

The 1689 Confession of Faith; Chapter 3, Paragraph 1 – “Of God’s Decree”,
Message # 8 – “Prayer and God’s Decree”, Presented in the
Adult Sunday School Class by Pastor Paul Rendall,
on September 19th, 2021.

Paragraph 1 – “God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably(1), all things, whatsoever comes to pass(2); yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein(3); nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established(4); in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree.”(5)

1) Proverbs 19: 21; Isaiah 14: 24-27; 46: 10, 11; Psalm 115: 3; 135: 6; Romans 9: 19

2) Daniel 4: 34, 35; Romans 8: 28; 11: 36; Ephesians 1: 11

3) Genesis 18: 25; James 1: 1; 1st John 1: 5

4) Genesis 50: 20; 2nd Samuel 24: 1; Isaiah 10: 5-7; Matthew 17: 12; John 19: 11; Acts 2: 23; Acts 4: 27, 28

5) Numbers 23: 19; Ephesians 1: 3-5

Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 7 – What are the Decrees of God?

Answer: “The Decrees of God are, His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.”

Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 8 – How doth God execute His Decrees?

Answer: God executes His decrees in the works of creation and providence.
(I Add – And Redemption also, through our Lord Jesus Christ)

1. God has Decreed that all believers will share in His holiness.

The Prayer of Hezekiah was included in the Decree of God.

2nd Kings 19: 14-19 –

“And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.” “Then Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said: ‘O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth.’ “You have made heaven and earth.” “Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God.” “Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods, but the work of men’s hands – wood and stone.” “Therefore they destroyed them.” “Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD God, You alone.”

1. When we pray, God’s mind is not changed by our prayers, but the answer which He gives, changes things for us, according to His decreed will.

2nd Kings 19: 20-22

“Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard.’ “This is the

word which the LORD has spoken concerning him: “The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised you, laughed you to scorn; The daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head behind your back!” “Whom have you reproached and blasphemed?” “Against whom have you raised your voice, and lifted up your eyes on high?” “Against the Holy One of Israel”.

You will notice that in this answer, God has decreed that Hezekiah and all Judah would be able to righteously despise Sennacherib, Rabshakeh, and all the forces of the Assyrians, because God had purposed to answer Hezekiah’s prayer and rebuke the very person who He had appointed to use as a rod to bring national chastening to Judah and Hezekiah. The reason that He would have this mercy was because the Assyrians had blasphemed and reproached God by saying that He would not deliver Judah.

2. God does not offer violence to the will of any man to accomplish His Decree.

2nd Kings 19: 23-26

“By your messengers you have reproached the Lord, and said: ‘By the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains, to the limits of Lebanon; I will cut down its tall cedars and its choice cypress trees; I will enter the extremity of its borders, to its fruitful forest.’ “I have dug and drunk strange water, and with the soles of my feet I have dried up all the brooks of defense.” “Did you not hear long ago how I made it, from ancient times that I formed it?” “Now I have brought it to pass, that you should be for crushing fortified cities into heaps of ruins.” “Therefore their inhabitants had little power; they were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field and the green herb, as the grass on the housetops And grain blighted before it is grown.”

Commentator Joseph Benson says – “Hast thou not heard long ago, &c. — Hast thou not long since learned that which some of thy philosophers could have taught thee; that there is a supreme and powerful God, by whose decree and providence all these wars and calamities are sent and ordered; whose mere instrument thou art; so that thou hast no cause for these vain boastings? This work is mine, not thine. I have done it, &c. — I have so disposed of things by my providence, that thou shouldest be a great and victorious prince, and that thou shouldest be so successful as thou hast hitherto been, first against the kingdom of Israel, and now against Judah. Thus God answers the boastings of this proud prince, and shows him that all his counsel and power are nothing; since these events wholly depended on a superior cause; namely, on God’s sovereign decree and overruling providence, whereof he had made this Assyrian the instrument in his almighty hand.”

