



ESTHER

WEEK 2:

God in Control When We Are Not

REVIEW: Esther is a story of God's grace in the Old Testament.

God's Power and Involvement in the World.

Omnipotent -

The Sovereignty of God

The Sovereignty of God is the teaching that God as the Creator and Lord over all things is the supreme authority and has the power and right to do as he wishes with all things. Psalm 115:3 says, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him." Daniel 4:34-35 says, The Most High "does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand " or call him to account for his actions.

Foreordination

Foreordination means that God not only knows the future but has planned out and decreed everything. Acts 4:27-28 says, they "gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Providence

Providence is God's generous provision for his people and creatures through sovereignly appointed means. The root word is 'provide.' It means "to supply what is needed; to give sustenance or support."

In the Esther narrative, as in all of history, God's providence is carried out through a string of second causes. A "second cause" is an act or decision performed by an individual. Central to the understanding of second causes is that the decisions people make are NOT made by divine compulsion (from the outside). The decisions made by people are decisions which are agreeable to their nature, character and wishes. Second causes brought Esther to the throne. Her selection was NOT like a lottery. Her advancement to the position of queen depended upon second causes -- *her submission, her beauty, her wisdom, her teachability, her grace and her purity were all involved.*

God normally accomplishes His providence through the use of ordinary means (the exception would be when He works above ordinary means by the supernatural and miraculous – God's direct working through the miraculous falls under the category of first cause). *The Book Of Esther: A Display Of God's Providence*

What kinds of things does God control?

Matthew 10:29 - Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

Proverbs 21:1 - The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

John Piper: Sometimes we need to be reminded by God himself that there are no limits to his rule. We need to hear from him that he is sovereign over the whole world, and everything that happens in it. We need his own reminder that he is never helpless, never frustrated, never at a loss. We need his assurance that he reigns over ISIS, terrorism, Syria, Russia, China, India, Nigeria, France, Myanmar, Saudi Arabia, and the United States of America — every nation, every people, every language, every tribe, every chief, president, king, premier, prime minister, and politician, great or small.

Genesis 50 - As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

John Newton: “To those who seek Him, His sovereignty is exercised in a way of grace. All shall work together for good; everything is needful that He sends; nothing can be needful that He withholds.”

Acts 2:24 – This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge and you with the help of wicked men put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Acts 17 – He determined the Times set for us and the exact places where we should live.

“Nothing whatever, whether great or small, can happen to a believer without God’s ordering and permission. There is no such thing as “chance,” “luck” or “accident” in the Christian’s journey through this world. All is arranged and appointed by God. And all things are “working together” for the believer’s good.” J.C. Ryle

And even the casting of the lot: Proverbs 16:33 - The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

John Piper: Has God predetermined every tiny detail in the universe, such as dust particles in the air and all of our besetting sins?

Yes.

There's a great quote from Spurgeon about dust motes. You may not even know what a dust mote is, but when I get up in the morning in my room, there's a window to the side of the bed, and a beam of light will be shining through it at certain times of the year when I get it.

Now when I look through the dark I see nothing. But when I look through the beam I see the dust in the room. It's flying around, and I say, "I'm breathing that stuff!?" Yes, you are. And Spurgeon says that every one of those particles is keeping its position and moving through the air by God's appointment.

Now the reason I believe that is because the Bible says, "The dice are thrown in the lap, and every decision is from the Lord" (Proverbs 16:33). Proverbs 16 has a bunch of these verses in it.

Why would he choose "the die is cast into the lap"? It's because he's trying to think of the most random thing he could think of. And he says that. So randomness is not random to God.

God is not the least taxed by keeping every sub-nuclear particle in its place. I used to say electrons, but now there's something smaller than electrons. Everything in the middle of the molecule moving, and the electrons—he's got them all in orbit, just like he has the planets in orbit.

So the macro-world and micro-world are all managed by God. Which means, Yes, every horrible thing and every sinful thing is ultimately governed by God.

Esther and the Silent Sovereignty of God

“The book of Esther tells the story of God’s providential protection of his people during a bleak moment in the Persian Empire, thus preserving them for the future gift of the Messiah.” — *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart

(T)hat we cannot see God working doesn't mean he isn't at work. He is busily occupied throughout the Book of Esther as the unseen director of history, arranging all things for the good of his people. (In chapter 1) Esther and Mordecai have not yet even made an appearance on stage, but events are still moving according to God's good pleasure. Why did Vashti throw away her position and privilege for a noble but predictably futile gesture? Why did Ahasuerus make his foolish demand in the first place? Who came up with the idea of replacing Vashti with a better woman, instead of quietly resolving the offense Ahasuerus had caused? All of these events are on one level entirely explicable as normal human events, with no miraculous component. Yet all of them are necessary to make way for the process by which Esther will rise to the position where she can use her Power and influence to protect God's people against a powerful enemy. Coincidences? By no means. Rather, they are the hand of God at work in a different mode from that seen elsewhere in the Bible. *Esther & Ruth*, Reformed Expository Commentary Iain M. Duguid:

“The theology of the book of Esther: A hidden force arranges events in such a way that even against the most daunting odds the Jews are protected and delivered. The hiddenness of the force is an essential part of this theology” (1997: 21). J. D. Levinson Commentary

God is not directly mentioned.

