

Sermon #41 — Isaiah Series

Title: **UNDERSTANDING DIVINE
PROVIDENCE**

Text: Isaiah 10:1-34

Subject: *The Providence of God*

Date: Sunday Evening — January 14, 2018

Readings: *Mark Medley and Mark Daniel*

Introduction:

Here are five facts revealed in Holy Scripture which I greatly cherish. These five, blessed, gospel truths are the pillars of our faith, the joy of our hearts, the comfort of our souls, and the constant themes of our songs in worship and of the message we preach.

1. The God we worship and serve, our heavenly Father is absolutely sovereign in all things (Daniel 4:34-37).
2. Our great, sovereign Lord God chose to save a people before the world was made and predestined all things from eternity which come to pass in time for the salvation of his chosen (Ephesians 1:3-5; Romans 8:28-30).

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3. The Lord Jesus Christ, God's dear Son, our Savior, has effectually redeemed his people from all sin (Galatians 3:13).
4. Salvation is by grace alone through faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9).
5. And the Lord God our Savior sovereignly rules, controls, and disposes of all things in providence according to his own wise and holy will (Isaiah 46:9-13; Romans 8:28; 11:36; 2 Corinthians 5:18).

(Isaiah 46:9-13) “Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, (10) Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: (11) Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it. (12) Harken unto me, ye stouthearted, that *are* far from righteousness: (13) I bring near my

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righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory.”

God does everything exactly as he will, exactly according to his eternal purpose, exactly as he intended from eternity. He is interrupted by nothing. He never changes his mind. He never makes adjustments. But **he never does things the way we would.**

- Who among us would dream of sending a raven, day after day, to feed a hungry prophet?
- Who among us would think to use a sworn enemy to deliver his captive children?
- Who among us would choose to use evil to accomplish good?
- Psalm 76:10

“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

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Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and will break
With blessings on your head.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense;
But trust Him for His grace:
Behind the frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His works in vain;
God is His own interpreter.”

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And He will make it plain.

— *William Cowper*

As God the Holy Ghost enables me, I want to talk to you about the providence of God. The title of my message is **UNDERSTANDING DIVINE PROVIDENCE**. God the Holy Ghost gives us a clear, instructive example of God's wise and adorable providence in the 10th chapter of the Gospel of Isaiah. In this chapter the Lord God, speaking by his prophet Isaiah, told his chosen people that he would use their Assyrian tormenters to save his own.

Proposition: And as God used Assyria to both purge his church and cause his elect remnant in Israel to seek him, so he uses all the events of time for the spiritual and eternal good of his elect.

As we read this chapter, we are again reminded of the blessed fact that God the Holy Ghost, in all ages and at all times, carries on his preparatory work in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners, using all the events of providence to plead with chosen, redeemed

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sinner on account of their sin, hedging about their way, to bring them to Christ (Hosea 2; Psalm 107).

ASSYRIA GOD'S INSTRUMENT

At the time of Isaiah's ministry Assyria was the greatest economic and military power in the world. Every nation in that part of the world had been, or in time would be, brought in subjection to the will of the Assyrian empire. In the eyes of the world Assyria was an uncontrollable power that had to be obeyed. No one dared oppose or stir up the wrath of Assyria, no one but a solitary, isolated prophet who believed God. **Isaiah recognized that Assyria was nothing but a tool in the hands of God, by which the Almighty sovereignly accomplished his eternal purpose, a nation he would destroy when he had no more use for it.**

Isaiah did not see himself living in a world in which men and nations run rampant to accomplish their own pleasure, with the powerful triumphing over the weak. **Isaiah saw himself living in a world with a**

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sovereign God at the helm of every nation, controlling the thoughts, words, and deeds of every man universally, making even the wicked to serve his purpose. In this 10th chapter of his prophecy Isaiah, by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, teaches us FIVE LESSONS about Divine Providence.

JUDGMENT DESERVED

1st — The judgments of God which fall upon individuals and nations in providence are always fully deserved (vv. 1-4).

(Isaiah 10:1-4) “Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness *which* they have prescribed; (2) To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and *that* they may rob the fatherless! (3) And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation *which* shall come from far? To whom will ye flee for help?

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And where will ye leave your glory? (4) Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand *is* stretched out still.”

The nation of Israel fell to the Assyrians because they had become a nation of idolaters and evildoers.

Illustrations: AIDS
The San Francisco Earthquake
Hurricanes, Floods
Famine and War

- The judgments of God in providence are righteous and just.
- When God sends judgment upon a people, both the believer and the unbeliever is affected.
- But God’s object in judgment is the punishment of the wicked and the preservation of his elect.

GOD’S INSTRUMENTS

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2nd — God wisely and graciously uses wicked men, without either their knowledge or consent to execute his purpose (vv. 5-19). Men are but instruments in his hand by which he accomplishes his purpose.

(Isaiah 10:5-9) “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. (6) I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. (7) Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but *it is* in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. (8) For he saith, *Are* not my princes altogether kings? (9) *Is* not Calno as Carchemish? *Is* not Hamath as Arpad? *Is* not Samaria as Damascus? (10) As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; (11) Shall I not, as I have done unto

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Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? (12) **Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks.** (13) For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done *it*, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant *man*: (14) And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs *that are* left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped. (15) **Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?** *Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood.* (16) Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall

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kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. (17) And **the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briars in one day**; (18) And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body: and they shall be as when a standardbearer fainteth. (19) And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them.”

Assyria was nothing but the rod of God's anger and the staff of his indignation by which he executed wrath upon the godless nation (5-6).