So, although Sennacherib had his plans concerning the siege of Judah, to attack and do much destruction and crush their cities, he wrongly assumed that he would succeed. He was such a very powerful man that he thought that his own plans would succeed because of his strength for war and destruction. He realized that Hezekiah and Judah had no power to be able to defend themselves. They were like the grass of the field, and would be mowed down. God left this wicked man to himself to think these things. But His own purpose would stand as you see in the following verses.

3. God, according to His Decree, knows exactly what He will do and accomplish in every given situation. He decrees exactly what He will do with evil men.

2nd Kings 19: 27, 28

“But I know your dwelling place, your going out and your coming in, and your rage against Me.”
“Because your rage against Me and your tumult have come up to My ears, therefore I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came.”

You can see here that God knows exactly what is in a man’s heart in terms of anger against Him. And He decreed Sennacherib’s downfall because of it. Although God will show mercy to some men according to His decree, with others he leaves them to their own sinful thoughts and ways, He deals with them according to His just judgment of what they deserve. God is opposed to the proud but He gives grace to the humble, it says in 3 places in the Bible: Proverbs 3 34, James 4: 6, and 1st Peter 5: 5. Peter also says, concerning those who rejected and crucified our Savior, in 1st Peter 2: 8 – “They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. (This was decreed for them, not out of any sin or unrighteousness in God, but because they truly deserved the punishment that they received, and will receive throughout eternity in hell.

4. By Decree, He prophesied the good that He would bring to Judah, establishing a remnant of believers in the land, and promising protection to them.

2nd Kings 19: 29-33

“This shall be a sign to you: You shall eat this year such as grows of itself, and in the second year what springs from the same; also in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them.” “And the remnant who have escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.” “For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and those who escape from Mount Zion.” “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” “Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: ‘He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it.’ “By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and he shall not come into this city,’ says the LORD.” “For I will defend this city, to save it for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.”

Here we see the value of prayer to the true and living God; the God who has decreed all things that will come to pass. God truly hears our prayers, our prayers to Him are not in vain because He has decreed all things. His decree encompasses our prayers; it takes them all in. And from our standpoint, and His, He truly considers them to answer them, in terms of His teaching us His ways, and our learning to look to Him for help and deliverance from every evil deed or evil man coming against us. While it is true that He has granted us not only the faith to believe, but also to suffer for His name’s sake, these being a part of His decree, He has also decreed, at times, great deliverance from our enemies, whether in life or in death.

In this case, it would mean for life, because Assyria’s messenger reproached the Lord and said that He was only the God of the mountains and not of the valleys. You see, how God takes notice of every detail of men’s words, their blasphemies and their sins; has decreed them, but has no fellowship with Him. He righteously considers the honor of His name, in relation to such things, and will act to deliver His people and prove to them His love and power. He had decreed that the remnant would again take root downward in Judah, and bear fruit upward. And He can do the same for any of us as it is according to His purpose. His decree is unchangeable, but in it God incorporates all the answers to prayer that He will give.

5. He has Decreed at certain specific times, to do Exceeding Abundantly, beyond all that we can ask or think....in answer to our prayers.

2nd Kings 19: 34-37 –

“And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses – all dead.” “So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh.” “Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat.” “Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.”

What a great deliverance God gave to Judah and to Hezekiah! God’s decree in this regard was **to** test Hezekiah to see if he would cry out to Him and pray to Him for deliverance from Sennacherib. After He had spoken with Isaiah the prophet about all that was coming against him, Hezekiah did pray and spread the matter out before the Lord. And because he did this, Judah was delivered from Sennacherib’s hand. Thus we see the importance of our praying in relation to the things which God has decreed. He already knows what He wants to bring out of adverse providences which He brings against us. His purpose is lead us to repentance and to build our faith and to fulfill all of His good purposes towards His elect people to make them holy.