One of the key features of Esther is the absence of any direct reference to God. There are no statements about God here. No theology. No comfort. No memory verses. No life verses. No burning bushes or anything else. There is nothing spectacular. No column of fire or smoke. There was not violent showdown with pagan prophets. There was no external verifiable miracle. We do not see God clearly show up in any verse in Esther.

God is nowhere to be seen in this chapter. Nor in this book. Yet he shows himself to be the one in control for the benefit of his people, in ways none of us would expect.

“God is present even when he’s most absent; when there are no miracles, dreams or visions, no charismatic leaders, no prophets to interpret what is happening, and not even any explicit God-talk. And he is present as deliver. Those whom he saved by signs and wonders at the exodus he continues to save through his hidden, providential control of their history. His people are never simply at the mercy of blind fate or of malign powers, whether human or supernatural.” *Five Festal Garments*, Barry Webb

The providence of God and Esther examples

How to Read the Bible Book by Book: **What the unschooled reader might regard as “just happening” is to be recognized instead as God’s own sovereignty lying behind.**

Consider the following occurrences which at face value appear to be inconsequential:

- 1:10 - Ahasuerus’s drunken request
- 1:12 - Vashti refuses to be “displayed” at the banquet.
- 2:1-4 - The roundup of women
- 2:7 - Esther is an orphan being raised by her uncle.
- 2:7 - The Beauty of Esther
- 2:17 – Ahasuerus was attracted to Esther and chose her as queen (2:15–18),
- 2:10 - Esther told to conceal race, religion, no dietary laws unlike Daniel and his friends
- 3:19-23 - Mordecai “by chance” discovers a treasonous plot to kill the king. 3:1-3 – Haman’s roll of the dice placed the date of execution a year away
- 4:11; 5:1-2 - after a three-day fast Esther receives the gold scepter when she approaches the king
- 5:14 - Haman listens to the counsel of his wife and friends on how he may vindicate his honor.
- 6:1-3 - Kings insomnia a night before Haman’s request to have Mordecai executed.
- 6:1-3 - The king tries to deal with his insomnia by reading the court minutes, in which he discovers that he had failed to honor Mordecai
- 6:2 - The scribe was reading from the annals that recorded events five years earlier
- 5:14 - Haman’s preparations in the early hours of the morning
- 6:4 – Haman’s sudden entry into the outer court
- 6:6 – Haman’s assumption that he was the man the king wished to honor
- 6:6 – Haman decides how to reward Mordecai
- 7:8 – Kings’ return just as Haman is falling on Esther’s couch

Can you trust God? How can you trust God?

This is the way to deal with our fears, confusion, and pain.

1. Our Fear of the Future.

“And your peace does not depend upon any change of circumstance which may appear desirable, but in having your will bowed to the Lord’s will, and made willing to submit all to His disposal and management. Pray for this, and wait patiently for Him, and He will do it. Be not surprised to find yourself poor, helpless, and vile; all whom He favours and teaches will find themselves so. The more grace increases, the more we shall see to abase us in our own eyes; and this will make the Saviour and His salvation more precious to us. He takes His own wise methods to humble you, and to prove you, and I am sure He will do you good in the end.” John Newton

2. Our Deep Confusion: Why doesn’t God?

Jerry Bridges: **“In adversity we tend to doubt God’s fatherly care, but in prosperity, we tend to forget it. If we are to trust God, we must acknowledge our dependence upon him at all times, good times as well as bad times.”**

I think I can feel for my friends; but for such as I hope have a right to that promise, that all things shall work together for their good, I soon check my solicitude, and ask myself, Do I love them better, or could I manage more wisely for them, than the Lord does? Can I wish them to be in safer or more compassionate hands than in His? Will He who delights in the prosperity of His servants afflict them with sickness, losses, and alarms, except He sees there is need of these things? John Newton

3. Being able to forgive and let go.

Only with the benefit of hindsight is it possible to see all the intricate details of God's plan working together for the good of his people. So also in our own lives, we may well have no idea what God is doing. He may seem hidden and remote, refusing to answer our prayers and to give us what we so earnestly ask of him. Wait! The end of our story has not yet been told, and who knows how the pieces of the jigsaw that at present seem to have no logical connection with one another will ultimately come together? Even though we cannot see God acting, it does not follow that he is not doing anything. God's work is not all slam-bang action; sometimes it is a quiet faithfulness to his promises in the seemingly ordinary providences of life, bringing about in the hearts of his people what he has purposed.

It is only when you reach the very bottom, when everything falls apart, when all your schemes and resources are broken and exhausted, that you are finally open to learning how to completely depend on God. As is often said, you never realize that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have. You must lose your life to find your life (Matthew 10: 39). Tim Keller

For Homework: Read Psalm 139. In what ways does this psalm encourage you that God loves you, is with you, and has a plan for your life?

How does finding your story within the larger context of God's promised grace in the gospel help you heal from past hardship? Help you face current difficulty?

How prone are you to feel that God must be absent because things are not going according to your plan?

In what circumstances are you most likely to feel abandoned by God? Why are you prone to think that way in that circumstance? What truth of God speaks directly to that feeling of abandonment?

How does the story of Esther enable you to persevere in trusting God even when life is difficult?