

## **DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN THE REFORMED TRADITION (PART I)**

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### I. Reformed Definition of Divine Providence

#### A. General Definition of Divine Providence:

God continually oversees and directs all things pertaining to the created order in such a way that 1) He preserves in existence and provides for the creation He has brought into being, and 2) He governs and reigns supremely over the entirety of the created order in order to fulfill all of His intended purposes in it and through it

#### B. Providence as Preservation:

God preserves in existence and provides for the needs of each aspect of the created order for as long as he purposes it to exist, and he protects all of his creation from any harm or destruction that stands outside his purposes for it. (see Neh 9:6; Matt 6:25-34; Acts 2:25; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:2-3; and Jas 1:17).

#### C. Providence as Governance:

God governs and reigns supremely over 1) all of the activities and forces of nature and natural law, and 2) all of the affairs of his moral creatures, in all cases accomplishing in them and through them (at times by divine concurrence) his eternal purposes—yet in neither realm does he govern in such a manner that it violates the integrity of creaturely moral responsibility and volitional freedom to choose and act according to the moral agent's strongest inclinations, nor does his exhaustive governance justly implicate the impeccable and infinitely holy moral character of God by making him either the author or the approver of evil. (see Deut 32:39; Psa 5:4; 135:5-7; Prov 21:1; Isa 45:5-7; Dan 2:21; 4:34-37; Eph 1:11).

### II. Select Biblical Support

#### A. Sample Key General Texts

##### 1. Psalm 135:5-7 (Governance of Nature)

<sup>5</sup> For I know that the LORD is great, and that our LORD is above all gods. <sup>6</sup> Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the sea and in all deeps. <sup>7</sup> He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who makes lightnings for the rain, who brings forth the wind from His treasures.

2. Daniel 4:34-35 (Governance of Nations)

<sup>34</sup> “. . . I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. <sup>35</sup> All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’”

3. Ephesians 1:11 (Governance of All Things)

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.

B. Spectrum Texts

1. Deuteronomy 32:39

“See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand.”

2. Isaiah 45:5-7

<sup>5</sup> “I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; <sup>6</sup> that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, <sup>7</sup> the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD Who does all these.”

Notice two observations:

- a. The term *bara* (“create”) is used in the OT exclusively with God as its subject. Here it is used in v. 7 for the two negative aspects of God’s control – darkness and calamity
- b. The terms in the second couplet are the strongest Hebrew words, respectively, for all that is good (*shalom*, or “peace”) and all that is bad (*ra*, or “calamity,” “destruction,” “evil”).

But alongside Isa 45:7, consider also these texts:

Yes, God is the One “forming light and creating darkness” (Isa 45:7a), but consider 1 John 1:5 also – “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you , that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.”

And yes, God is the One “causing well-being and creating calamity [*ra*]” (Isa 45:7b), but consider along with this also Psalm 5:4 – “For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil [*ra*] dwells with you.” (Note: “evil” in Psalm 5:4 is the same term (*ra*) used in Isaiah 45:7)

**Conclusion: God fully controls both good and evil, yet God is wholly good and is not evil** in any respect whatsoever.

### C. “Compatibilist” Texts

#### 1. Genesis 45:4-8

<sup>4</sup> “Then Joseph said to his brothers, . . . ‘I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup> Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life . . . <sup>7</sup> God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. <sup>8</sup> Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.’”

#### 2. Isaiah 10:5-7, 12, 15

<sup>5</sup> “Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger, and the staff in whose hands is My indignation. <sup>6</sup> I send it against a godless nation, and commission it against the people of My fury, to capture booty and to seize plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets. <sup>7</sup> Yet it does not so intend, nor does it plan so in its heart, but rather it is its purpose to destroy, and to cut off many nations . . . <sup>12</sup> So it will be when the Lord has completed all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will say, ‘I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness . . . <sup>15</sup> Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it? Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it?’”

#### 3. Acts 2:23; 4:27-28

<sup>2:23</sup> “this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death . . . <sup>4:27</sup> for truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.”