

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

What God's Word teaches about

PROVIDENCE

Gordon Lyons

KJV Edition

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Providence

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Providence

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Part 1

Synopsis: Providence of God

The Providence of God is the ordering of all events in the universe according to the sovereign purposes of God's own will, and in fulfilment of his foreordained plan for all creation. By his providence, God sustains the course of the universe; governing and preserving every individual star, planet, and other heavenly body. By his providence, God supplies the needs of all created beings, including both mankind and animals. The life of every living creature is in God's hands, and he upholds and preserves them by his acts of providence. Health, strength, ability, and all other faculties or endowments are gifts of God's providence—as is life itself. The ordering of all affairs in the lives of individuals and nations is in accordance with God's working in providence. God executes temporal judgments upon individuals and nations by specific acts of his providence, such as sword (war or conflict), famine, or plague. God's providential dealings with his own people are accompanied by his infinite wisdom and never-ending love, mercy and compassion.

Note 1

Providence Includes Government and Preservation

God is the God of Creation, Providence, and Redemption. The Providence of God is the outworking of the sovereignty of God. God's sovereign and providential control extends over all creation. Nothing of which God is the author (i.e., nothing except sin and its consequences), can exist unless God creates it. Everything that God creates he thereafter governs and preserves by his sovereign power, operating through his works of providence. Providence, therefore, includes two distinct elements:

1. *Government*; and
2. *Preservation*.

(Ps. 104:1-32; Isa. 45:5-12; John 1:3)

Scripture References

Psalms 104:1-9

- ⁽¹⁾ Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty.
- ⁽²⁾ Who coverest *thyself* with light as *with* a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain:
- ⁽³⁾ Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind:
- ⁽⁴⁾ Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire:
- ⁽⁵⁾ *Who* laid the foundations of the earth, *that* it should not be removed forever.
- ⁽⁶⁾ Thou coveredst it with the deep as *with* a garment: the waters stood above the mountains.
- ⁽⁷⁾ At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away.

⁽⁸⁾ They go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys unto the place which thou hast founded for them.

⁽⁹⁾ Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth. (See vv.10-32)

Isaiah 45:5-7

⁽⁵⁾ I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else, *there is* no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: ⁽⁶⁾ That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that *there is* none beside me. I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else. ⁽⁷⁾ I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: ¹ I the LORD do all these *things*. (See v.8)

Isaiah 45:9

⁽⁹⁾ Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! *Let* the potsherd *strive* with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? (See vv.10-11)

Isaiah 45:12

⁽¹²⁾ I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, *even* my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. (See vv.13-14)

John 1:3

⁽³⁾ All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. (See vv.1-5; see also Col. 1:16-17; cf. Heb. 1:2-3)

Note 2

General, Special, and Extraordinary Providence

For convenience, we may divide divine providence into the three following categories:

1. *General* Providence, which is God's sovereign control over the entire creation, including mankind generally;
2. *Special* Providence, which is God's sovereign control over, and preservation of, his own redeemed people in fulfilment of his purposes;
3. *Extraordinary* Providence, which is God's direct intervention in his creation. Works of extraordinary providence may result in unusual occurrences or phenomena, or they may involve the temporary suspension or overruling of the normally uniform laws of nature. Miracles (providential or absolute) are examples of God's works of extraordinary providence.

(See Note 5 below.)

(Ps. 139:7-16; Matt. 6:25-34; Rom. 8:28-31)

Scripture References

Psalms 139:7-12

¹ *I...create evil*: i.e., physical evil or disaster; not moral evil or sin. (GL)

⁽⁷⁾ Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

⁽⁸⁾ If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*.

⁽⁹⁾ *If* I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

⁽¹⁰⁾ Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

⁽¹¹⁾ If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

⁽¹²⁾ Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light *are* both alike *to thee*. (See vv.1-6)

Psalms 139:13-16

⁽¹³⁾ For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

⁽¹⁴⁾ I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made: marvellous *are* thy works; and *that* my soul knoweth right well.

⁽¹⁵⁾ My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, *and* curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all *my members* were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when as *yet there was* none of them. (See vv.17-24)

Matthew 6:25-26

⁽²⁵⁾ Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? ⁽²⁶⁾ Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? (See vv.27-29)

Matthew 6:30

⁽³⁰⁾ Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith?

Matthew 6:31-34

⁽³¹⁾ Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ⁽³²⁾ (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. ⁽³³⁾ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. ⁽³⁴⁾ Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof.

Romans 8:28-30

⁽²⁸⁾ And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. ⁽²⁹⁾ For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. ⁽³⁰⁾ Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (See v.31)

Note 3

God Provides Health and Food

It is by his providence that God provides for all our everyday needs. Many of the things we take for granted, or attribute to other sources, come to us providentially from the Lord. For instance, the health, strength, and the ability to work and to earn a living are all gifts of God's providence. Favourable climates that nourish the soil and produce much of our daily food, are also gifts of God's providence. God can suspend or withdraw these, or any other gifts of his providence, at his own sovereign will and pleasure. (Deut. 8:17-18; 28:58-67; 1 Chron. 29:12)

Scripture References

Deuteronomy 8:17-18

⁽¹⁷⁾ And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of *mine* hand hath gotten me this wealth. ⁽¹⁸⁾ But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for *it is* he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto thy fathers, as *it is* this day. (See vv.1-20)

Deuteronomy 28:58-63

⁽⁵⁸⁾ If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; ⁽⁵⁹⁾ Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, *even* great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance. ⁽⁶⁰⁾ Moreover he will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee. ⁽⁶¹⁾ Also every sickness, and every plague, which *is* not written in the book of this law, them will the LORD bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed. ⁽⁶²⁾ And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God. ⁽⁶³⁾ And it shall come to pass, *that* as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to naught; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. (See vv.15-57)

Deuteronomy 28:64-68

⁽⁶⁴⁾ And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, *even* wood and stone. ⁽⁶⁵⁾ And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: ⁽⁶⁶⁾ And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: ⁽⁶⁷⁾ In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of

thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see. ⁽⁶⁸⁾ And the LORD shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spoke unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy *you*.

1 Chronicles 29:12-14

⁽¹²⁾ Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand *is* power and might; and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all. ⁽¹³⁾ Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.

⁽¹⁴⁾ But who *am* I, and what *is* my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things *come* of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. (See v.16)

Note 4

God Controls Laws of Nature

The Sovereign God has established and set in motion all the laws of nature, and usually God works through the normal operation of these laws. However, none of the laws of nature are independent of the sovereign and providential control of God. All, without exception, are governed and preserved in operation by God's almighty power. The laws of nature cannot continue to operate uniformly, apart from God's immediate and providential control over them. It is a great mistake to believe that the universe governs itself according to the laws of nature alone. God always remains in total control of his creation; and, in Christ Jesus, that creation consists, subsists, and is constantly being upheld. (Job 12:10,15; 26:7-14; 34:13-15; Col. 1:16-17)

Scripture References

Job 12:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ In whose hand *is* the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind. (See vv.7-9)

Job 12:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth. (See vv.13-17)

Job 26:7-8

⁽⁷⁾ He stretcheth out the north [NIV, *northern [skies]*] over the empty place, *and* hangeth the earth upon nothing. ⁽⁸⁾ He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them. (See vv.9-14)

Job 34:13-15

⁽¹³⁾ Who hath given him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world? ⁽¹⁴⁾ If he set his heart upon man, *if* he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; ⁽¹⁵⁾ All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.

Colossians 1:16-17

- ⁽¹⁶⁾ For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:
⁽¹⁷⁾ And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. (See vv.14-19)

Note 5

God May Overrule Laws of Nature

Usually, God exercises his works of providence through natural laws—but not always. The God who established the laws of nature is perfectly free to exercise his sovereign dominion over them in by-passing or overriding these laws to accomplish his own purposes. By his acts of providence, God opened the Red Sea, thereby providing his people with a way of deliverance from the pursuing Egyptian army. By his providence, God provided sufficient manna to feed his redeemed people—an entire nation—in the desert. By his providence, the Son of God turned water into wine, and fed the five thousand and the four thousand. By his providence, the Lord Jesus healed the sick by a word of command, cast out evil spirits, and raised the dead to life. Again, by his acts of providence, Jesus commanded the winds and the waves to obey him. In all these cases, God by-passed the normally uniform operation of natural laws to achieve his own purposes. When God bypasses or modifies his natural laws in some way, we generally refer to such an event as a ‘miracle’. Miracles (which are merely demonstrations of God’s sovereignty and omnipotence) belong to the category of extraordinary providence. (Exodus 14:13-31; Matt. 8:27; 14:15-21; John 2:1-9)

Scripture References

Exodus 14:21-22

- ⁽²¹⁾ And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go *back* by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry *land*, and the waters were divided. ⁽²²⁾ And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry *ground*: and the waters *were* a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. (See vv.13-31)

Matthew 8:23-27

- ⁽²³⁾ And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him, ⁽²⁴⁾ And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. ⁽²⁵⁾ And his disciples came to *him* and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.
- ⁽²⁶⁾ And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.
- ⁽²⁷⁾ But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

Matthew 14:19-21

- ⁽¹⁹⁾ And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and broke, and gave the loaves to *his* disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.
- ⁽²⁰⁾ And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. ⁽²¹⁾ And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children. (See vv.15-18)

John 2:7-11

- ⁽⁷⁾ Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.
- ⁽⁸⁾ And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare *it*.
- ⁽⁹⁾ When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, ⁽¹⁰⁾ And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: *but* thou hast kept the good wine until now.
- ⁽¹¹⁾ This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him. (See vv.1-6)

Related Bible Truths

Inseparably linked to the doctrine of divine providence is the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. Everything that occurs through, or by means of, the providence of God is the outworking of God's sovereign purposes for the universe and all it contains. This applies both to the animate creation (human and animal) and to the inanimate creation (the non-living material universe). In one way or another, everything in all creation comes under the sovereign control of God in providence. Nothing can happen in the history of the universe—or in our lives—unless, from eternity, God has decreed or ordained these events or occurrences to take place.²

² See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Sovereignty of God*, by the same author.

