Question #32: Summarize in your own words what these Scriptures teach about God.

Question #33: Describe your mental and emotional reaction to this teaching.

God’s Control of History
Not only does God control nature, but also the events of history. The Scripture plainly declares that God is the primary cause behind every historical occurrence.

*Lamentations 3:37-38:* 3Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it? 38Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?

*Isaiah 45:7:* The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.

Consider these words of Jonathan Edwards: “God decreed from all eternity all the evil that He ever does permit, because God’s permitting is God’s forbearing to act or to prevent. It can be made evident by reason that nothing can come to pass but what is the will and pleasure of God should come to pass.”

God’s control over the events of history is plainly evident in Scripture. The Bible consistently testifies to the fact that God is providentially working His will in all things to accomplish His purposes for the display of His own Glory, exalt His Name, and affirm His Power.

*Ephesians 1:9-11:* He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.

Many examples of God’s control over the events of history can be cited from the Old Testament. Here are just a few:

- The creation account (Genesis 1-2)
- The flood (Genesis 6-8)
- The confounding of human languages at Babel: (Genesis 11)
- The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: (Genesis 19)
- The plagues of Egypt: (Exodus 7-12)
- The Exodus, parting of the Red Sea, giving of manna and water from the rock: (Exodus 14-17)
- Giving of the Law at Sinai: (Exodus 19-20)
- Defeat of Sihon and Og: (Numbers 21)
- Conquest of Canaan: (Joshua)
- Numerous divine interventions: (Judges)
- Defeat of Sennacherib and 185,000 Assyrians: (2 Kings 19)

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Question #34: Read two or three of the passages referenced above. For each one that you read, describe how God’s control over the events of history is clearly affirmed.

The Old Testament is literally riddled with accounts of concurrence i.e., examples of God’s constant cooperation “with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do.” Scripture plainly declares that God: (1) controls the events of history to achieve His own purpose and will; and (2) exercises His providence over the nations themselves as well as the economic and religious systems of the world. He is sovereign over the wise and the foolish, the strong and the weak.

Isaiah 40:22-25: 22It is He who sits above the vault of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. 25He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless. 24Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He merely blows on them, and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble. 25“To whom then will you liken Me That I should be his equal?” says the Holy One.

Job 12:16-22: 16With Him are strength and sound wisdom, The misled and the misleader belong to Him. 17He makes counselors walk barefoot, And makes fools of judges. 18He loosens the bond of kings, And binds their loins with a girdle. 19He makes priests walk barefoot, And overthrows the secure ones. 20He deprives the trusted ones of speech, And takes away the discernment of the elders. 21He pours contempt on nobles, And loosens the belt of the strong. 22He reveals mysteries from the darkness, And brings the deep darkness into light. 23He makes the nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges the nations, then leads them away. 24He deprives of intelligence the chiefs of the earth's people, And makes them wander in a pathless waste. 25They grope in darkness with no light, And He makes them stagger like a drunken man.

Romans 11:32: For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all.

Psalm 22:28: For the kingdom is the LORD’s, And He rules over the nations.

Psalm 82:8: Arise, O God, judge the earth! For it is Thou who dost possess all the nations.

Psalm 47:7-8: 7For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm.
8God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne.

Here we have irrefutable testimony that God is Sovereign over the nations of the earth! These passages affirm that when a nation becomes great and powerful, it is God’s doing. They affirm that when a nation is destroyed, it is God’s doing. Even the spiritual darkness of the nations is said to be God’s doing. All the nations belong to Him. They exist for His purposes and His good pleasure. The Old Testament plainly declares that God providentially directs the rise and fall of nations and is constantly directing the affairs of human history.

Question #35: From the verses quoted above, describe several examples of concurrence.
Question #36: How do these examples of concurrence encourage and comfort you as situations in the world tempt you to be worried and fearful?

