

The Greatest Strategist

The plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations (Psalm 33:11).

Scripture: Psalm 33:1-12

Song: “Jesus Shall Reign”

Between 334 BC and 323 BC, Alexander the Great strategically grew his empire from Greece to India. He strengthened his presence against rebellious tribes within his conquered lands, making his kingdom formidable. However, after his death his generals fought for leadership, eventually dividing the empire into four parts. They each took their respective areas. The division continued until Rome overtook them all.

Despite all his ingenuity, Alexander’s hard-won empire fractured under the rule of his successors. His actual political influence lasted only a few generations. In contrast, our passage in Psalms says the Lord’s plans are certain and everlasting. No ruler has ever usurped—or will ever usurp—God’s throne or upset His goals.

God is clearly able to bring forth, manage, and direct all He has made. From stars to seas, and from nations to individuals, God is sovereign. What a reassurance that in this ever-changing world, we have a sure King whose purposes have been and will be fulfilled! May we honor and celebrate Him above anyone else.

Father, You reign from eternity past into an everlasting future. I put my trust in You instead of in my shifting circumstances. In Jesus’ name, amen.

December 20–26. **Sara Schaffer** lives in Colorado with her husband and daughters. She volunteers at her church and her children’s school.

The Covered Gifts

“I, the LORD, love justice. . . . In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them” (Isaiah 61:8).

Scripture: Isaiah 61:4-9

Song: “Immortal, Invisible”

F. B. Meyer wrote about his childhood Christmas mornings. His family would wake up and dutifully go to the dining room for breakfast. Not much was usually eaten by the younger Meyers, and time seemed to pass very slowly as F. B. and his siblings waited for their parents to finish the meal. When they were done, everyone went into the living room. There a large blanket was pulled off a huge pile of presents. Without hesitation, the children grabbed the boxes and joyfully unwrapped them.

The parents showed their children love and faithfulness through this tradition. Year after year, they chose, wrapped, and piled up gifts. They put a blanket over the top, adding to the anticipation and thrill of the occasion. F. B. Meyer said he never had to have approval to open the presents; he knew he could just take them. God, too, offers us a reward—one that is currently hidden but just as real.

While at breakfast, the Meyer children knew presents sat in the living room. We also await God’s veiled promises that are in another place, and we can be even more certain God will fulfill His promises. One day He will fully pull off the cover, and we will see our glorious God.

Father, lift my eyes to see beyond my day-to-day life toward that day when I will see You in all Your glory. In Jesus’ name, amen.

His Complete Plan

“[Jesus] will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:33).

Scripture: Luke 1:26-37

Song: “What Child Is This?”

When Joshua began college, he never imagined how long it would take to graduate with his degree. After his first year of college, financial realities forced him to work full-time and slow the pace of his studies. But as a result, his career developed along with his academics. Meanwhile, he started going to church and met the Lord. Later he met a girl and married her. After nine years, Joshua completed college with a degree—but also with a wife, a successful job, and faith in Christ.

Like Joshua, we don’t know how our lives will unfold. We may look back and see how our initial plans were interrupted and altered along the way. In our passage, God reveals His plans for His Son. God sent Gabriel to announce to Mary the divine conception, and that the child, to be named Jesus, would reign forever.

At Christmas we celebrate Jesus’ birth and coming to earth. Let’s also rejoice in the promise of His eternal reign. In an unsteady, unpredictable, and often volatile world, we can focus on a solid and forever future with Him. Mary was with child, gave birth, and named Him Jesus. He will certainly be King always, for nothing—absolutely nothing—is impossible with God.

Father, thank You for the fulfilled promise of Jesus and the sure promise of His reign. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Clear Principles of Justice

Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness (Psalm 72:1).

Scripture: Psalm 72:1-8, 11-14

Song: “I Wonder as I Wander”

After the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, the governor of Pennsylvania purchased the land where the fighting took place, so it could become an official burial ground. For the dedication of Cemetery Hill, Edward Everett, a highly regarded speaker, was invited to give the main address. As an afterthought, the organizers asked President Abraham Lincoln to make some remarks. Without condemnation of any persons but clear principles of justice, the president declared that “all men are created equal.” His brief words became the most memorable of the day and known as the Gettysburg Address.