Part 2

Doctrine of Divine Providence

Elements of Providence

God is the God of Creation, Providence, and Redemption. God's works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing of all his creatures, and all their actions. Providence, therefore, includes two distinct, but closely related, elements: *Preservation* and *Government*.³

Preservation

By *preservation* is meant that all created things owe the continuance of their existence, with all their properties, faculties or powers, to the will of God. For instance, man is said to live, move, and have his being, in God—or according to the will of God; i.e. man's life and breath is in God's hands. Just as man's life and breath is in God's hands, so also are all the properties, faculties, and powers of man's body and soul. All these are properties or faculties that God has bestowed upon man as a gift. God has bestowed these gifts according to his workings in common grace (i.e., grace that is common to all mankind). Thus, God's Word says:

Job 34:14-15

⁽¹⁴⁾ If he set his heart upon man, *if* he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; ⁽¹⁵⁾ All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust. (See vv.1-13)

Psalms 31:15a

^(15a) My times *are* in thy hand...

Acts 17:25

⁽²⁵⁾ Neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; (See vv.22-24)

Acts 17:28

⁽²⁸⁾ For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. (See vv.26-31)

For the preservation of his life, man is wholly dependent upon his Creator. Similarly, for the preservation of all his properties or faculties, such as health, strength, ability, intelligence—together with all his emotional capabilities—man is totally dependent upon the will of the living God.

What is true of mankind, is true of the entire creation—living creation, and non-living creation (such as the material universe). All alike are preserved in existence by the will of the Almighty and Sovereign God. This is clearly the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. The passages relating to this subject are very numerous, and they are of different kinds. Some of these passages assert in general terms that God sustains all things by the word of his power. For instance, the Scripture says:

³ Based on C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 [Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1977 reprint], p.575.

Colossians 1:16-17

- ⁽¹⁶⁾ For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:
⁽¹⁷⁾ And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. (See vv.14-19)

Hebrews 1:3

- ⁽³⁾ Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; (See vv.1-4)

Extent of Preservation

Many passages of Scripture refer to God's preservation being effected through the normal or uniform operation of the laws of nature. These are laws that God himself has established, and by which he continues to sustain and govern the entire created universe. (See, for example, Psalms 104 and 147) These and other related passages clearly teach:

1. That, as a whole, the universe does not continue in existence by itself. It would cease to exist if it were not supported by God's almighty power. Alternatively, it would resolve itself into chaos if God did not continually preserve it by his providential control, operating through or above the laws of nature.
2. That all living things, whether cells, plants, or animals, in their several genera, species, and individuals, are continued in existence—not merely because of their inherent principle of life and regeneration—but by the will of God who sustains all things by his almighty power.
3. That this preservation extends not only to the substance, but also to the shape or form. In other words, God is not only their Creator and Preserver—he is also their Designer. God assigns a specific shape or form to each individual member of his natural creation in such a way as to enhance and enrich its intrinsic beauty—to the praise and glory of God's name. Preservation also extends to all the qualities, properties or faculties, and powers, of every created thing.

Government

Concerning God's providential government, the Scriptures teach:⁴

1. That God's providential government is *universal*. It includes all creatures of God in all spheres of creation, and it governs all their actions. God's providence not only governs the living creation such as mankind and animals, it also governs the inanimate creation. The stars, planets, and every other form of non-living creation in heaven and earth is governed by God's providence. Everything that exists is under the intelligent and universal control of the infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God.
2. That God's providential government is *powerful*. It is the sovereign and universal sway of the omnipotent or Almighty God which renders absolutely certain the accomplishment of all his designed plans. Nothing in all creation can thwart or hinder the fulfillment of any of God's foreordained purposes. All that God has decreed from eternity will certainly come to pass at the time that God has set, and in the precise manner that he has planned.

⁴ Based on C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 [Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1977 reprint], p.582.

3. That God's providential government is *wise*. God governs the material world according to fixed laws—the laws of nature—which he himself has established, and by which he continues to sustain his creation. In his wisdom, God's natural laws govern irrational animals through their instincts. In this way, animals are provided for, and reproduce after their kind. In a similar manner, rational creatures such as mankind act in accordance with their nature: i.e., the instincts which God has given them, and which—in the case of mankind—is itself governed by their moral and spiritual nature. Unlike the animal creation, mankind has been made in the image and likeness of God. For this reason, instinct alone must never be allowed to govern or control man's actions.
4. That God's providential government is *holy*. There is nothing in any of the means which God uses to govern the universe which is inconsistent with his infinite holiness. In all the exercises of his providence, God stands totally apart from the sin attaching to fallen mankind, and from the corresponding curse attaching to the earth.

Part 3

God Governs All Events in the Universe

We have seen that God's providence includes both preservation and government. Government includes the ideas of design and control. God governs the universe toward the attainment of some great end (or design). To render certain the accomplishment of his designed plan, God controls or governs the sequence of all events throughout the universe.

God Controls Mankind

Regarding God's total control over all events relating to mankind, the Scripture says:

Psalms 22:28

⁽²⁸⁾ For the kingdom *is* the LORD'S: and he *is* the governor among the nations.
(see vv.27-31)

Or, as expressed by the NIV:

Psalm 22:28

⁽²⁸⁾ for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. (NIV)

And

Psalms 103:19

⁽¹⁹⁾ The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. (See vv.20-22)

God's dominion or sovereignty is *absolute*. God is the Supreme Ruler. All other rulers—in heaven and on earth—are subject to God (i.e. YHWH), and to his sovereign control over them.

The Lord Jesus Christ possesses the title, *King of kings and Lord of lords*. (Rev. 17:14; 19:16.) This is the title of sovereign dominion: a title which—as we can see from 1 Timothy 6:15—pertains to God Almighty (i.e. YHWH). Since the Father has invested his Son with this title, this in itself demonstrates the full deity of Jesus, the Son of God.

God Controls Nature

Regarding God's total control over all events relating to the natural elements, the Scripture says:

Psalms 135:6-7

⁽⁶⁾ Whatsoever the LORD pleased, *that* did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.

⁽⁷⁾ He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures. (See vv.1-13)

The physical laws controlling the natural elements (such as produce heat, wind, and rain), always remain under God's sovereign control.

God Controls Man's Personal Circumstances

Again, both personal circumstances, and personal or natural disasters, are subject to God's absolute control. Thus, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 45:6-7

⁽⁶⁾ That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that *there is* none beside me. I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else. ⁽⁷⁾ I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil [i.e., physical evil or disaster]: I the LORD do all these *things*. (See vv.1-13)

Again, concerning God's absolute control over the movements of Cyrus, King of Persia, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 46:9-11

⁽⁹⁾ 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. (See vv.3-13; cf. Dan. 4:25,32,34-35)

God, therefore, is not only the Creator of all that is, he is also the Governor or Controller of everything that happens throughout the length and breadth of his creation.

Time and Chance

Frequently, people say or believe that time and chance happens to us all. Thus, the Scripture says:

Ecclesiastes 9:11

⁽¹¹⁾ I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race *is* not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. (See vv.7-12)

From a human perspective, it may appear that God does not exercise direct control over the affairs of men. This, however, would be to imply that God is powerless to intervene (i.e. that he is not omnipotent). Alternatively, it could imply that God has no desire to intervene (i.e. that he shows no concern for the destiny of men and nations). Yet again, it could imply that God does not exist, and therefore cannot intervene. Such is the folly of human reasoning. This kind of reasoning fails to acknowledge the sovereignty of God. It fails to acknowledge the Lord's absolute right, power, and ability to exercise sovereign dominion or government over everything he has created.