Many examples of God’s control over the events of history can also be cited from the New Testament. Here are just a few:

1. From the life and ministry of Jesus Christ:
   - His virgin birth: (Luke 1-3)
   - His calming of the raging sea: (Matthew 8:23-27)
   - The lame walk: (John 5:1-47, note in particular vs 17, 19 & 30)
   - The blind see: (John 9:1-41, note in particular vs 3-5)
   - The dead live again: (John 11:1-44, note in particular vs. 4, 41-42)
   - His resurrection: (Matthew 28:1-20, note in particular vs 2-7, 18-20)

2. From other places in the New Testament:
   - Numerous signs and wonders done by the Apostles: (throughout Acts)
   - Peter’s deliverance from prison: (Acts 12:1-11)
   - The conversion and calling of Saul of Tarsus: (Acts 9:1-22)
   - The death of Herod: (Acts 12:18-23)
   - The trumpet and bowl judgments: (Revelation 7-11,16)
   - The Judgment of the Beast and the False Prophet: (Revelation 19:19-21)

Question #37: Read two or three of the passages referenced above. For each one that you read, describe how God’s control over the events of history is clearly affirmed.

The following passages specifically demonstrate how God mysteriously works in the free choices of men to accomplish His purposes.

Acts 2:22-24: 22Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 23And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Acts 4:27-28: 27For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the
Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.

Question #38: In these two situations from Acts, how do you see concurrence at work?

The New Testament plainly declares and explicitly teaches that God is constantly directing all the affairs of human history.

Two Related Questions: Does God cause or ordain evil? Is everything that happens God’s will?

Wayne Grudem, in his Systematic Theology, wisely answers the first question like this:

If God does indeed cause, through his providential activity, everything that comes about in the world, then the question arises, “What is the relationship between God and evil in the world?” Does God actually cause the evil actions that people do? If he does, then is God not responsible for sin?

In approaching this question, it is best first to read the passages of Scripture that directly address it. We can begin by looking at several passages that affirm that God did, indeed, cause evil events to come about and evil deeds to be done. But we must remember that in all these passages it is very clear that Scripture nowhere shows God as directly doing anything evil, but rather as bringing about evil deeds through the willing actions of moral creatures. Moreover, Scripture never blames God for evil or shows God as taking pleasure in evil, and Scripture never excuses human beings for the wrong they do. However we understand God’s relationship to evil, we must never come to the point where we think that we are not responsible for the evil that we do, or that God takes pleasure in evil or is to be blamed for it. Such a conclusion is clearly contrary to Scripture.

There are literally dozens of Scripture passages that say that God (indirectly) brought about some kind of evil. I have quoted such an extensive list (in the next few paragraphs) because Christians often are unaware of the extent of this forthright teaching in Scripture. Yet it must be remembered that in all of these examples, the evil is actually done not by God but by people or demons who choose to do it.

A very clear example is found in the story of Joseph. Scripture clearly says that Joseph’s brothers were wrongly jealous of him (Gen. 37:11), hated him (Gen. 37:4, 5, 8), wanted to kill him (Gen. 37:20), and did wrong when they cast him into a pit (Gen. 37:24) and then sold him into slavery in Egypt (Gen. 37:28). Yet later Joseph could say to his brothers, “God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen. 45:5), and “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” (Gen. 50:20). Here we have a combination of evil deeds brought about by sinful men who are rightly held accountable for their sin and the overriding providential control of God whereby God’s own purposes were accomplished. Both are clearly affirmed.
The story of the exodus from Egypt repeatedly affirms that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh: God says, “I will harden his heart” (Ex. 4:21), “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 7:3), “the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh” (Ex. 9:12), “the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 10:20, repeated in 10:27 and again in 11:10), “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 14:4), and “the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Ex. 14:8)...

What was God’s purpose in this? Paul reflects on Exodus 9:16 and says, “For the scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth’” (Rom. 9:17). Then Paul infers a general truth from this specific example: “So then he has mercy upon whom he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills” (Rom. 9:18). In fact, God also hardened the hearts of the Egyptian people so that they pursued Israel into the Red Sea: “I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen” (Ex. 14:17). This theme is repeated in Psalm 105:25: “He turned their hearts to hate his people.”

