



Is God Really in Charge of Everything?

by A. Koshy Muthalaly

Human suffering has a way of turning our thoughts toward God. When things don't go our way, we often wonder, "Is God really in charge of everything? If he is, then why doesn't he do something? We want some answers now!" When a loved one dies in a tragic accident, we look to a seemingly elusive God for answers. We wonder where he is when we need him most. The world cannot easily forget what happened in New York on September 11, 2001. Deep in our hearts, we asked where God was at that time. If God is really in charge of this world, why did he not prevent that attack? If he were truly powerful, then he would do something . . . fast! The implication here, though false, is that he is not as powerful as he claims.

The Bible shows us, however, a God who is active among his people. The word *Jehovah* implies a God who is involved and active. He is the ever-present God, who fights for his people against all who would attempt to usurp his authority. The Old Testament chronicles the actions of a God who stands up for his people against the rest of the world. Whenever Israel was attacked, God came to their rescue. Of course, at times God stepped back and let them be defeated because they were not obedient to him.

So how, then, can we view suffering from God's perspective?

God's Ways Are Not Our Ways

When a family grieves because their child is born handicapped or when a deserving young man does not get the job he wanted so badly, we wonder what God is doing. We ask why he does not step in, wave his hand, and transform things in an instant. (For example, see Naaman's desperation at God's seeming inactivity in 2 Kings 5:11.)

The truth is that God is very patient, and he is completely in control of every situation. He is truly God. Terrorists and other evildoers can never take that away from him. The word the Bible uses to describe God is *sovereign*. This is indicative of absolute power in all situations, even during the times we think God is not doing anything.

Elijah knew his God was an active God. He taunted the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:27, for their god did not and could not answer their pleas. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a God who always listens to the prayers of his people, but his ways are not our ways. So when answers do not come as we expect, we are to submit to whatever alternative he has for us; he knows what is best. Often it seems to us that the Lord works slowly, but he is always working thoroughly, with our best interests at heart. He sees the larger picture, which is not available to us. When God seems most silent, he is actually at work putting people and resources in place to make his next move.

In the story of Esther, we see God allowing the enemies of the Jews to carry out their plans to hurt God's people; it seems as if God is doing nothing to protect his people. Then Esther and Mordecai come on the scene in God's timing and things start to change. We must learn to wait for God's perfect timing and work with him.

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in absolute control of everything, we must remember
that God has a specific plan for his children.**

God Is a Just God

The very nature of God is justice, and he cannot and will not contradict that. When we ask whether God is really in charge of everything, we must look at it through the lens of God's justice. In the story of our Scripture text, we see that Haman was punished and Mordecai and Esther were ultimately elevated to places of honor. God is just, and his justice will reign in the end, for God always vindicates his people.

Because he is just, God's justice will always be carried out—even when we think he is inactive. When we begin to question whether God is truly in charge of everything that happens, we can gain encouragement from the examples of courageous people in the Bible.

When Abraham was asked to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, even in light of God's promise that he would make Abraham a great nation, he trusted God. Today, Israel is on the map of the world for all to see. Christian history hinges on what happened in Israel and the fulfillment of God's prophecies. When Jonah obeyed God and preached to the people of Nineveh, they repented—contrary to Jonah's preferences—and God offered them his grace. We see examples of God's judgment in the Old Testament, where the enemies of God's people were punished. The Philistines, at the time of Samson, are one instance of this.

God is truly a just God, and those who turn to him will be restored. Those who fight against him will be destroyed.

God Always Has a Plan

When we lose sight of the fact that God is in absolute control of everything, we must remember that God has a specific plan for his children. We are not here by accident. We are here by the very specific design of God. God reminded Jeremiah that he was in his mind even before he was born (Jer. 1:5), and he was set apart for the prophetic ministry long before he saw the light of day.

The Jews at the time of King Xerxes were going through a time of suffering, and God knew exactly where they were in his plan. When we suffer, he knows exactly when to step in and deliver us. We have the promises of God to back that up (see Ps. 34 for encouragement in this area). In Esther 9, we see the Jews' sorrow being turned to joy as they experienced victory. God's plan came to pass in the end.

You and I have been set on a course on this planet to serve God in specific areas at divinely appointed, specific times. When we contradict God's plans, we go astray and God will not bless us. Even our times of temptation and suffering are known to him. He knows how much we can handle, and then God shows his face and we begin to know the joy of his presence.

God Is in Absolute Control

God is a perfect gentleman, if you'll pardon the mortal analogy. Even though he is in charge, he waits for our cooperation with his plans. In Scripture, we see God in complete control of everything. Nothing baffles God, for he is always in charge. The psalmist David reminds us, "The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever" (Ps. 29:10). No matter what happens, God is not overwhelmed, for he is still on the throne. However, if we do not cooperate with his

plans, we suffer the consequences. This brings us to the polarization between God's absolute control and our autonomy.

We have to understand the dichotomy between God's sovereignty and our freedom. Though God is in charge, he does not override our freedom to make choices. God's best for us comes when we are subject to his perfect plans. Ultimately, God's sovereignty will win. We would do well to fit in with his special design for our lives, but he will never force this upon us. We have his manual, the Bible, to guide us into all truth.

In the story of Esther, we see that in order for the Jews to have God's best, Esther had to make the right choice to go into the presence of the king and risk her life. We know the end of the story and how that choice affected God's people for good. If Esther had disobeyed, God may have sent someone else to fill her place. God does not recruit people against their will.

Jeremiah 17:10 gives us deep insight into the ways of God and his absolute control. "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve." He is truly in charge. Good or bad, we can be sure God will give us our just rewards in the end. Thank God for his gifts of grace and mercy that preserve us from getting all the punishment we deserve!