From the divine perspective, however, matters are entirely different. God *does* exist; and he *is* omnipotent. He is the Sovereign Ruler or Governor of all creation. Again, God remains deeply concerned for mankind—even although mankind has rebelled stubbornly and persistently against him. Had God not been concerned for individual members of fallen mankind, he would not have provided a means of redemption and reconciliation for sinners through faith in Christ.

Furthermore, God specifically directs the course of events and the affairs of the world for the ultimate good of his own people—those whom Christ has redeemed with his precious blood. The believer is most certainly not at the mercy of 'time and chance'. The Almighty God who exercises sovereign dominion over his entire creation is the God who exercises that same dominion over the everyday lives of his own children. God does this to govern and preserve them until they reach their heavenly dwelling.

Part 4

God Plans Our Circumstances

The circumstances of life do not come about by time and chance. God expressly ordains or permits them according to his will, and in fulfilment of his purposes from all eternity. At the right time and place, God effects these purposes through 'circumstances'. Such circumstances do not occur fortuitously or at random. Rather, God arranges them, or brings them about, according to his manifold works of providence.

For instance, it is by the providence of God that we are born at one particular period of the world's history, and not at another. It is by the providence of God that we are born in one particular nation, and not in another. It is by the providence of God that we grow up under favourable or unfavourable circumstances. It is by the providence of God that we find love and companionship, or are prevented from finding it. Thus, God's Word says:

Acts 17:26

⁽²⁶⁾ And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; (See vv.22-28; see esp. v.28a)

Examples of God's Providence in Our Lives

It is by the providence of God that we experience comfort or hardship; wealth or poverty; success or failure (in the eyes of the world). It is by the providence of God that we are highly gifted in natural talents or abilities, or are less well gifted in these endowments. It is by the providence of God that we become well known, or remain in relative obscurity. Thus, the Scripture says:

1 Samuel 2:6-9

⁽⁶⁾ The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. ⁽⁷⁾ The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. ⁽⁸⁾ He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, *and* lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set *them* among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth *are* the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them. ⁽⁹⁾ He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. (See vv.1-11)

1 Chronicles 29:11-12

⁽¹¹⁾ Thine, O LORD, *is* the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all *that is* in the heaven and in the earth *is thine*; thine *is* the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.

⁽¹²⁾ Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand *is* power and might; and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all. (See vv.10-19)

Again, it is by the providence of God that we enjoy good health, or suffer from poor health; that we are granted long life, or are taken in early life. The *Lord* gives, and the *Lord* takes away. In times of deepest grief, sorrow and distress, we must humbly yield to God's hand of providence, saying, *Blessed be*

the name of the LORD. (Job 1:21b) Yet, for the believer, departure from this life is arrival in his Father's eternal home: a home where there is no more sorrow, suffering, trials, pain or tears—for all these things have passed away.

Perhaps most significantly of all, it is by the grace and providence of God that we, and not others, are brought to believe in Christ. It is by the grace and providence of God that we, and not others, have been granted the gifts of repentance and faith. It is by the grace and providence of God that we, and not others, have been delivered from the wrath to come, and have been adopted into the family of God as children and heirs. To this end, God's Word says:

John 6:37

⁽³⁷⁾ All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. (See vv.35-40)

John 6:44-45

⁽⁴⁴⁾ No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁽⁴⁵⁾ It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. {*Isaiah 54:13*} Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. (See vv.41-51; see also v.65)

Romans 9:15-16

⁽¹⁵⁾ For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. {*Exodus 33:19*}

⁽¹⁶⁾ So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. (See vv.6-18)

God Plans the Meeting with a Stranger

The Lord plans all our ways. To illustrate this principle by example: when circumstances cause a 'chance' meeting with someone who will later influence our lives for the good, this is the outworking of God's sovereignty and providence. There was nothing co-incidental or unplanned about this encounter. God had purposed to bring it about in his own way, and at the right time, so that he could further his plans for our lives. The meeting with a stranger can be the meeting of God's appointing.

In the counsels of God, there is no such thing as unforeseen circumstances or unplanned co-incidences. There is nothing unforeseen or co-incidental to God. Everything that occurs is happening in line with God's providence and in fulfilment of God's eternal plan: a plan that he decreed in Christ Jesus from before the creation of the world. To this end, God's Word says:

Ephesians 1:11

⁽¹¹⁾ In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: (See vv.4-12)

Ephesians 3:11

⁽¹¹⁾ According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: (See vv.1-12)

Romans 8:28

⁽²⁸⁾ And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. (See vv.29-30)

Everything that God has planned, he will fulfil. It is absolutely certain of accomplishment. Nothing in all creation can ever hinder or thwart God's intentions, or prevent the execution of God's decrees. Concerning the infallibility of God's purposes, the Scripture says regarding Cyrus:

Isaiah 46:8-11

⁽⁸⁾ Remember this, and show yourselves men: bring *it* again to mind, O ye transgressors.

⁽⁹⁾ 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. (See vv.1-13)

Minor Details are of Concern to God

The providence of God is not linked to those matters in our lives that we deem to be of greater importance. It extends to those matters that we may consider are insignificant, and therefore of little or no concern to God. As examples of God's concern for minor details, we need only consider the following Scriptures:

Matthew 6:26

⁽²⁶⁾ Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? (See vv.24-34)

Note what the Scripture says:

...*your heavenly Father feedeth them.* (v.26)

If *our* heavenly Father provides for the birds of the air, how much more will he provide for his own children?

Again, God's Word says:

Matthew 10:29

⁽²⁹⁾ Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. (See vv.24-31)

Or, as the NIV renders this verse:

Matthew 10:29

⁽²⁹⁾ “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? ⁵ Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.” (NIV)

Not a single sparrow can fall to the ground apart from the will of our Father in heaven. How much more, therefore, will that same Father preserve and protect his own children?

The Scripture further says:

Matthew 10:30

⁽³⁰⁾ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

The Scriptures not only tell us that God has numbered every hair of our head, but also that the Lord has planned every step of our way. (Prov. 19:21; 20:24.) God's Word tells us also that every breath that we take is in his hands. (Job 12:10; 34:14-15.) Again, his Word says that in him we live, and move, and have our being. (Acts 17:28.) These are clear indications that God concerns himself with even the most minute details of our everyday lives. If this were not so, then he could not justly be called our heavenly Father: for a true father cares about every detail of his children's lives—not just about the more important issues.

⁵ Greek *an assarion* [NIV footnote to Matt. 10:29]

Part 5

Seeking God's Guidance

By his special providence, and according to his purposes, God governs and preserves the lives of every individual believer. A person is free to exercise his God-given faculties such as reason and common sense, so long as he does so responsibly, and according to God's will for his life. However, if a person endeavours to apply reason and common sense to a situation that would be contrary to God's will and purposes, then the Lord may override his choice and thwart his intentions. God may do this by closing a particular door of opportunity against that person. Alternatively, he may do it by means of some other circumstances in that person's life that effectively prevents him from following his intended course. (Prov. 16:9; 19:21; 21:30)

At certain times, a believer may seek to know God's will about a particular matter (e.g. in regard to his vocation, or to employment). If he has committed the outcome to the Lord, then the Lord will certainly make known his will. At the right time, and in the right place, the Lord will open the appropriate door of opportunity for that believer—and will close all other doors against him. When a believer wholeheartedly seeks to honour the Lord and seek his guidance in this way, God will not fail to make known his will. (Ps. 32:8; 37:4-7; Prov. 3:5-6)

Ask, Seek, Knock

In conjunction with prayerfully seeking God's will, it is the believer's duty and responsibility to act. He must ask, seek, and knock at every door of opportunity that he believes could be in line with God's purposes for him. For example, in relation to employment, the believer must exercise reason and common sense in seeking any suitable work. He should attend interviews, and do all that is necessary to discover God's intentions. However, although it is the believer's responsibility to do all these things, the Lord will determine the actual outcome. Thus, the Scripture says:

Proverbs 16:3

⁽³⁾ Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.

Proverbs 16:9

⁽⁹⁾ A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.

Proverbs 19:21

⁽²¹⁾ *There are* many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

Proverbs 20:24

⁽²⁴⁾ Man's goings *are* of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way? (See also Prov. 21:30)

Only by seeking to know God's will, and by applying himself to finding out God's will, will the believer know that he is in the right place, at the right time. Only by doing these things, will the believer find himself acting in line with the Lord's express will and purposes for his life. Guidance, therefore, is a positive application of God's providence to a believer's life and circumstances. God will never fail to guide those who acknowledge and honour him in all their ways and who earnestly seek to know his will. (1 Sam. 2:30)

God, however, will bring disappointment and frustration of mind to those who fail to acknowledge his absolute right to govern their lives, and to direct their lives according to his own eternal purposes. The Sovereign Lord must be free to exercise total dominion over his purchased possession: and we are the purchased possession—the redeemed and holy people—of the Lord. (1 Chron. 28:9-10,20)

God Provides by Ordinary Means

Normally, God accomplishes his works of providence by operating through ordinary everyday means or agencies. God's providence, however, is by no means confined to the use of these agencies. The Lord may by-pass or override ordinary means at any time, as seems good and appropriate to him. The daily provision of manna and quail for an entire nation, and of food and drink for a prophet in a drought-stricken area, exemplify God works of providence through everyday means. Again the provision of sufficient food from a few loaves and fish to satisfy a multitude, is an example of the Lord's sovereign control over the laws of nature. It demonstrates, too, the Lord's power or ability to set aside these laws at any time to accomplish his own purposes.

