

# God Is in Control

by Lehman Strauss

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*God is in control of all events, and He uses suffering to teach us valuable lessons and to bring us closer to Him.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 18:25

**Topics:** "Gods Sovereignty", "Divine Providence"

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## Description

Lehman Strauss preaches about God's sovereignty as the creator and controller of the universe, emphasizing that His choices are always right and that He is accountable only to Himself. Despite not always understanding the purpose of trials, believers are encouraged to trust that God loves them and is in control, capable of carrying out His plans flawlessly. The sermon delves into the concept of God's sovereignty as depicted in the Scriptures, highlighting His righteous rule over all nations and His involvement in every aspect of His creation, ensuring that nothing happens by chance. Through personal experiences and biblical examples, the message underscores the importance of surrendering to God's sovereign will, even in the midst of human suffering and affliction.

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## Transcript

God is the creator and controller of the universe and all that is in it, whether animate or inanimate. Any use or disposition He chooses to make of any part of His creation is His sovereign right. God is accountable only to Himself. He reports to nobody. He is not required at any time to give to any person any explanation for anything He says or does. He is the superpower above all powers in every area of His creation

We do not expect to understand fully the purpose for our trials until our Lord calls us home to be with Him. But we do know that He loves us too much to harm us, and that He is far more concerned with our welfare than we are. God's choices are always right. He is capable of carrying out any project to a successful conclusion without the possibility of fault or failure. Nothing in His universe happens by chance or accident. For every effect there is a cause. God "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:11-12). Yes, God is in control.

It was Wednesday, April 14, 1982. Eighteen days had passed since Elsie's stroke. The neurologist in charge requested that I meet with him. I waited expectantly in the corridor outside Elsie's room. When the doctor appeared his remarks were brief and pointed.

"We are making arrangements to move your wife to a rehabilitation center in San Diego."

"What led you to this decision?" I asked.

He hesitated. I detected a bit of concern in his delayed reply. I was right. His words came slowly.

"There is nothing more that we can do medically for Mrs. Strauss." He placed his hand on my shoulder and patted it gently. "I'm sorry," he said, and he walked away.

For a few seconds I stood motionless, my mind almost blank. Then I walked slowly into the room, kissed Elsie, and sat in the chair beside the bed.

She spoke first. "What did the doctor tell you?"

"He said that you will be transferred to a rehabilitation center in San Diego."

I took her hand in mine. Then I assured her that there was nothing to fear because God was in control.

But did I really believe that God was in control? The mere thought of questioning the sovereignty of God scared me. But then, the government of the universe is a question with which most of us have grappled at some time. We Christians affirm our belief in the sovereignty of God, but our faith is challenged in times of natural upheaval, national disaster, or personal affliction. Pain and poverty, disease and death, sorrow and suffering all tend to cause us to think seriously about God as creator and controller of the world of which we are a part. It is not always easy to believe that God is in control.

On that Wednesday in April 1982, my faith was being tested. At that particular moment my mind was not capable of rationalizing the majesty of God's sovereignty. When I was told the seriousness of Elsie's condition, I realized that some cherished plans would have to be canceled. Quite frankly, I could not understand God's reason for this turn of events. But I knew that the Bible contains all we poor mortals need to know. Our Lord said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). So I went immediately to the Scriptures for help.

### God's Sovereignty and the Scriptures

Although the words sovereign and sovereignty do not appear in the King James Version of the Bible, the fact of God's sovereignty is its major message.

The word sovereign comes from the Latin word *super*. It conveys the idea of superior and supreme, primary and paramount, unequalled and unexcelled. The God of the Bible is eternal and self-existent. He is supreme in excellence and perfect in all His ways. He is the one and only autonomist, self-contained and self-controlled, with the right and power of self-government. God is infinite in His imperial independence. His capacities and capabilities far surpass the scope of human reasons.

