

## PROVIDENCE

### GOD GOVERNS THIS WORLD

*The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*

PROVERBS 16:33

✚ “God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions” (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q.11). If Creation was a unique exercise of divine energy causing the world to be, providence is a continued exercise of that same energy whereby the Creator, according to his own will, (a) keeps all creatures in being, (b) involves himself in all events, and (c) directs all things to their appointed end. The model is of purposive personal management with total “hands-on” control: God is completely in charge of his world. His hand may be hidden, but his rule is absolute.

Some have restricted God’s providence to foreknowledge without control, or upholding without intervention, or general oversight without concern for details, but the testimony to providence as formulated above is overwhelming.

*The Bible clearly teaches God’s providential control (1) over the universe at large, Ps. 103:19; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11; (2) over the physical world, Job 37; Pss. 104:14; 135:6;*

*Matt. 5:45; (3) over the brute creation, Ps. 104:21, 28; Matt. 6:26; 10:29; (4) over the affairs of nations, Job 12:23; Pss. 22:28; 66:7; Acts 17:26; (5) over man’s birth and lot in life, 1 Sam. 16:1; Ps. 139:16; Isa. 45:5; Gal. 1:15-16; (6) over the outward successes and failures of men’s lives, Ps. 75:6, 7; Luke 1:52; (7) over things seemingly accidental or insignificant, Prov. 16:33; Matt. 10:30; (8) in the protection of the righteous, Pss. 4:8; 5:12; 63:8; 121:3; Rom. 8:28; (9) in supplying the wants of God’s people, Gen. 22:8, 14; Deut. 8:3; Phil. 4:19; (10) in giving answers to prayer, 1 Sam. 1:19; Isa. 20:5, 6; 2 Chron. 33:13; Ps. 65:2; Matt. 7:7; Luke 18:7, 8; and (11) in the exposure and punishment of the wicked, Pss. 7:12-13; 11:6. (L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 4th ed.)*

Clear thinking about God’s involvement in the world-process and in the acts of rational creatures requires complementary sets of statements, thus: a person takes action, or an event is triggered by natural causes, or Satan shows his hand—yet God overrules. This is the message of the book of Esther, where God’s name nowhere appears. Again: things that are done contravene God’s will of command—yet they fulfill his will of events (Eph. 1:11). Again: humans mean what they do for evil—yet God who overrules uses their actions for good (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23). Again: humans, under God’s overruling, sin—yet God is not the author of sin (James 1:13-17); rather, he is its judge.

The nature of God’s “concurrent” or “confluent” involvement in all that occurs in his world, as—without violating the nature of things, the ongoing causal processes, or human free agency—he makes his will of events come to pass, is mystery to us, but the consistent biblical teaching about God’s involvement is as stated above.

Of the evils that infect God's world (moral and spiritual perversity, waste of good, and the physical disorders and disruptions of a spoiled cosmos), it can summarily be said: God permits evil (Acts 14:16); he punishes evil with evil (Ps. 81:11-12; Rom. 1:26-32); he brings good out of evil (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 13:27; 1 Cor. 2:7-8); he uses evil to test and discipline those he loves (Matt. 4:1-11; Heb. 12:4-14); and one day he will redeem his people from the power and presence of evil altogether (Rev. 21:27; 22:14-15).

The doctrine of providence teaches Christians that they are never in the grip of blind forces (fortune, chance, luck, fate); all that happens to them is divinely planned, and each event comes as a new summons to trust, obey, and rejoice, knowing that all is for one's spiritual and eternal good (Rom. 8:28).