As a rule, however, God works through—or by means of—the laws of nature that he himself has established. For example, God has established those laws that ensure regular seasons of the year: different seasons that are suitable for sowing, growing, reaping, and respite. In his providence, God also provides the necessary climatic and soil conditions, including sunlight, rainfall, and fertile ground to nourish the crops and cause them to grow. These are just a few instances of the ways in which God governs the course of nature to provide us with food.

Concerning the fact that the laws of nature do not operate independently of God's sovereign control, the Scripture says:

Psalms 104:10-14

- (10) He sendeth the springs into the valleys, *which* run among the hills.
- (11) They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst.
- (12) By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, *which* sing among the branches.
- (13) He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.
- (14) He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; (See vv.1-30; see esp. v.19)

God, however, can alter the favourable climates, soil conditions, and seasons, to produce a situation resulting in drought, famine or plague. Such disasters may be caused by man himself (due, for example, to poor land management). Or they may be inflicted upon a country or nation as a divine judgment. Thus, the Scripture says:

Psalms 107:33-34

- (33) He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground;
- (34) A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein. (See vv.35-38)

Isaiah 42:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools. (See vv.14-17)

Isaiah 50:2

⁽²⁾ Wherefore, when I came, *was there* no man? when I called, *was there* none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because *there is* no water, and dieth for thirst. (See vv.1-4)

This form of judgment usually follows God's frequently repeated—but neglected—warnings of a lesser magnitude. God, however, is not mocked. For those who refuse to respond to the lesser warnings, God eventually will inflict a greater. Hence, by their persistent and stubborn rebellion against God, or by their wilful refusal to acknowledge that the Most High God is Sovereign in the kingdoms of men, God may impose greater judgments. These judgments may take the form of 'sword' (i.e. armed conflict), drought, famine, or plague (epidemics or pandemics). For example, God may direct the course of events in nature specifically to bring judgment upon a people or nation. Thus, concerning his own people, the Scripture says:

2 Chronicles 7:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; ⁽¹⁴⁾ If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (See vv.8-18)

God promised his blessing on both king and people, so long as they remained faithful to him and to his covenant with them. However, the LORD warned them that he would judge them if they forsook his law and his ways. Thus, God's Word says:

2 Chronicles 7:19-22

⁽¹⁹⁾ But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; ⁽²⁰⁾ Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it *to be* a proverb and a byword among all nations. ⁽²¹⁾ And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house? ⁽²²⁾ And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshiped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

Concerning God's providential judgment on King Zedekiah and the people of Judah, the LORD says:

Jeremiah 21:5-6

⁽⁵⁾ And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath. ⁽⁶⁾ And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence. (See vv.1-7)

Jeremiah 21:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. (See vv.8-14; see esp. v.14)

Through the prophet Jeremiah, and other faithful prophets, God had warned his people repeatedly of coming judgment on their sinful and idolatrous way of life. With these warnings of judgment, however, the LORD had given the people many opportunities to repent. Thus, God's Word says:

Jeremiah 26:13

⁽¹³⁾ Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. (See vv.1-15; see esp. v.3)

Ultimately, however, the people had refused to repent, and God had allowed the city of Jerusalem to fall to the army of the Babylonian king.

Later, when the commander of the imperial guard found Jeremiah bound in chains, he reminded the prophet why God had permitted the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of his people to Babylon:

Jeremiah 40:2-3

⁽²⁾ And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah, and said unto him, The LORD thy God hath pronounced this evil upon this place. ⁽³⁾ Now the LORD hath brought *it*, and done according as he hath said: because ye have sinned against the LORD, and have not obeyed his voice, therefore this thing is come upon you. (See vv.1-6)

Again, by man's continued abuse or misuse of the favourable conditions provided by God, it is possible to turn rich fertile ground into a desert wasteland.

Part 6

Gifts of God's Providence

The Gift of Life

Human life comprises two elements—body and soul. In its present earthly state, the body is physical and mortal. The soul, however, is spiritual and immortal. Life is a gift of God's providence. Our life has been given to us by the Lord, and it is the Lord who preserves and sustains that life. Thus, God's Word says:

Job 12:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ In whose hand *is* the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.

Acts 17:28a

^(28a) For in him we live, and move, and have our being... (See also v.25)

We live by the providence of God. Without God's preservation, our lives would cease to be. As the Scripture says:

Job 34:14-15

⁽¹⁴⁾ If he set his heart upon man, *if* he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath;

⁽¹⁵⁾ All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust. (Cf. Ps. 104:29)

Or, with the NIV:

Job 34:14-15

⁽¹⁴⁾ If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit ⁶ and breath,

⁽¹⁵⁾ all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust. (NIV;

Life in the Womb

It is by the providence of God that he gives children to us. As the Scripture says:

Psalms 127:3

⁽³⁾ Lo, children *are* a heritage of the LORD: *and* the fruit of the womb *is* his reward.

⁶ Or *Spirit* [NIV footnote to Job 34:14]

Just as God *preserves* life (body and soul), so also God *creates* life (body and soul). It is by the providence of God that new life is conceived at fertilisation. Later—and still working through the natural processes that he has created—God continues to form this new life in the womb. Thus, the Scripture says:

Job 10:8a

^(8a) Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about...

Job 10:10-12

⁽¹⁰⁾ Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?

⁽¹¹⁾ Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews.

⁽¹²⁾ Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit.

Psalms 139:13

⁽¹³⁾ For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

Psalms 139:16

⁽¹⁶⁾ Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all *my members* were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when as *yet there was* none of them. (See vv.11-15; see also Ps. 119:73)

Isaiah 44:2a

^(2a) Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb... (See vv.1-8)

Isaiah 44:24a

^(24a) Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I *am* the LORD that maketh all *things*... (See vv.21-28)

Isaiah 46:3

⁽³⁾ Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne *by me* from the belly, which are carried from the womb: (See v.4)

Isaiah 49:1

⁽¹⁾ Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.

Isaiah 49:5a

^(5a) And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb *to be* his servant... (See vv.1-12)

Jeremiah 1:5

⁽⁵⁾ Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, *and* I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. (See vv.1-19; cf. Gal. 1:15)

From the above references, it is abundantly clear that life begins at conception or fertilisation. (Cf. Isa. 46:3b.) Following successful implantation in the lining of the uterus or womb, this life continues to take shape and develop during the months ahead.

Life is the creation of God. Human reproduction accounts only for the transmission of physical and mental characteristics. It does not account for the creation of a spiritual and immortal soul—a soul that God gives to each developing life. No one, except God himself, knows at what point the soul is created within each developing life. For this reason, we must consider human life to begin at the point of successful fertilisation (conception). From this point on, the fertilised living cell begins to sub-divide. This is the very beginnings of new life. Therefore, from then on, we must regard that developing life form as sacred in the eyes of God.

Part 7

It is The Lord Who Provides

All that we have by way of health, strength, abilities and talents, come to us by the providence of God. It is the Lord who provides. Similarly, our daily food, clothing, and other necessities of life, come to us by the providence of God. It is the Lord who provides. Again, our possessions, wealth—and even things like our employment—come to us from the Lord. It is the Lord who provides. Likewise, when the Lord favours us with relative peace and security, and when we can enjoy the freedom to worship God without fear of oppression, these liberties and privileges are gifts of God's providence. It is the Lord who provides.

In his providence, God provides us with all things needful, and often with many additional material and spiritual blessings. So long as we acknowledge that all things come to us from the Lord—that it is the Lord who provides—then we are honouring the Lord. If, however, we should deny that it is the Lord who provides us with these things, then we are denying the providence of God. In addition, we are denying God's right of sovereignty over our lives.

Regarding our duty to acknowledge the providence of God, and to honour him accordingly, the Scripture says:

Proverbs 3:9-10

⁽⁹⁾ Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: ⁽¹⁰⁾ So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine. (See vv.5-12)

As God provides for us, so we must be careful to give back to God that portion of our substance that is due to him. This means duly honouring God with all that we gain (not only with our income), and with the first benefits of all our increase.

Denying God's Providence in Our Lives

If we were to deny the providence of God in our lives, then God may suspend or withdraw some or more of his blessings. We may lose the things that we have received from the Lord, until we acknowledge that all things—great and small—come to us from his hand.