After Elsie had her stroke, someone sent her a book entitled *Yet Will I Trust Him* by Peg Rankin. The book is nontechnical and nontheological, but we found it to be practical and helpful. It contains this brief definition of God's sovereignty, "God can do anything He wants to do, anytime He wants to do it, anyway He wants to do it, and for any purpose He wants to accomplish." Any use or disposition God chooses to make of any part of His creation, animate or inanimate, is His sovereign right. When God revealed to Abraham that He would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, the patriarch knew that many people would die. To that frightening revelation Abraham said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25).

In addition to being sovereign, God is righteous. This means that He can do no wrong. If God could do wrong, He would cease to be God. When those two cities were destroyed, God was in control. He was doing what He wanted to do, when He wanted to do it, in the way He wanted to do it, and for the purpose He wanted to accomplish. And in so doing, He did right.

The book of Daniel was written to teach the sovereign rule of God over all nations on earth. Read these excerpts:

--to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men. (4:17)

--till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. (4:25)

--until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. (4:32)

And [Nebuchadnezzar] was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses; they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever He will. (5:21)

In each of the above passages the name "most High" or "most high God" is used. It is the Hebrew name El Elyon, and means "the possessor of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14:22). The Holy Spirit guided the writers of Scripture to state emphatically that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1; see also 1 Corinthians 10:26, 28). God sent the plagues upon the Egyptians so that the people would know "that the earth is the Lord's" (Exodus 9:29). The universe is God's by creative right. By Him were all things created and by Him all things consist (see Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:3).

The apostle declared that God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1:11). Civilizations have risen and fallen. Great leaders of nations have reigned and have been dethroned. And all the while, God has been in control. David prayed to the Lord, "Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all" (1 Chronicles 29:12). With the rise and fall of every world ruler, God has been in control. Yes, He has been doing what He wanted to do, when He wanted to do it, in the way He wanted to do it, for the purpose He wanted to accomplish, and using whomever He would.

Likewise, the book of Amos teaches the sovereign control of God over all the affairs in heaven and on earth. The nation of Israel had willfully disobeyed God. Divine judgment came to the people in several ways: war, drought, famine, and plagues of grasshoppers. Read chapter 4 carefully and note the seven times God said to Israel that He was responsible for every disaster that befell the nation. Observe the use of the first person singular: "I also have given you . . . want of bread" (v. 6); "I have withholden the rain from you" (v. 7); "I have smitten you with blasting and mildew" (v. 9); "I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt" (v. 10); "I have overthrown some of you" (v. 11). God here informed the nation that He was the motivating force behind disease, death, drought, and destruction.

Now look at Amos 3:6, where the prophet asked, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" The word evil here does not refer to moral evil, but rather a calamity. Through the prophet Isaiah, God said, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I, the Lord, do all these things"

(45:7). Again the word evil denotes any kind of a natural disaster such as a plague, drought, flood, or earthquake.

Both Amos and Isaiah are telling us that nothing happens by chance or accident. For every effect there is a cause. God does what He wants to do, when He wants to do it, in the way He wants to do it, for the purpose He wants to accomplish, and involves any person or persons He chooses to use.

The supreme rulership of God is based upon the perfections of His divine being. This is the biblical concept of God, and Christians need to believe it and hold fast to it. God is the supreme dispenser of all events. "He ruleth by His power for ever" (Psalm 66:7). He is "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15). Our loving Heavenly Father is the sovereign ruler over all His creation. He is in control. This is the plain teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

### God's Sovereignty and Human Suffering

I am learning that there is a large gap between studying truth intellectually and knowing that truth by personal experience. This fact was made real to me as I reviewed what the Bible teaches about the sovereignty of God. Quite frankly, I confess to having had a bit of a problem on the day of April 14, 1982.

This was my problem: How does a child of God reconcile God's sovereignty with human suffering and affliction? How does a Christian apply the sovereignty of God when his wife, whom he loves more than he loves his own life, lies helpless and suffering before him?

If someone had come to me on that day in April and said, "I would like to help you. What are your needs?" I wouldn't have had any answer. My mind was too boggled. I was hurting. I needed time for in-depth study and personal application of the truth of God's sovereignty.