- They thought their cruel, barbaric policies were going to advance their own cause (v. 7).
- They had met with great success before (vv. 8-10).
- The Assyrians' wicked success caused their heads to swell with pride (v. 11, 13-15).
- But when God had accomplished his purpose with Assyria, he told Isaiah how he would abolish Assyria (12, 16-17).

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THE LIGHT OF ISRAEL

(Isaiah 10:16-17) “Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. (17) And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briars in one day.”

The Lord Jesus Christ, God our Savior, is the Light of Israel, the Light of his people. He enlightens us by his Word and by his Spirit. By his almighty grace he effectually calls his redeemed out of darkness into marvellous light. **He is our Light; and he, the Holy One, is for us a purifying flame of sanctification.**

- He devoured the thorns and briars of our sin and the law’s curse in one day at Calvary.
- And he devours the thorns and briars of our sin and the law’s curse in one day when he calls the chosen, redeemed sinner to life and faith by his grace (Zechariah 3).

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Understand the prophet's message here and rejoice. — **God, who is sovereign over all history, is sovereignly working his will in all the events of history.** We must never judge God's goodness in the light of his providence, but judge his providence in the light of his goodness (Psalm 92:5-15).

(Psalm 92:5-15) "O LORD, how great are thy works! *And thy thoughts are very deep.* (6) A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this. (7) **When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed forever:** (8) But thou, LORD, *art most high for evermore.* (9) For, lo, thine enemies, O LORD, for, lo, thine enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered. (10) **But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil.** (11) Mine eye also shall see *my desire* on mine enemies, *and* mine ears shall hear *my desire* of the wicked that rise

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up against me. (12) **The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree**: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. (13) **Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.** (14) **They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing;** (15) **To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.**”

GOD’S OBJECT

3rd — **The object of God’s providence is the spiritual, eternal good of his elect** (vv. 20-23).

(Isaiah 10:20-23) “And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* **the remnant of Israel**, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. (21) **The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God.** (22) For though thy people Israel be as the sand of

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the sea, *yet* a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. (23) For the Lord GOD of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined, in the midst of all the land.”

In every age there is a remnant, according to the election of grace, who must and shall be saved. It was true in Isaiah’s day. And it is true today. And everything God does, directly and indirectly, is for the salvation of his elect remnant.

Why does God send his church through trials, troubles, and difficulties of providential judgments like...?

- The Assyrian Invasion of Judah?
- The Persecutions of the Past?
- The Communist Rule of Asia and Eastern Europe?
- Civil Strife, Etc.?
- Rampant Ungodliness?

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He does these things for the purging of his church — **They are not all Israel which are of Israel. He does the things for the spiritual maturity of his saints, to teach us to lean upon our Christ alone** (Romans 5:1-5). **He does all things for the salvation of his elect, that he might gather his elect from afar.**

Illustration: *Paul's Shipwreck* (Acts 27-28).

FEAR NOT

4th, I want you to know and be assured of this next fact. — **God's saints in this world, even in the most troublesome times, have no cause for alarm or fear** (vv. 24-26; Matthew 10:30; Isaiah 41:10; 43:1-7).

(Isaiah 10:24-26) “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, **be not afraid of the Assyrian**: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. (25) **For**

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yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction. (26) And the LORD of hosts shall

stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb: and *as* his rod *was* upon the sea, so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt.”

(Matthew 10:30) “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

(Isaiah 41:10) “Fear thou not; for I *am* with thee: be not dismayed; for I *am* thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

(Isaiah 43:1-7) “But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou *art* mine. (2) When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they

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shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (3) For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. (4) Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. (5) Fear not: for I *am* with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; (6) I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; (7) *Even* every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”

- **Your troubles will not last long** (vv. 24-25; 2 Corinthians 4:18).
- **The Lord will deliver you, just as he delivered Israel from Egypt** (v. 26; 1 Corinthians 10:13; James 1:12).

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ENEMIES DESTROYED

5th — **In the end, our God will destroy his enemies and ours, and shall save his people** (vv. 27-34; Revelation 19:1-6; Romans 16:20; Romans 8:35-39; 1 Peter 5:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

(Isaiah 10:27-34) “**And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.**” — **THAT’S EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENS IN THE NEW BIRTH!**

“(28) He is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron; at Michmash he hath laid up his carriages: (29) They are gone over the passage: they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramah is afraid; Gibeah of Saul is fled. (30) Lift up thy voice, O daughter of Gallim: cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth. (31) Madmenah is

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removed; the inhabitants of Gebim gather themselves to flee. (32) As yet shall he remain at Nob that day: he shall shake his hand *against* the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem. (33) **Behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled.** (34) And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.”

(Revelation 19:1-6) “And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: (2) For true and righteous *are* his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. (3) And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. (4) And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying,

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Amen; Alleluia. (5) And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. (6) And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

(Romans 16:20) “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.”

(Romans 8:35-39) “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. (37) Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. (38) For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) Nor height, nor depth, nor

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any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(1 Peter 5:6-7) “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: (7) Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”

(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) “Rejoice evermore. (17) Pray without ceasing. (18) In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

I once read a story about a group of men met at a local high school every Saturday night to play basketball. While they played, the school janitor usually sat off in a corner reading his Bible, trying to prepare for the worship of God the next day. Normally, he read until they were done. Then he would lock up and go home. One night, one of the men asked, "What are you reading?" The old man replied, "The Book of Revelation." The younger man

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asked, with a bit of a snicker, "Do you understand it?" The old man said, "I sure do. — It says, 'Jesus is gonna win.'"

That is just about as good an explanation of the Book of Revelation as I ever read, or heard. When you read the Book of God's Providence, try to remember that the message of God in his Book is just that. — *The Lord Jesus Christ is going to win!*

Amen.