

**BUT GOD...**  
**by Joy Salvage**

As we go through the Bible, we constantly read reports of the things that could have happened. Then we come to this little phrase, "**But God**" and the situation changes dramatically.

In Genesis 50:20 we read "*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*" These were the words that Joseph spoke to his brothers. They had come to Egypt during the famine and asked for help. They did not realize that they were asking the brother they sold into slavery to help them. Fortunately for them Joseph was a godly man and saw God's plan for his life and not an opportunity for revenge. We should also believe that God has a plan for our lives, especially when we are wronged by others.

There are times when God intervenes to protect us from harm as we read about David in 1 Samuel 23:14 "*David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands.*" Saul had been impressed by David until he perceived him as a threat but God kept David out of harm's way so that His plan for the young man's life could be fulfilled.

When it was God's time for the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt nothing could stop the process. Ezra 5:5 GNB says "**But God** was watching over the Jewish leaders, and the Persian officials decided to take no action until they could write to Emperor Darius and receive a reply." The Persian Emperor, Cyrus, had allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem when he conquered Babylon where they had been held captive. He put his decree in writing and allowed them to take treasures for the temple as well. Of course, the process of rebuilding the temple took a long time and the governors of the provinces changed and there were new kings. These men could have harmed those working on the temple but instead they wrote to King Darius who ordered a search of the documentation of his predecessor, Cyrus, and found the decree and allowed the building to continue.

I think we often don't realize how many of the sayings found in Proverbs we use all the time. One that comes to mind is "Man proposes, God disposes". In the GNB translation we find in Proverbs 16:1 "*We may make our plans, but God has the last word.*" And in verse 9 "*You may make your plans, but God directs your actions.*" and the NIV says "*In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.*" I am sure we can all think of times when we intended doing something and all our plans came to nothing because of circumstances beyond our control. Those are the times when we must realize that God knows what is best for us and His timing is perfect.

There are also times when God stops us because we want to do things that are not in His will for our lives. The parable Jesus told in Luke 12:16-21 illustrates this - "*And he told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. <sup>17</sup>He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' <sup>18</sup>Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup>And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' <sup>20</sup>But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' <sup>21</sup>This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.'"*

We should also realize that we cannot hide anything from God. We can show the world our "good" side but the words of Jesus in Luke 16:14&15 are clear on this subject: "*The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. <sup>15</sup>He said to them, 'You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.'*" God knows our hearts, our thoughts and our innermost feelings and that means that He is also aware of our needs even when those around us do not seem to understand what they are.

Acts 7:5 says *“But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.”* God keeps his promises. No matter how unlikely it seems or how outrageous (in our eyes) the promises are. We can be sure that if God says it, it will happen. When God intervenes in a situation anything is possible.

God also promises that we will not be asked to handle more than we can cope with and as we read in the GNB translation of 1 Corinthians 10:13 *“Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way”*. We do not need to do anything in our own strength because we can rely on God’s power to help us.

There are also times when God directs us to do things which are out of character or not the norm. This could mean that we will be criticized or our motives questioned, but when we are doing what God wants us to do, He will enable us to do it. The story of Cornelius, the Gentile Christian, in Acts 10:27-29 illustrates this. *“Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. <sup>28</sup>He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. <sup>29</sup>So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection.””*

Paul wrote to the Philippians about Epaphroditus and in chapter 2:25-27 *“But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. <sup>26</sup>For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. <sup>27</sup>Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.”* We all know of, or have experienced, God’s intervention in the health of His children. Time and again doctors have no hope but God heals. I think of our elder, Barbara, who was so ill that she could not attend church for 5 years and when she had no human hope of recovery, God healed her. We all see the work she is doing for the Lord daily and I know that she has been a blessing to each one of us.

None of us would know the joy of having a personal relationship with our Saviour if it were not for the “but God” that we read in Acts 3:14&15 *“You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. <sup>15</sup>You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.”*

Lastly, there are 2 other scriptures I would like to share with you - to me they are the ultimate *“but God”* verses: Romans 5:8 *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* and Ephesians 2:4&5 *But, because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”* These verses state that we are all sinners, a condition that deserves punishment and death. The phrase *“but God”* interrupts the process. God’s love is brought into the situation and changes everything. While we were sinners, Christ died for us and, by doing so, showed his love for us. He proved that His love overrides the devastation of sin. God sees us at our worst but knows what we can become and gives us the faith we need to become His sons and daughters. Because of God’s love, mercy and grace, He intervenes in our lives and we are assured of eternal life.

No matter if others want to harm us, or if we are faced with potential danger, or if we are being opposed, or if we have been waiting for a long time for something to happen, or if it seems that the task ahead is impossible, or if we are ill, no matter what man decides, we must remember that the Bible says *“But God.....”*.

*Joy Salvage, CPC Bible Study - 13 May 2009*