It is our duty and responsibility to work to earn a living. We must always remember, however, that it is the Lord who gives us the health, strength, and ability to work and to earn. Without these gifts of God's providence, we would be unable to work for ourselves. We would be unable to enjoy many of the temporal blessings—of family, home, and possessions—that so often we take for granted. However, it is the Lord who has granted these very blessings to us, together with many other blessings and benefits. It is the Lord who provides. Thus, God's Word says:

Deuteronomy 8:17-18

⁽¹⁷⁾ And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of *mine* hand hath gotten me this wealth. ⁽¹⁸⁾ But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for *it is* he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto thy fathers, as *it is* this day. (See vv.1-20)

Again, the Scripture reminds us:

1 Chronicles 29:12

⁽¹²⁾ Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand *is* power and might; and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all.

God's servant, David, continues by acknowledging the true source of his—and of his people's—many temporal blessings:

1 Chronicles 29:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ But who *am* I, and what *is* my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things *come* of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.

1 Chronicles 29:16

⁽¹⁶⁾ O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee a house for thine holy name *cometh* of thine hand, and *is* all thine own.

Acknowledging God's Providence in Our Lives

The passage quoted above from 1 Chronicles chapter 29 refers to the provision of wealth to purchase the materials necessary for the building of God's temple. Again, it refers to the provision of the necessary strength required by the labourers in constructing and furnishing the house of God. It refers, too, to the provision of the necessary skills to the craftsmen, and to the provision of all the necessary raw materials for these purposes.

The people could have claimed that the wealth was their own. They could have claimed that the strength belonged to the labourers, and the skill to the craftsmen. They could have claimed that all the raw materials necessary for the construction and furnishing of the temple had been gathered, paid for, and provided by the people themselves. Such claims, however, would have been to deny the providence of God. The people would have been refusing wilfully to acknowledge that they were wholly dependent upon the Lord for his gracious provision. All these material provisions—even those in their raw state—had come to them from the hand of the Lord. It is the Lord who provides. The people had indeed gathered all the materials necessary for the work—and it was their duty and responsibility to do so. Nevertheless, they were careful to acknowledge that even these bare building materials had been provided by the Lord, and that they belonged to the Lord.

We have already seen this principle exemplified in the passages quoted earlier (Deut. 8:17-18; 1 Chron. 29:12). However, as further indication of the fact that all things belong to the Lord, the Scriptures remind us that:

Psalms 24:1

⁽¹⁾ A Psalm of David.

The earth *is* the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

Psalms 50:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ For every beast of the forest *is* mine, *and* the cattle upon a thousand hills.

Psalms 50:12

⁽¹²⁾ If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world *is* mine, and the fullness thereof.

Everything in all creation belongs of right to our Sovereign Creator. God has given these things to mankind as a trust: That is the LORD has committed the earth's riches to mankind's stewardship—and mankind is responsible and accountable to God for the proper management of this trust.

Mankind, therefore, must acknowledge that the earth—and everything it contains—is the LORD'S.⁷

⁷ See also on *Bible Truths Explained: Sovereignty of God*, by the same author.

Part 8

Providential Tests and Trials

In his infinite mercy and never-ending love, God sometimes tests his people by permitting them to endure some form of suffering or affliction. These tests or trials of our faith usually come to us through the works of God's providence. They are specifically designed to bring glory to our heavenly Father, and to strengthen us in our faith.

At the time the Lord calls upon us to endure them, however, we often cannot understand the reason for—or the purpose behind—these tests and trials. In our despondency, we tend sometimes to believe that God has forsaken us, or that he is punishing us for some sin in our lives. However, this is not necessarily the case. It is perfectly possible for God to send us great sorrow, suffering, or grief—or to afflict us in some other way—even when we have done nothing specifically wrong or worthy of chastisement. Providential tests and trials, therefore, are not always connected with wrongdoing or sin in our lives. Thus, God's Word says:

Philippians 1:29-30

⁽²⁹⁾ For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; ⁽³⁰⁾ Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me. (See vv.27-28)

1 Peter 4:19

⁽¹⁹⁾ Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls *to him* in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. (See vv.12-18)

God is faithful, and he will preserve every saint whom he calls upon to suffer according to the purposes of his will.

The Sufferings of Christ

As an example of suffering according to the will of God, we need only consider the Lord Jesus. We know that the Lord Jesus Christ never at any time committed sin, nor was there any sinful inclination in his mind. Yet, God permitted the evil one to tempt severely his well-beloved Son. He allowed his own dear Son to be treated with scorn and contempt, and his name to be maligned, by a hypocritical religious leadership. He permitted the people to despise and reject their Lord and Messiah. God allowed his one and only Son to be betrayed into the hands of sinful men. By these evil hands, the Lord of glory was taken, cruelly crowned with thorns, spat upon, mocked, scourged, and finally, nailed to a cross.

All these things happened to the sinless Son of God. Yet, they happened according to God's providence, and in fulfilment of his eternal purposes. This does not excuse the sinful deeds of wicked men; nor does it in any way mitigate the gravity of their crimes, or diminish their responsibility for those crimes. However, it shows very clearly that—although Christ was totally without sin—yet he was not exempted from God's providential dealings.

Thus, God's Word says:

Acts 2:23

⁽²³⁾ Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: (See vv.22-24)

Isaiah 53:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. (Cf. Heb. 10:7,9)

Christ's sufferings were vicarious (substitutionary). Even so, the principle remains that Christ suffered according to the providential purposes of God. If Christ should so suffer for his people, should not his people expect to share in sufferings—under the providence of God?

The Sufferings of Believers

It is possible for a believer to be sorely and grievously afflicted—in body and soul (including the mind). God may never have intended these afflictions, however, as a punishment for sin. The Lord may very well have been sent them into our lives to achieve greater ends than we can ever understand. Let us remember the example of Joseph. Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt. His brothers intended it for evil, but the Lord intended it for good—to preserve his own people alive in Egypt during the great famine.

Again, let us remember what the Lord Jesus told his disciples when they asked why a certain man had been born blind. The Lord replied that it was neither because of this man's sin—nor because of his parent's sins—that he had endured this affliction. Rather, he had been born blind that the glory of God might be wrought in his life. This man had suffered long without sight. He rejoiced longer, however, when the Lord Jesus granted him his sight, and the man came to behold the Light of the World. (John 9:1-38)

Concerning the sufferings of believers, the apostle Peter tells us:

1 Peter 4:12-13

⁽¹²⁾ Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: ⁽¹³⁾ But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. (See vv.14-19; cf. 1 Pet. 3:14,17-18; cf. Heb. 11:32 - 12:3)

Again, in the midst of great suffering and heartbreaking loss, Job declares:

Job 1:21

⁽²¹⁾ And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. (See vv.13-22)

To his wife, Job said:

Job 2:10

- ⁽¹⁰⁾ But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips. (See vv.9-10a)

In the providence of God, we may expect not only manifold blessings, but also manifold sorrows. Such is the way of the cross, and to such has God called his redeemed and holy people. (Phil. 1:29) Yet, God is faithful. He will never allow his people to endure more than they are able to bear. (1 Cor. 10:13.) Rather, in their afflictions, trials, and distresses, the Lord himself will bear them. In all their calamities and perplexities, the Lord will uphold his people. For underneath the saints of God are the loving Redeemer's everlasting arms. Again, we have this certain assurance from the Word of God:

Isaiah 43:1-4

- ⁽¹⁾ 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 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.

To whom is the above Scripture addressed? God's own Word provides the answer:

Isaiah 43:7

- ⁽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. (See vv.5-6; cf. 1 Thess. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13-14)

Through all our extreme sufferings and painful trials, therefore, it remains unchangeably true that all things work together for good for those who love God; for those who are the called according to his purpose. (Rom. 8:28)

Misjudging a Fellow Believer's Sufferings

In the providence of God, many of the Lord's people in different ages have suffered great trials and sorrows. Sometimes, however, their fellow-believers have misunderstood the reason for their sufferings, and the purpose of a loving and compassionate God in permitting these sufferings.

We must be very careful lest we misjudge our brother or sister in the Lord. We must never assume that—because they are enduring some form of affliction, sorrow, or pain—this must be God's judgment upon them for some sin that they have committed. This may be true in certain cases, but it is certainly not true in every case.

Instead of causing them even greater anguish, sorrow or distress by thinking or speaking unkindly or an afflicted brother or sister, we should endeavour to help them in a practical and prayerful manner. We should not be critical of their misfortunes. Rather, we should remember that *he who is spared the trial today, may not be spared tomorrow*. Let us not presume upon the grace that keeps us, and without which we ourselves would most assuredly fall. (1 Cor.10:12)

Part 9

Blessings and Judgments

Providential Blessings

God Requires Obedience to the Moral Law

We stand in relation to God as his adopted sons and daughters. As the children of our Father in heaven, there are many blessings that we may receive when we are obedient to the Word and will of our heavenly Father. However, there are many ‘curses’ (or forms of chastisement) that we may receive when we disobey or dishonour our heavenly Father.