Later in the Old Testament narrative similar examples are found of the Canaanites who were destroyed in the conquest of Palestine under Joshua. We read, “For it was the LORD’s doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed” (Josh. 11:20; see also Judg. 3:12; 9:23). And Samson’s demand to marry an unbelieving Philistine woman “was from the LORD: for he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel” (Judg 14:4). We also read that the sons of Eli, when rebuked for their evil deeds, “would not listen to the voice of his father; for it was the will of the LORD to slay them” (1 Sam. 2:25). Later, “an evil spirit from the LORD tormented King Saul (1 Sam. 16:14)...

Still later in David’s life, the Lord “incited” David to take a census of the people (2 Sam. 24:1), but afterward David recognized this as sin, saying, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done” (2 Sam. 24:10), and God sent punishment on the land because of this sin (2 Sam. 24:12–17). However, it is also clear that “the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel” (2 Sam. 24:1), so God’s inciting of David to sin was a means by which he brought about punishment on the people of Israel. Moreover, the means by which God incited David is made clear in 1 Chronicles 21:1: “Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel.” In this one incident the Bible gives us a remarkable insight into the three influences that contributed in different ways to one action: God, in order to bring about his purposes, worked through Satan to incite David to sin, but Scripture regards David as being responsible for that sin...

In the story of Job, though the LORD gave Satan permission to bring harm to Job’s possessions and children, and though this harm came through the evil actions of the Sabeans and the Chaldeans, as well as a windstorm (Job 1:12, 15, 17, 19), yet Job looks beyond those secondary causes and, with the eyes of faith, sees it all as from the hand of the Lord: “the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). The Old Testament author follows Job’s statement immediately with the sentence, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (Job 1:22). Job has just been told that evil
marauding bands had destroyed his flocks and herds, yet with great faith and patience in adversity, he says, “The LORD has taken away.” Though he says that the LORD had done this, yet he does not blame God for the evil or say that God had done wrong: he says, “Blessed be the name of the LORD.” To blame God for evil that he had brought about through secondary agents would have been to sin. Job does not do this. Scripture never does this, and neither should we.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament we read that the Lord “put a lying spirit in the mouth” of Ahab’s prophets (1 Kings 22:23) and sent the wicked Assyrians as “the rod of my anger” to punish Israel (Isa. 10:5) . . .

In many of the passages mentioned above, God brings evil and destruction on people in judgment upon their sins: They have been disobedient or have strayed into idolatry, and then the LORD uses evil human beings or demonic forces or “natural” disasters to bring judgment on them. . . . Therefore, when God brings evil on human beings, whether to discipline his children, or to lead unbelievers to repentance, or to bring a judgment of condemnation and destruction upon hardened sinners, none of us can charge God with doing wrong. Ultimately all will work in God’s good purposes to bring glory to him and good to his people. Yet we must realize that in punishing evil in those who are not redeemed (such as Pharaoh, the Canaanites, and the Babylonians), God is also glorified through the demonstration of his justice, holiness, and power (see Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:14–24).”

Question #39: Summarize your understanding of Grudem’s teaching in three or four sentences.

Question #40: Did Grudem’s teaching generate any questions in your mind? If so, record them here:

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Distinctions in God’s Will - Is everything God’s will?
Armed with this understanding of God’s control over and use of evil, we will now turn to the second question: Is everything that happens God’s will? As we have seen, God’s will must be seen as the final authority behind and ultimate reason for everything that happens. God’s providential permitting or preventing determines whatsoever comes to pass (Isaiah 14:24). Does this mean, however, that everything that happens is God's will? Answering this question requires us to distinguish between God’s sovereign will and His moral will. Scripture clearly reveals that God often permits His moral requirements to be violated by the free choices of men and women. This reveals that God’s sovereign will clearly includes certain violations of His moral will. God’s moral will is discerned by simply reading His precepts and commands

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12 Grudem, 322-326.