What interesting facts do you discover about what life would have been like in that area during Daniel's story?

This would be a good time to consult a theological dictionary—a scholarly volume that defines theological terms and concepts that weigh in on Scripture. Also included are biblical references that serve as examples of those themes.

Look up *God's Sovereignty* in a theological dictionary (we recommend *The Concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell), and read through the information. You might even take time to look up and read the various Bible references that are included with that entry. Make some notes below on what you discover.



Now that you've done some preliminary spade work, it's time to dig a bit deeper into the passages discussed in today's lesson.



Your Turn in the Scriptures

Find Daniel 4:34–37, and read through those few verses carefully and thoughtfully. Based on these verses, what do you know about King Nebuchadnezzar? What experience had he just been delivered from (4:28–33)?

After reading this section of Daniel 4, circle the phrase below that best describes what the king is offering:

- A historical record of the events
- A summary of his dreams
- An edict for all the people to obey
- His personal testimony of faith

Explain why you circled the option you did. Make sure you use evidence from the passage to support your response.

As a ruler of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar once considered himself sovereign over all the earth. How do you think his view of sovereignty changed?



THE GREATEST WORDS

Life's Greatest Comfort

Romans 11:33–36

How might you use this intriguing Old Testament story to explain the doctrine of God's sovereignty to an unbeliever? How about to a small group of elementary-age children?

All of the major theological doctrines expressed in the Old Testament find support in the pages of the New Testament. Romans 11 offers a stirring expression of the doctrine of God's sovereignty that Babylon's ancient king gave witness to nearly a thousand years before Christ.

Turn to Romans 11:33–36. Take a few minutes to read these few verses aloud, reading as if for the very first time. What is your first impression of Paul's words?

What kind of expression would you say this is? A prayer? An expression of praise? A declaration? Explain your answer based on the text.

Write down a few ways in which Paul's words are echoes of what Nebuchadnezzar uttered in Daniel 4. (Remember: *Correlation* is an important part of the searching the Scriptures process, showing how one passage of Scripture compares to and supports another.)



THE GREATEST WORDS

Life's Greatest Comfort

Romans 11:33–36

In the space below, list any attributes of God that you find embedded in Paul's words. Hint: *Sovereignty* is one of them.

Now turn to 1 Corinthians 15:24–28. In this section of Paul's letter to the Corinthian church, the doctrine of God's sovereignty is also on display. How do Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15 compare to his expression in Romans 11? How are they different?

Using the words below that are not in any order, based on 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, arrange the words in order from top to bottom, with the top name being the most sovereign and in authority.

Humankind

Every ruler and authority

All things everywhere

Jesus Christ

God the Father

Finding Yourself in the Story

Placing yourself in the story of Scripture helps you to apply to your own life what you have learned as well as to illustrate to those with whom you are communicating just how important the lessons are to embrace. In what ways are you able to relate to Nebuchadnezzar's story in Daniel 4? Be as specific and transparent as you possibly can in your response.



THE GREATEST WORDS

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Romans 11:33–36

Now read again Paul's *doxology* (word of praise) in Romans 11:33–36. Thinking about what you have experienced in your own relationship with the Lord and using Paul's words as a model, write out your own personal doxology to the Lord, giving witness to your commitment to His sovereign rule in your life.



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord, thank You for Your living Word, which has made known to me Your sovereign goodness and power. May I represent You in all my ways, through Christ my Lord, amen.



THE GREATEST WORDS

Life's Greatest Comfort

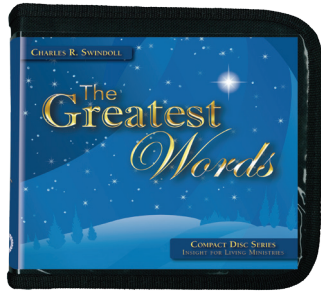
Romans 11:33–36

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



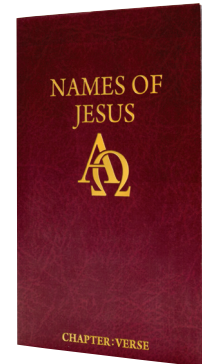
Tools for Digging Deeper



The Greatest Words
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD series



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For the 2016 broadcast, this Searching the Scriptures study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Charles R. Swindoll based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts.



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