As the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, we are not subject to the law as a covenant of works. That law has been abrogated. In this respect, we are not under law, but under grace. Nevertheless, although not bound by the law of works, we are bound to obey the moral teachings and spiritual principles of God’s Word. For example, the law says that we must not murder, commit adultery, steal, provide false testimony, or covet our neighbour’s house or possessions. (Exodus 20:13-17.) Being under grace does not nullify the requirements of God’s moral law—of which these commandments form an integral part. God requires us to observe all these commands in full, together with the spiritual principles that derive from each of them individually. This requirement extends to both tables of the law; i.e. to all the Ten Commandments.

It is our duty and responsibility to honour God as our Father. If, however, we fail to honour him by our daily lives and conduct, then we may forfeit his blessings. Instead, we may find that God has replaced these blessings by the curses or forms of chastisement that he has threatened.

Blessings for Obedience

If his people are obedient to him, God promises to bless them with sufficiency or with plenty through his acts of providence. Thus, the Scripture says:

Leviticus 26:3-4

- ⁽³⁾ If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;
- ⁽⁴⁾ Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. (See vv.1-12)

If we obey the Word and will of God—by keeping and doing God’s commands (v.3)—then God will ensure that all our daily needs are met. He will ensure, too, that we are successful in all the work of our hands. To this end, the Scripture says:

Deuteronomy 28:2-6

- ⁽²⁾ And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.
- ⁽³⁾ Blessed *shalt thou be* in the city, and blessed *shalt thou be* in the field.
- ⁽⁴⁾ Blessed *shall be* the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine [cattle or similar livestock], and the flocks of thy sheep.
- ⁽⁵⁾ Blessed *shall be* thy basket and thy store.

⁽⁶⁾ Blessed *shalt* thou *be* when thou comest in, and blessed *shalt* thou *be* when thou goest out. (See vv.1-10)

Deuteronomy 28:11-12

⁽¹¹⁾ And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee. ⁽¹²⁾ The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. (See vv.13-14)

These are just a sample of the providential blessings that God promises to bestow upon his people in all ages. These blessings are conditional on his people's wholehearted faithfulness, love, and obedience to him, and to his Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Providential Judgments

Curses for Disobedience

God is abundantly merciful and willing to forgive those who repent. Nevertheless, if God's people persist in their sin and unfaithfulness, and if they do not obey God's Word and will, then eventually the Lord will withdraw his blessings and will impose some form of judgment. The Bible often refers to this kind of judgment (temporal judgment) as a *curse*. Thus, for example, God's Word says:

Deuteronomy 28:58-59

⁽⁵⁸⁾ If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; ⁽⁵⁹⁾ Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, *even* great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance. (See vv.60-68)

We must emphasise that the Lord imposes judgments such as these only on those who wilfully and stubbornly refuse to respond to all other lesser forms of correction. When imposed on a national scale, however, it is inevitable that those who have remained faithful to God will—to some extent—be affected by the judgment imposed on the nation. Even so, God will preserve his faithful saints. However, for those who stubbornly and repeatedly have disobeyed the Lord—refusing to repent—the '*providence*' of blessings has become the '*pro-vidence*' of curses. Yet, God imposes even these in love, and with compassion, with the aim of effecting true, godly repentance, restoration, and reconciliation.

God's Word Withdrawn in Judgment

Another form of curse or judgment on a wilfully and persistently rebellious people, is the suspension or removal of God's works of grace. For example, when the Holy Spirit no longer strives with men and women, this is a form of judgment on that people or nation. Similarly, when the Word of God is no longer proclaimed in all its power and fullness, this too is a form of judgment on a disobedient people or nation. To this end, God's Word warns:

Amos 8:11

⁽¹¹⁾ Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:

When a people or nation consistently despises the Word of the living God and practises iniquity, and when their religious leaders condone sin or practise it themselves, God acts in judgment. He withdraws the Word of life, and therefore the only message of salvation. As the Scripture says:

Amos 8:12

⁽¹²⁾ And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find *it*.

Again, the Scripture warns:

Proverbs 29:18a

^(18a) Where *there is* no vision, the people perish...

This is a most solemn warning from the Word of God. Where there is no revelation—no teaching of the revealed will of God, as contained in the Bible—the people throw off restraint. God then leaves such wicked people to perish in their iniquity. They loved not the truth, but delighted in a lie. God, therefore, gives them over to the punishment of their perverse and sinful ways. This is God's judgment on their evil way of life. (Rom. 1:18-32; 2 Thess. 2:10-12)

Part 10

Sin Leads to a Nation's Disgrace

God cannot be mocked. Those who despise the Word of God will themselves be despised. It is not in vain that the Scripture says:

Proverbs 14:34

⁽³⁴⁾ Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin *is* a reproach to any people.

In his Word, the Bible, God reveals his way and standard of righteousness. This is the only standard of behaviour acceptable to God. Without a true knowledge and understanding of God's righteous standard as revealed in his Word, however, a nation eventually brings disgrace upon itself by its unrighteous, ungodly, rebellious and sinful behaviour. If a nation still refuses to repent and return to God, then ultimately that nation will face moral and spiritual ruin. It will be destroyed as a civilised nation, or it will lose its independence or autonomy. God will hand that nation over to its enemies. In his providence, the Lord appoints an enemy to execute his judgments on a persistently sinful and rebellious nation. Thus, God's Word says:

Jeremiah 6:19

⁽¹⁹⁾ Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, *even* the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it.

Jeremiah 6:22-23

⁽²²⁾ Thus saith the LORD, Behold, a people cometh from the north country, and a great nation shall be raised from the sides of the earth.

⁽²³⁾ They shall lay hold on bow and spear; they *are* cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roareth like the sea; and they ride upon horses, set in array as men for war against thee, O daughter of Zion. (See vv.13-30; see also Jer. 9:12-16)

Regarding the subsequent invasion and captivity of Judah, God's Word says:

Jeremiah 40:1-3

⁽¹⁾ The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after that Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him being bound in chains among all that were carried away captive of Jerusalem and Judah, which were carried away captive unto Babylon. ⁽²⁾ And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah, and said unto him, The LORD thy God hath pronounced this evil upon this place. ⁽³⁾ Now the LORD hath brought *it*, and done according as he hath said: because ye have sinned against the LORD, and have not obeyed his voice, therefore this thing is come upon you.

This is one of history's painful and frequently repeated lessons. It is a lesson, however, that many people still have not learned.

Example of Israel

On numerous occasions, and in many different ways, God punished Israel (or Israel and Judah) by his providential acts of judgment. These judgments ranged from drought, famine and plague, to war, captivity and devastation of their land. As so often happens, these disasters brought with them the consequential disasters of loss of fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, children and other loved ones.

In his mercy, God had at first sent his prophets to warn the people of the consequences of their sinful actions. The people, however, would not listen to the prophets of God. (Jer. 6:10,17.) They did not believe that God would act in judgment if they continued in their sin. Notwithstanding their stubbornness and rebellion, God sent more prophets. These prophets warned the people that—if they did not utterly forsake their sinful ways, and return to the LORD their God—then God would send upon them the sword, famine and plague. Thus, God's Word says:

Jeremiah 14:11-12

⁽¹¹⁾ Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for *their* good.

⁽¹²⁾ When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence. (See v.10)

Again, God's Word says:

Jeremiah 15:1-2

⁽¹⁾ Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, *yet* my mind *could* not *be* toward this people: cast *them* out of my sight, and let them go forth. ⁽²⁾ And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the LORD; Such as *are* for death, to death; and such as *are* for the sword, to the sword; and such as *are* for the famine, to the famine; and such as *are* for the captivity, to the captivity. (See vv.3-4)

Still, however, the people would not listen to God's warnings, nor turn from their sin and unfaithfulness to God. They persisted in their iniquity and rebellion. They mocked and shamefully treated and rejected the true prophets of God. By doing so, however, they had been despising the very Word of God: for the prophets had been the bearers of that Word. Therefore, when these people consistently despised God's message of grace and mercy, the Lord finally acted in judgment, and in fulfilment of his many warnings.

For their persistent unfaithfulness to God (spiritual adultery), the Lord ultimately gave the northern kingdom of Israel into the hands of her enemies. When at last the capital city of Samaria fell, the remaining people were taken captive to a foreign land. At a later stage in history, God imposed a similar judgment on the southern kingdom of Judah. Because of their unfaithfulness to God's covenant with them, the Lord delivered the people of Judah over to their enemies. When the capital city of Jerusalem fell, most of the remaining people were exiled to Babylon, as the prophets had predicted and forewarned.