God Understands Suffering

When tragedy falls in our laps, or our hearts are full of unanswered questions, we can find freedom in the God we serve. Not only is he sovereign, just, and in complete control, but also his Son suffered while on earth. He felt every jab, every insult. God understands the human condition—better than any of us ever could. We can trust him in the suffering because his sacrifice conquered every evil, both now and in the future, for "he has put everything under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:27).

Questions for Reflection

1. Think of one situation when you thought God was not doing anything, but it worked out anyway. What do you think God was doing all that time? Was he in control? If so, how?
2. What should our attitude as Christians be when our enemies seem to be doing well and prospering and we seem to be getting a "raw deal"?
3. Think of an example in your life when God turned the tables, as he did when he blessed Mordecai and sent Haman to the gallows Haman had prepared for Mordecai.
4. If God rewards us according to our motives (Jer. 17:10), what specific steps should you take to fear God and live for him?
5. How does God's justice come into play in your life? Think of examples.
6. "[Jesus] is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). How does this verse apply to you today? ●



Continue learning about and praising the Lord at home with your family. Here's an idea how to do that.

JUST DESERTS

Watch an age-appropriate movie where the villain gets their just deserts. Some examples include *Cinderella*, *The Incredibles*, *Monsters, Inc.*, or *The Wizard of Oz*.

Discuss with your kids how God humbles those who try to build themselves up and builds up those who humble themselves. ●



WORDS

from Wesley



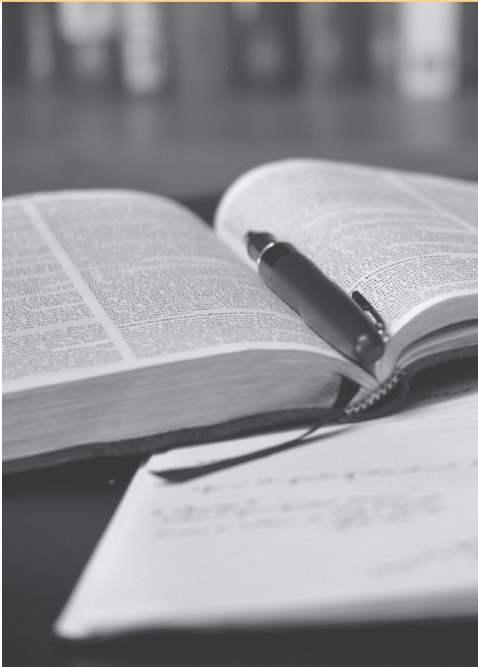
Esther 6:10

How mean the gifts which earthly kings
On favourites bestow,
What childish toys the noblest things
And most esteem'd below!
But whom the King of kings delights
To honour as His son,
He to an heavenly feast invites,
And places on His throne. (vol. 9, 229)

(*The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*. Edited by D. D. G. Osborn. 13 vols. London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1868.)



THROUGH THE BIBLE IN A YEAR



Monday
March 2 *Luke 10–11*

Tuesday
March 3 *Luke 12–13*

Wednesday
March 4 *Luke 14–16*

Thursday
March 5 *Luke 17–18*

Friday
March 6 *Luke 19–20*

Saturday
March 7 *Luke 21–22*

Sunday
March 8 *Luke 23–24*



SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY



God's Plan Always Prevails

GOD HONORS RIGHTEOUSNESS AND FAITHFULNESS

Esther 6:1-10; 7:1-10; 10:3

God honors our efforts to cooperate with his plans for good.

INTO THE SUBJECT

See how God intervened in history to turn the tables on Haman. Watch for evidence that God's rule is greater than that of any earthly king.

INTO THE WORD

1. How has this Old Testament book shown God's hand in the lives of his people?
2. How did God use Xerxes' sleepless night to awaken him to the honor he owed Mordecai?
3. What had Haman wrongly concluded?
4. How do you think Haman felt when the king ordered him to honor Mordecai?
5. What do you think of the saying, "What goes around comes around"? Would you apply the saying to Haman? Why or why not?
6. How did Xerxes counteract his decree against the Jews?
7. What is the significance of the Feast of Purim?
8. How has God turned the tables on someone who opposed you because of your faith?

INTO THE WORLD

Project an attitude that tells others you believe God is in control of your life and will never fail you.

A VOICE OF SILENCE

*Mordecai . . . worked for the good of his people and spoke up
for the welfare of all the Jews. (Est. 10:3)*

On a cold April night, the *Titanic* made its way across the North Atlantic. As the ship drew closer to North America, ice warnings began pouring in from multiple ships. The last warning message came from the *SS Californian* at 10:55 p.m., who reported that they were “stopped . . . surrounded by ice.” The *Californian’s* message, along with others, never reached the *Titanic’s* bridge. Then forty minutes later screams from the crow’s nest were heard, warning that there was an iceberg ahead. However, it was too late, as the *Titanic* collided with the iceberg that caused her to sink in less than three hours.

Unlike the messages that never reached the *Titanic’s* bridge, Mordecai passed on the message he heard that threatened King Xerxes’ life. His actions not only saved the life of King Xerxes but also led to the salvation of an entire people group. Ultimately, he became their spokesperson within the king’s administration. The twenty-first century has provided us many different communication platforms. These platforms are powerful and offer us a tremendous opportunity to make our voices heard. And it is with our voices that we can either tear others down or build them up. Let us choose to use our voices to build one another up. As it says in Ephesians 4:29, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up.”

—T. J. Albertson

Esther 6:1–10; 7:1–10; 10:3

Encourage someone with your words.

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Published by Wesleyan Publishing House.
For more information,
call 1-800-493-7539, or go
online to wphstore.com.

ISBN: 978-1-63257-644-6



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