Is it wrong for a minister and teacher of God's Word to be perplexed? Although most of us don't admit it, all of us at some time have been tempted to walk away from God. But when a hurting person takes his view of life from what he is experiencing, from what he sees and feels, that's one time when he needs to draw near to God. As the apostle James put it, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8). Asaph was perplexed by what he saw in life, but he came to the right conclusion when he said, "But it is good for me to draw near to God" (Psalm 73:28).

How do I draw near to God? I could pray. But at that moment I was affected emotionally to the point where I couldn't articulate an intelligent prayer. Then too, what could I tell God that He didn't already know? I needed to draw near to God, not to update Him on Elsie's condition and our needs. I needed to draw near so that He could speak to me and give me the assurance that He was in control. I had just told Elsie that God was in control. But at that moment, I was being controlled by an experience that perplexed me. So I drew near to God through His Word.

The prophet Isaiah wrote, "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction--" (Isaiah 30:20). Yes, God does send adversity and affliction to His own. They are His gifts to us, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Hebrews 12:6). This is a time of adversity and affliction for Elsie and me, but I will not dishonor the Lord by questioning His right to do what He wants to do.

I see no difference between a God who is not sovereign and no God at all. If I were to doubt now that the Lord of the Bible, the God and Father of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, is in control over our lives, I would be no better than an atheist.

David stood before the congregation and prayed aloud to God, "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 honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all" (1 Chronicles 29:11-12). Take special note of that word reignest. Because it is in the present continuous tense, it tells us that God is reigning now. At this very moment God is in control.

I am comforted with the assurance that my Lord has a good and wise purpose to be served through Elsie's affliction. Exactly what His purpose is in sending this trial into our lives I do not know at this time. Nor do I know if God will ever reveal His purpose to us in this life. The Lord said, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7). I do not want these words of our Lord to be lost on me as they were lost on Peter. One day Elsie and I will understand that which for the present is hidden from us. We can afford to wait. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then, face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Multitudes have suffered and died, and multitudes continue to suffer, without knowing the reason why. The Bible says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). This is God's promise that He will place a limit upon the severity of the trial and that He will give us sufficient strength to bear up under it.

We realize that we are not the only ones to suffer without knowing the reason. Job, for instance, who suffered great losses and bore heavy burdens, never did learn the reason the tragedies came into his life.

Recently, as I reread Psalm 119, I was greatly impressed and encouraged with David's personal testimony of the blessings he received from the afflictions he suffered.

First, he bore witness to the sovereignty of God when he was afflicted. He said, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness has afflicted me" (v. 75). Here we have a clear testimony, given by divine inspiration, that God in righteousness sent affliction into David's life and experience.

Second, David testified that affliction was a learning experience for him. He wrote, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (v. 71). Suffering is a required course in God's school, and it should be a great learning place for every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our trial has been for me an enriching experience. It has taught me some valuable lessons.

Third, David testified how his affliction benefited him spiritually. "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (v. 67). One of the proverbs reminds us that "whom the Lord loveth He correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth" (Proverbs 3:12). The New Testament adds witness to this fact with the words, "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6).

Yes, spiritual benefits are to be derived from trials and suffering. God has placed us on earth that we may glorify Him. "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Peter 4:16). The suffering season of life is a beautiful time to glorify God. It provides us with a fresh incentive to grow in grace and to develop spiritually.

Every afflicted Christian should bow to the absolute sovereignty of God and surrender to Him the right to do what He chooses to do, whenever He chooses to do it, in any way He chooses to do it, for any purpose He wants to accomplish, and to use any person He chooses.

He Maketh No Mistake

My Father's way may twist and turn,

My heart may throb and ache,

But in my soul I'm glad I know

He maketh no mistake.

My cherished plans may go astray,

My hopes may fade away,

But still I'll trust my Lord to lead,

For He doth know the way.

Though night be dark and it may seem

That day will never break,

I'll pin my faith, my all in Him,

He maketh no mistake.

There's so much now I cannot see,

My eyesight's far too dim;

But come what may, I'll surely trust

And leave it all to Him.

For by and by the mist will lift

And plain it all He'll make;

Through all the way, though dark to me,

He made not one mistake.

(A. M. Overton)

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