These examples represent the kind of providential judgments that God ultimately imposes upon a stubbornly rebellious people when they despise his grace. This is the kind of judgment that God can impose when people wilfully refuse to respond to all other lesser forms of correction.

In these last days, God has sent one greater than any of the former prophets. For he has given us his Son—the One who is Prophet, Priest and King. In view of the majesty of his person, and the dignity of his offices, what will God do to a people who wilfully despise and reject his one and only Son? It is well for us to remember these Scriptures:

Matthew 21:37-41

- (37) But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.
- (38) But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.
(39) And they caught him, and cast *him* out of the vineyard, and slew *him*.
- (40) When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?
- (41) They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out *his* vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. (See vv.33-44)

Hebrews 1:1-2a

- (1) God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, (2a) Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son...

Hebrews 2:1-3

- (1) Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip. (2) For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; (3) How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*; (See v.4)

Part 11

Failing to Acknowledge God's Providence

Everything recorded in the Bible was recorded for our learning that we might not presume upon the grace of God and become like Israel and Judah in turning away from the Lord. We can turn away from the Lord when, for example, we are attempting to serve him, while—in our hearts—we are secretly harbouring false gods or idols. One way of harbouring false gods in our hearts is to set great store by our personal achievements. We glory in our abilities, in our position, in our wealth, and in our possessions; not acknowledging that all these things—together with every other good and perfect gift—have come to us from the Lord. (Jas. 1:17) Instead of being grateful and humble because God has enabled us to achieve these successes, or to attain these things, we become proud and conceited. We vainly imagine that we have a right to be proud of the fruits of our own efforts.

What, however, does the Scripture say?

Deuteronomy 8:2

⁽²⁾ And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, *and* to prove thee, to know what *was* in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or not.

Deuteronomy 8:12, 14

⁽¹²⁾ Lest *when* thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt *therein*... ⁽¹⁴⁾ Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;

Deuteronomy 8:17-18a

⁽¹⁷⁾ And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of *mine* hand hath gotten me this wealth. ^(18a) But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for *it is* he that giveth thee power to get wealth... (See vv.19-20)

This kind of attitude is sinful pride. It is a refusing to acknowledge the providence of God in our lives, and in the lives of our families. Of all sins, however, pride is one that God most detests. Pride is a kindred sin to the sin of rebellion: the rebellion of God's own people against their Creator, Provider and Redeemer. We must ever remember that—although we are God's people—we are a people whom he has saved and whom he is keeping eternally secure by his sovereign grace. If, however, we will not learn that God will judge his people, and if we presume upon the grace of God, then we are leaving ourselves open to the judgments that God has threatened. Initially, this may be of a milder disciplinary nature. If, however, we fail to heed the lesser forms of correction, God will ultimately impose a greater.⁸

Neglecting Christ Brings Judgment

If unconverted people live without regard for Christ and his atoning work on behalf of sinners, then they have neglected or rejected God's appointed way of salvation. To neglect or reject the way of salvation is to despise the grace of God, and to treat God's Word and Spirit with contempt. (Heb. 2:1-3; 10:26-31; 12:25,29) Since they have carelessly neglected or wilfully refused to turn with all their hearts to the living and true God through faith in his Son, these people stand justly condemned. They are presently

⁸ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Adoption under Discipline*, by the same author.

abiding under the wrath of God; and, unless they repent, they will forever remain under that wrath (John 3:18,36) Judgment must assuredly come upon unrepentant sinners. At the Last Day, the Lord will pronounce his final judgment against these wicked people. Even in this present life, however, God may also pronounce and impose temporal judgments, to warn of the coming final judgment.

Natural Disasters

Natural disasters occur frequently throughout the world. These disasters, however, are always according to the providence of God. On occasions, natural disasters come as a direct consequence of a people's persistently sinful behaviour. On these occasions, God may impose such disasters as a form of judgment. For example, in Noah's day, God destroyed mankind with a catastrophic flood, because of the unbridled wickedness, corruption, and violence of the people. (Gen. 6:5-13; 2 Pet. 2:5; 3:5-7.) Similarly, on another occasion, the LORD destroyed Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain, because of the people's sexual immorality and unnatural and perverted homosexual practices. (Gen. 19:1-29; 2 Pet. 2:6-8; Jude 1:7)

Often, the purpose of inflicting temporal judgments such as these is to warn people of that greater and final judgment that will take place at the Last Day. Against this final judgment, there will be no appeal. God gives space to repent in this world only. Yet, people may persistently refuse to forsake their greed, covetousness, lust, and idolatry. They may continue in their immorality, or any other sinful practices or attitudes. If, however, they do so and remain impenitent to the end, then inevitably they must reap the consequences.

Would God Destroy Innocent Lives?

Sometimes, people suggest that God cannot be directly responsible for natural disasters, since these disasters often involve the destruction of many 'innocent' lives. They argue that a God of love would not bring such destruction on anyone. This argument is, however, unsound, untenable and invalid. For if God will not bring destruction⁹ on anyone, then there can be no such place as hell or the lake of fire: for the lake of fire represents a place or state of eternal conscious torments.

A person may assert that hell (or, the lake of fire) is reserved only for the worst of impenitent and wicked sinners. This assertion, however, is unsatisfactory. For, outside of Christ, everyone in the world is unrepentant and wicked in the sight of a holy and righteous God. The entire world of unbelievers is guilty of sin, and polluted by sin. No one is innocent. Without exception, everyone outside of Christ lies under the wrath and condemnation of God for their sin. Again, the whole world stands justly condemned, because they have despised the death of God's only Son by refusing to repent and believe on him. It is true that God is a God of love. However, we must never forget that God is also a God of light; i.e. of absolute or transcendent holiness, righteousness, justice and truth. An absolutely holy and righteous God can by no means clear the guilty. (Nahum 1:2-3)

Again, we cannot contend that no one deserves to die. The truth is that no one deserves to live. Except for the mercy and grace of God, all of us alike would perish without hope of redemption. We have already said, however, that God is the God of Creation, Providence, and Redemption. In his great and eternal love, and yet in full consistency with his absolute holiness and with the demands of justice against the sinner, God has provided a way of redemption. This way is open to all those who believe in God's one and only Son for their salvation.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the sacrifice for their sin—the sacrifice of atonement that fully satisfies and turns aside the wrath of God. Christ bore the wrath of God on behalf of the repentant and believing sinner. The Lord Jesus is the means through whom God reconciles sinners to himself, by the work of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling and through the repentant sinners' faith in God's Son. Being justified

⁹ In this connection, it must be remembered that *to destroy* means *to bring to complete ruin*—not to annihilate (G. Lyons)

and reconciled, God then adopts these redeemed sinners into his family as his beloved children and heirs.¹⁰

¹⁰ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Repentance*, by the same author.

Part 12

God Judges Nations

God rules as absolute Sovereign over all the nations. Whether the nations acknowledge him or not, God controls their affairs and holds their destiny in his hands. Every nation in the world comes under the judgments of God—for good or evil. Thus, concerning King Belshazzar of Babylon, the Scripture says:¹¹

Daniel 5:18-21

⁽¹⁸⁾ O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: ⁽¹⁹⁾ And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. ⁽²⁰⁾ But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: ⁽²¹⁾ And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and *that* he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. (See vv.1-31; see also Dan. 4:17,25-37)

Of course, there will be a time when all the nations will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. God, however, does not reserve his judgments for the future alone. Even now, God is visiting the nations in judgment. These judgments are of limited scope, nature and duration. They pertain only or principally to this present world or age. Thus, we refer to them as ‘temporal judgments’; i.e. judgments relating to this life and to the existing form of creation.

Temporal Judgments

In his providence, God sustains the nations with all things needful. As the Scripture says:

Matthew 5:45b

^(45b) ...for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

However, if a nation refuses to acknowledge the true God as their Provider, Lord, and Sovereign, and if it continues to practise those evil deeds that God’s Word condemns, then God will judge that nation. God brings judgment upon a nation in exactly the same way as he sometimes judges his own rebellious people. He judges them by ‘sword’ (war or conflict), famine, or plague, or by any other similar devastation or destruction, such as drought or flood. As an example of God’s power to control and channel the forces of nature to accomplish his sovereign purposes, the Scripture says:

Job 12:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth. (See vv.13-16)

¹¹ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Sovereignty of God* under *God’s Sovereignty Over the World*, by the same author.

In his providence, God may use drought, flood, or any other disaster to judge a country or a nation. He may do so to remind the inhabitants of that land that there is a God in heaven who rules as Sovereign over all creation. Thus, the Scripture says:

Psalms 103:19

⁽¹⁹⁾ The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.