President Lincoln was committed to equality for all his country’s citizens; our God is even more just and faithful to His people. In today’s Scripture, we see the ideal leader gifted with God’s justice and full of compassion for the vulnerable. While we continue to see suffering in our world, we have hope that not only does God also see oppression and inequality; He has a plan to—and a Savior who will—make all things right.

We can look with confidence and hope to our true King, Jesus Christ, who does and will rule with righteous compassion. In the injustices we face, may we trust His goodness. Let us be the ones who cry out to Him in our need because He will deliver us.

Father, I call on You with confidence in Your just, compassionate sovereignty. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Glorifying God

Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord” (Luke 1:46).

Scripture: Luke 1:46-55

Song: “Our Day of Joy Is Here Again”

The head of personnel for the JC Penney Company arranged a meeting to introduce Mr. Penney to a candidate for manager of a new JC Penney store. Mr. Penney visited the retail store the candidate already managed. There Mr. Penney met and talked with each employee. Later Mr. Penney asked the candidate about an employee who had a foot in a cast. The candidate admitted he didn't know of anyone with a bad foot. In fact, he didn't seem to know much about any of his employees. He preferred to keep the conversation on himself in order to glorify what he thought his qualities were. Mr. Penney made it clear that he did not want a person who boasted about himself so much.

When Gabriel visited Mary to tell her about God's selection of her to bring Jesus into the world through her, she declared herself a willing servant (Luke 1:38). Later, in response to her cousin's blessing (v. 42), Mary immediately responded with today's verse, putting the focus on God. Mary recounted and praised God's work and word from the time of Abraham forward.

We too can glorify God for all He has done throughout history. Make this season a time of focus on the greatness of God and His accomplishments.

Father, You are mighty and merciful. My heart rejoices in who You are and what You've done! Help me to glorify You today and throughout this season of Christmas. In Jesus' name, amen.

Chosen Even Though Frail

[Mary] gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger (Luke 2:7).

Scripture: Luke 2:1-7

Song: “One Small Child”

In her 20s, Amy Carmichael applied to be a missionary to China. The organization didn't accept her because of her ill health and inexperience. Another group, however, sent her to share the gospel in Japan. But 15 months later, illness brought her back home to Ireland. Her longing to go and help those in need continued to press on her. And after her recovery, she went to India, where she served others for 55 years. Even when she became completely bedridden, she ministered to others through prayer. Her faithful work brought hope and the gospel to many in India.

According to some, Amy wasn't qualified to be a missionary because she lacked strength and knowledge. Yet God chose her to display His might and compassion.

God revealed himself to humanity through a vulnerable newborn. Jesus was born in a stable, where Mary put Him in a manger. Through these humble circumstances, the love and mercy of God shines forth for all.

When we face challenges or rejection, we are situated to glorify God. Even when we feel weak, we can turn our hearts to God and humbly receive His help to serve Him as He chooses. May the offering that pours out from our brokenness give God all the glory and praise.

Father, in my strength and in my frailty, may my life honor You. In Jesus' name, amen.

True Freedom

The LORD says: . . . “Now I will break their yoke from your neck and tear your shackles away” (Nahum 1:12-13).

Scripture: Nahum 1:1-3, 6-8, 12-13, 15

Song: “O Hearken Ye”

Sir Arthur Leary Piggott brought forth a bill to the House of Commons in England in the early nineteenth century. He presented the legislation as a war strategy to undermine France. They would hurt their adversary by prohibiting British subjects from transporting slaves. Abolitionists promoted the bill as a step to eradicate slavery. In May 1806, the Foreign Slave Trade Act passed with a strong majority.

William Wilberforce and a group of his peers had helped devise the successful scheme. He worked for two decades to end the human trafficking of his day. In 1807, legislation passed to completely end the British slave trade. These victories led Wilberforce to then focus on freeing those still in slavery. His vision was complete freedom.

People in Nahum’s day were ensnared in bondage—a result of their own sin. But God, in His mercy, sent an avenger, refuge, and deliverer: Jesus Christ, His Son. The good news is that Jesus took all sin, bore the punishment on the cross. The Father accepted His blood and sacrifice as payment for our sin. May we see the work of Christ, accept the atonement of God, and live in true freedom—no longer enslaved to sin.

Father, thank You for liberating me from sin and proclaiming Your peace to me. In Jesus’ name, amen.