

Understanding God's sovereignty and how He influences earthly leaders

by Gigi Cook

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An old man recalls being a young voter, patriotic and passionate, empowered by virtuous ideals and honorable service to his country. Enduring election after election where "his candidate" losses, he becomes disillusioned and reluctantly concludes that his vote doesn't really count. Now, decades later, he sees his country and its leaders as hopelessly misdirected and corrupt. He scornfully watches the political process and in a silent bitterness wonders why God does not intervene.

Most Christians today believe God is the creator of and the supreme authority over the entire universe, yet struggle with how that sovereignty fits in with the six o'clock news. In a world with an abundant supply of dictators, despots and tyrants always twisting arms, buying elections and subjugating the innocent, how is it God can be on top of the perpetual impending disasters?

The apostle Paul, speaking of earthly rulers, declared, "For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." (Romans 13:1) Anyone who possesses any influence on Earth has it because God has granted it to him.

The Bible speaks directly regarding positions of authority and power on Earth. There is a specific structure and leadership He designed for the home, the church, and governments. Those He brings to power over others at home, in the church or through government are given a measure of divinely ordained authority as well as specific responsibility and accountability.

Historical accounts in the Old Testament reveal that God uses even pagan rulers as testimonies of His sovereign greatness and as agents of His will when it suits His purposes. Nebuchadnezzar, the notably proud king of Babylon, waged wars, conquered kingdoms and fed on the misguided worship of an enslaved nation. He reveled in the magnificence of his earthly power until God adjusted his perspective. The prophet Daniel was sent to show Nebuchadnezzar, "He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings." (Daniel 2:21) In a glorious display of God's sovereign authority, He allowed Nebuchadnezzar to completely lose his mind and be brought to the lowest state, one of an animal eating the grass, until the day he recognized "the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." (Daniel 4:25)

The New Testament has numerous examples of rulers whom God exalted or brought down. King Herod, who failed to acknowledge God in light of his position and achievements, allowed his subjects to refer to him as "the voice of a god, and not of a man!" (Acts 12:22) God's response was direct: "Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him...and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last." (Acts 12:23) While Herod was a charismatic man of influence, he was not out of God's jurisdiction.

Christ himself highlighted God's sovereignty and power over the government when shortly before his crucifixion Pilate questioned Him and He did not respond. Amazed that Jesus would not answer his questions, Pilate said, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" (John 19:10) Jesus replied, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above." (John 19:11) Knowing Pilate's compromising character, God had exalted him to fulfill His plan for the sacrifice of the cross.

Does God motivate corrupt rulers to wickedness? No...yet He permits shameless people to rule and at times uses their actions to achieve His divine purpose.

Some interpret God's rule over men and government as a reason to disengage from elections or neglect praying for governmental leaders. However, in both Old and New Testaments, God's people are admonished to pray for their nation's leaders.

If you are a registered voter, God has entrusted you with a level of authority and power to exercise in your town and country. Your challenge is to be a faithful steward of the position you have received and to exercise your influence with grace, faithfully praying for those in authority both in your private life and in your country.

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