Again:

Micah 5:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen, such as they have not heard. (See vv.7-14)

We need only consider the present state of the world, and of many thousands of suffering individuals within the world, to see the effects of God's judgments upon people's wilful sin and rebellion. It is folly indeed to neglect or reject the living God of all creation: for he is a great King, and every nation on earth ought to fear or reverence his name. (Mal. 1:14b)

We have said that God is a righteous, holy and just God who will by no means acquit the guilty. (Nahum 1:2-3) Even so, the Lord is also a God who delights in mercy. He is a God who has great compassion toward sinners. He does not desire the death of anyone. Rather, he desires that they should turn from their wicked ways and live. (Ezek. 18:23; 33:11)

In Wrath, God Remembers Mercy

In righteous judgment, God will send disaster upon all unrighteous people and nations. However, in mercy and compassion, the Lord will first give his own backsliding people space to repent. Thus, the Word of God holds out hope to his backslidden and rebellious people:

Jeremiah 26:13

⁽¹³⁾ Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. (See vv.1-15)

God extends similar hope of mercy to any nation that repents of its evil deeds and turns to him in repentance. As an illustration, we need only consider what God said to the great city of Nineveh:

Jonah 3:4

⁽⁴⁾ And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. (See vv.1-3)

How, though, did the people respond to God's threat of imminent judgment?

Jonah 3:5

⁽⁵⁾ So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

Jonah 3:10

⁽¹⁰⁾ And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not. (See vv.6-9)

On this occasion, God spared Nineveh. However, we must never forget that—on a later occasion—the Lord totally destroyed this city. Then, the judgment of God—which had been averted as a result of Jonah’s preaching and the people’s repentance—fell with full force on the Ninevites. This judgment came because the Ninevites later spurned the grace of God to return to their rebellious and sinful ways. (See the book of Nahum.)

God’s Wrath Strikes the Unrepentant

When a people stubbornly refuse to repent with all their heart and soul, and deliberately continue to practise their sinful deeds, then God will certainly act in judgment. God’s Word does not warn in vain:

Jeremiah 21:3-6

⁽³⁾ Then said Jeremiah unto them, Thus shall ye say to Zedekiah: ⁽⁴⁾ Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that *are* in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and *against* the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls, and I will assemble them into the midst of this city. ⁽⁵⁾ And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath. ⁽⁶⁾ And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence. (See vv.1-14)

These solemn words were written for our instruction and warning. For those, however, who will not heed the warning of God, they will find that history has a habit of repeating itself. Thus, today, many people are enduring the consequences of their own sinful actions. Sadly, and through no fault of their own, many individuals are enduring the consequences of other people’s sin—consequences for which God will one day judge those responsible.

Though mankind knew God’s righteous decree, they refused to repent and forsake their evil ways. The Lord, therefore, has inflicted upon sinful mankind the judgments that he has threatened. He has given these impenitent individuals over to the consequences of their chosen evil ways. (Jer. 2:17,19; 21:14; Rom. 1:18-32)

Part 13

Sins of the Father

There is a sense in which God holds every person accountable for his *own* sins. In this sense, the sins of the son are not attributable to—nor are they derived from—the sins of the father: (e.g. the man born blind). (Ezek. 18:19-20; John 9:1-3)

There is, however, another sense in which the sins of the father are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate God. When people continue to practise their evil deeds in defiance of God's Word, then God warns that the children will bear the consequences of their parent's sin. Thus, for example, God's Word says:

Exodus 20:5-6

⁽⁵⁾ Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me; ⁽⁶⁾ And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (See vv.1-17)

Exodus 34:6-7

⁽⁶⁾ And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, ⁽⁷⁾ Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*. (See vv.1-8)

Jeremiah 32:18-19

⁽¹⁸⁾ Thou showest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, *is* his name, ⁽¹⁹⁾ Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes *are* open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings: (See vv.16-35)

Tragically, the effects of disregarding God's warning are plainly evident today on every hand. People who have lived in defiance of God and who have defiled and distorted God's moral laws are now seeing the consequences of their evil deeds in the lives of their children and grandchildren. It is a true saying indeed:

Hosea 8:7a

^(7a) For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind... (See vv.1-14)

Consequences of Parents' Sin on their Children

Thus we see that a consistently sinful lifestyle practised by parents—and by grandparents before them—can well result in their children living in very similar, or even more depraved lifestyles than their forebears. This is what the Lord means by saying that the sins of the parents are visited on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate (i.e., despise) him, his Word, and his ways.

By despising God, his Word and his ways, these parents have rejected God's standards of righteousness, and have chosen to live according to their own sinful ways. Not only have they set their children the worst possible example, but they have caused their children to despise and repudiate moral and spiritual values, and to stifle the voice of conscience within them. Of course, as they grow older, the children will become accountable before God for their own sins.

Yet, even in such a situation, God can and does show mercy. Many such children—and parents—have been redeemed from such a lifestyle by the sovereign grace of God. No doubt, many more will yet be redeemed and made the children of God. Nevertheless, it remains true that God will judge those who remain impenitent unto the end.

God is Not Mocked

Multitudes of people around the world are discovering the truth of God's Word:

Jeremiah 4:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ Thy way and thy doings have procured these *things* unto thee; this *is* thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart.
(See vv.11-22)

Or, as expressed by the NIV:

Jeremiah 4:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ "Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you. This is your punishment. How bitter it is! How it pierces to the heart!" (NIV)

God is not mocked. Those who have sown the wind—and have enjoyed their sinful pleasures—are now reaping the bitter harvest. They have sown to the flesh—their sinful nature; and of the flesh, they have reaped corruption: corruption of body, and corruption of mind. It is a dreadful thing indeed to despise the warnings contained in the Word of the living Sovereign God.

The Ungodly Called to Repentance

It is an undeniable truth of the Bible that the most holy and righteous God visits people in judgment. Yet, he is still the same loving, merciful, and compassionate God who gave his one and only Son to be the Redeemer of sinful men and women. Regarding those who turn to God with all their heart and soul, seeking mercy and forgiveness through the merits of Christ's blood, God has promised to be merciful. He has assured everyone who calls upon the name of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that their sins—however great—will be forgiven, and will never again be called to remembrance. (Jer. 31:34; Rom. 10:13; Heb. 8:12)

There is no limit to the love of God, nor to his willingness to forgive and to reconcile to himself the truly repentant sinner. As the Scripture says:

Isaiah 1:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. (See vv.1-20)

The Scripture continues:

Isaiah 1:19-20

⁽¹⁹⁾ If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: ⁽²⁰⁾ But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

God promises mercy to those who truly repent and utterly forsake their evil ways. The Lord reserves judgment, however, for those who refuse to repent. Similarly, God holds judgment in store for those who make an outward show of repentance, but who later return to their old sinful way of life. Remember the people of Nineveh!

God's People Called to Repentance

At times, God's own people prove unfaithful to him. Yet, the Lord promises mercy to them upon their true and heartfelt repentance toward him, and the forsaking of their sin. Though God may have visited his people with providential judgments, yet the Lord gives them this assurance:

2 Chronicles 7:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; ⁽¹⁴⁾ If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (See vv.1-22)

God sends drought, destructive insects (or, alternatively, vermin), and plagues (including epidemics or pandemics). However, the same God of providence who brings these disasters will remove them when his people humble themselves, repent, and call upon his name. Not only will God forgive his people's sins, but he will also heal their devastated land (naturally or spiritually). He will restore to them the years that the locusts have eaten. (Joel 2:25)

It was this kind of godly sorrow for sin that the Corinthian church experienced, and that led to their repentance and their earnest desire to set themselves and their church right with God. Thus, the apostle Paul says:

2 Corinthians 7:8-11

⁽⁸⁾ For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though *it were* but for a season. ⁽⁹⁾ Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. ⁽¹⁰⁾ For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. ⁽¹¹⁾ For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, *what* clearing of yourselves, yea, *what* indignation, yea, *what* fear, yea, *what* vehement desire, yea, *what* zeal, yea, *what* revenge! In all *things* ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter. (See v.12; cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-13)

God Rules Over His People

The Lord God Almighty rules supreme in the kingdoms of men; i.e. he exercises his absolute or sovereign dominion over all nations. God applies this rule through his works of Creation, Providence, and Redemption. Concerning providence, we may summarise God's rule as follows:

1. *General* Providence is the ruling hand of God over all mankind, and over all creation in heaven above and on the earth beneath.
2. *Special* Providence is the ruling hand of God over his own elect people; ordaining or permitting all events and circumstances so that all things work together for good to those who love God: to those who are the called according to his purpose.
3. *Extraordinary* Providence is the ruling hand of God over mankind in general, and over his own people in particular, by works of a supernatural or miraculous nature.

Regarding special providence, the Lord God gives each of his own people this solemn assurance from his Word:

Psalms 121:5-8

- (⁵) The LORD *is* thy keeper: the LORD *is* thy shade upon thy right hand.
- (⁶) The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.
- (⁷) The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.
- (⁸) The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore. (See vv. 1-4)

The God who preserves the universe, is the God who preserves our lives.

