

Providence of God

- Providence = the continuing action of God in preserving His creation and guiding it towards his intended purposes.
- If creation was God's originating work regarding the universe, providence is His continued relationship to it.
- God does not create anything at this point, but instead He takes care of the creation.
- Thus providence really speaks of preservation and governance.



Providence as Preservation

- God maintains creation, preserves it from destruction.
- God also makes provision for the needs of the elements and members of creation.
 - Nehemiah 9:6 – “You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and **you preserve all of them**; and the host of heaven worships you.
 - Colossians 1:17 – And he is before all things, and **in him all things hold together**.
 - Hebrews 1:3 – He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and **he upholds the universe by the word of his power**. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
- Creation is not self-sufficient, but it is dependent upon God. He never ceases in preserving (contra to Deism).

Providence as Preservation

- Such providence applies to people as well.
 - Through Joseph, God preserved the family of Israel.
 - God preserved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego against the fire.
 - Jesus taught that we need not worry: God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers. Since we are worth more than they, God takes care of us too.
- Paul teaches that our salvation is preserved as well.
 - Romans 8:35 – Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?
- We can have confidence in the uniformity of nature.



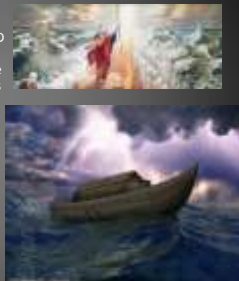
Providence as Government

- Providence of government = God's activity in the universe ensures that all its events fulfill His plan for it.
- It is the purposive directing of the whole of reality and the course of history to God's ends.
- If God's plan was determined in eternity past, providence of government is His execution of it in real time.
- God is in control of nature, animals, human history, and the actions of individuals.



Providence as Government

- Of Nature:
 - Psalm 135:5-7 – For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. 6) Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. 7) He it is who makes the **clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses**.
 - Elijah said it would not rain, it did not.
 - Jesus controlled nature – this convinced people that He was God.
- Over Animals:
 - Psalm 104:21-29 = God using animals to carry out His will.
 - 1 Kings 17:6 = Ravens delivering food to Elijah.



Providence as Government

- Of History:
 - Daniel 2:21 – He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;
 - Daniel 4:35 – all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he **does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth**; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”
 - With Assyria (Isaiah 10:5-12); With all nations (Acts 17:26).
 - This implies that even the direction of the gospel to each nation falls under this.



Providence as Government

– Of Individual Humans:

- If God controls national destinies, then He must also control individual humans by default. Some people have no problem with the former, but they reject the latter. This is inconsistent.
- Hannah's profound statement: 1 Samuel 2:6-7 – The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. 7) The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts.
- In Galatians 1:15-16, Paul says God set him apart for his task. Salvation came with that.
- The Holy Spirit sovereignly gives us the gifts we use (Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12).



Providence as Government

– Of "Accidental" Occurrences:

- Proverb 16:33, God controls how the lot falls.
- In Jonah, the crew cast lots to see who caused the storm, and it fell on Jonah.
- Lots were used by God to choose Matthias as Judas Iscariot's replacement in Acts 1:23-26.
- Exodus 21:13 – But if he did not lie in wait for him, but **God let him fall into his hand**, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee.
 - So even accidental manslaughter.
- Esther 4:14 – For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?



Providence as Government

• Of the free actions of humans:

- Ephesians 1:11 says God works all things out in conformity with the purpose of His will.
- God caused Egyptians to look favorably upon the Israelites so that they would be plundered.
 - Exodus 12:35-36 – The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. 36) And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.
- Psalm 33:14-15 – from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, 15) **he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.**
- God laid His purpose on the heart of the pagan ruler Artaxerxes.
 - Ezra 7:27 – Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem,
- Peter argues the same in Acts 2:23 concerning the crucifixion.
 - Acts 2:23 – this Jesus, delivered up according to the **definite plan and foreknowledge of God**, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

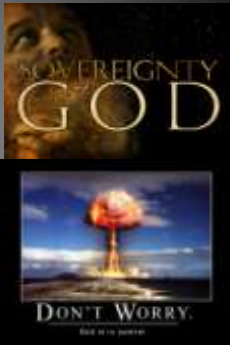
Providence as Government

• Of the free actions of humans:

- God incited David to sin by numbering Israel. Yet, Satan was the means that God used.
 - 2 Samuel 24:1 – Again the **anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David** against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah."
 - 1 Chronicles 21:1 – Then **Satan stood against Israel and incited David** to number Israel.
- Because people in the last days will not believe in God, God sends them a delusion.
 - 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 – and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11) Therefore **God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false.** 12) in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Providence as Government

- So then what is God's relationship to sin? He directs free choices, and even directs sin.
- James 1:13 says that God tempts no one. Temptation comes from within ourselves.
 - James 1:14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.
- Our desire to sin also comes from the world.
 - 1 Jn 2:16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.
- If God does not make men sin then, how are their free acts within His governing activity?
 - There are four ways.



Providence as Government

- God can prevent sin, permit it, direct it, or limit it.
- Sometimes God prevents sin.
 - Genesis 20:6 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her."
 - Psalm 19:13 Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.
- God sometimes permits sin.
 - This does not mean that God desired it (from an inclinational standpoint). But by God not preventing a sinful action, He renders it certain, yet not necessary. Thus, He is not the direct cause of sin.
 - Acts 14:16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.
 - Psalm 81:12-13 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels. 13) Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!
- God sometimes directs sin. This means that He makes some good come out of it.
 - A good example is Joseph and his brothers. Or Romans 11:13-15 says Israel's rejection of the gospel is the means by which reconciliation comes to the world.
- God can also limit sin. He did not prevent what happened to Job, but He did limit it. Also, think of 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Providence and Prayer

- If God rules the universe through providence, then why pray? Isn't His plan already fixed? If prayer effects what God does, then does that mean His plan isn't fixed? This is a definite paradox.
- Two facts must be accepted and perhaps reconciled:
 - First, Scripture teaches that God's plan is definite and fixed and is not subject to revision.
 - Second, we are commanded to pray and are taught that it has great value (James 5:16).
 - James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.



Providence and Prayer

- In some ways God does work in partnership with humans.
 - Think of Jesus few miracles in faithless Nazareth as opposed to the great miracles He did among those with faith.
- This is reconciled to God's fixed plan the same way election is. God ordains both the ends and the means.
 - God fixed the end, but He chose prayer to be the means.
 - So if a prayer gets answered, the end was ordained in eternity past, and the means by which it was going to be fulfilled was through answered prayer.
- Thus, prayer is powerful and effective.
- Jesus taught His disciples to pray that God's will be done (shows us the purpose).
 - He also taught us to pray persistently (present tense = keep asking, seeking, knocking)
- Not all prayers will be answered favorably.
 - Think about Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:9-10).
- God is so wise that He does not always give us what we want, but He does give us what is best.
 - Psa 84:11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.



Providence and Miracles

- Ever since the Enlightenment, rationalists rejected the Bible due to miracles.
 - It comes down to presuppositions.
- There are three main views proposed by theologians about miracles.
 - Little Known Natural Laws – God knows natural law better than us, and so what ignorant humans see as a miracle is really God working natural laws.
 - Breakdown of Natural Laws – God simply disregards natural law. Thus, the floating axe head in 2 Kings 6 was the suspension of gravity.
 - Supernatural interventions imposed Upon Natural Law – The laws of nature are intact, but God held the axe head up with His invisible hand. This is the most biblical position.
 - Exodus 14:21-22 – Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. 22) And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

