



SPECTATOR OR  
DIRECTOR

IS GOD *REALLY*  
IN CONTROL?

PAUL HARTWIG  
STUART THEUNISSEN

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Whatever the LORD pleases, he does... (Ps 135:6)

# I N T R O D U C T I O N

Providence is a word rarely used anymore. This is a pity because a great Christian truth has largely disappeared along with it. Taken from the Latin 'providentia', meaning forethought, providence indicates God's universal government and care of all things in His creation. The doctrine of God's providence should be something of deep importance to us, for by it we learn to recognize God's hand in our lives and the world around us, past and present.

While a biblical understanding of providence and sovereignty may be on the downhill, all Christians agree that God is at work in the world. Unlike deists who present God merely as a disinterested kickstarter of the universe, we acknowledge that the God of the Bible is personally active in human affairs. After all, the Old Testament is largely a record of God's dealing with a historical nation while the central theme of the New Testament is Christ, 'the God-Man', who stepped physically into history and 'dwelt among us'. No Christian then believes that God is simply a passive spectator, yet many questions remain: How exactly does God govern? What sort of things does He direct and by what means? Does God really direct everything? Is nothing left to chance? What about the small stuff? ...and what about the

bad stuff? So while all Christians have some idea of providence, our conception of it is often vague.

This small book is an answer to these very questions. In these pages you'll find a collection of Scriptures affirming that God is indeed in control --to a full extent! From nations to individuals, from a wave on the sea to the rolling of a dice, nothing is left to chance. Everything is subject to Him in every respect. We hope these scriptures will be a cause for further thought and study, that you may be strengthened in the faith and encouraged by the secure knowledge that 'the Lord our God the Almighty reigns' (Rev 19:6) to His glory alone. Amen.



PART 1:

# GOD'S RULE OVER NATIONS

'There are many scenes, but one drama; there are many pages, but one book. There are many lords and many rulers, but one empire, and God the only Potentate.' - C H Spurgeon

History is God's story. The ebb and flow of nations and peoples in time does not begin in the minds of men or kings, princes or presidents, but in the mind of God from all eternity. It is He who raises them up, and He who brings them low. From the most wise and godly of Judah's kings, to the most cruel and idolatrous Caesar, it is God who establishes them. The selected Scriptures will prove that no nation or ruler shall exist, nor shall any continue, apart from God's will. Furthermore, God does not govern them partly, or at certain times, but He governs them absolutely and always. The story of every nation, however small and distant is woven into the central narrative of history, the grandest of all themes: the incarnation of Christ.

## ONLY ONE KING

"For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations." (Ps 22:28)

"...Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth..." (Rev 1:5)

## MOST HIGH RULES

"...the Most High God rules over the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will." (Dan 5:21)

"He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings..." (Dan 2:21)

"He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations and leads them away." (Job 12:23)

## THEIR DESTINIES FIXED

So when they (disciples) had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed in his own authority..." (Acts 1:6-7)

## THEY EXIST FOR HIM

"For by him (Christ) all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers

or authorities – all things were created through him and for him.” (Col 1:16)

## ALL AUTHORITY FROM GOD

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed...” (Rom 13:1-2)

## RAISED UP

“But for this purpose I have raised you (Pharaoh) up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.” (Ex 9:16)

“Look among the nations and see... For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation...” (Hab 1:5-6)

## DAVID MADE GREAT

“You delivered me from strife with the people; you made me the head of the nations; people whom I had not known served me.” (Ps 18:43)

## NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S EMPIRE

“You, O king, (Nebuchadnezzar) the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the

might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all..." (Dan 2:36-38)

## PILATE'S AUTHORITY

"You do not speak to me? Do you not know that I (Pilate) have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him "You would have no authority over me unless it were given you from heaven above..." (Jn 19:10-11)

## ANTICHRIST RECEIVES POWER

'And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months... It was also allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation...' (Rev 13:5-7)



Throughout the Old Testament we learn that God uses nations as instruments of His providence. Countless times we are told how He 'stirred' up one nation against another for their wickedness or as a means to discipline His people. Those who



rule these nations are not consciously doing God's will, but are yet His unwitting servants.

## **CANAAN, GOD'S CRUCIBLE**

'Now these are the nations that the LORD left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan.' (Judges 3:1)

## **ARABIA, GOD'S DISCIPLINE**

'And the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the anger of the Philistines and of the Arabians who are near the Ethiopians.' (2 Chron 21:16)

## **ASSYRIA, GOD'S FURY**

"Ah Assyria, the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury! Against a godless nation I will send him, and against a people of my wrath I command him, ...but he does not so intend, and his heart does not so think..." (Isa 10:5-7)

## **SENNACHERIB, GOD'S PLAN**

"Have you not heard that I (God) determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what I now bring to pass, that you (Sennacherib) should make fortified cities crash into heaps of ruins..." (Isa 37:26)

## BABYLON, GOD'S DESTROYER

'For thus says the LORD GOD: "Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, and with horsemen and a host of many soldiers... He will set up a siege wall against you... They will break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses... You shall never be rebuilt, for I am the LORD; I have spoken declares the LORD GOD." (Ezek 26:7-14)

## PERSIA, GOD'S VENGEANCE

'...The LORD has stirred up the spirit of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance for his temple.'  
(Jer 51:11)

## CYRUS, GOD'S BIRD OF PREY

"...I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it." (Isa 46:9-11)



That the nations are not simply doing as they please is evident as scripture teaches us that God frustrates their plans and designs. All their schemes that do not conform to His will he overrules. In this way God channels the flow of history to His good purpose. As Job says; "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." (Job 42:2)

## PEOPLE PLOT IN VAIN

"Why do the nations rage and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD holds them in derision." (Ps 2:1-4)

## HE FRUSTRATES COUNSEL

"The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations." (Ps 33:10)

## NATIONS VANITY FROM GOD

"Behold, is it not from the LORD of hosts that peoples labour merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing?" (Hab 2:13)

## HE REMOVES UNDERSTANDING

"He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth and makes them wander in a pathless waste. They grope in the dark without light, and he makes them stagger like a drunken man." (Job 12:24-25)

## NOTHING SUCCEEDS VS GOD

"Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us." (Isa 8:10)

"No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the LORD." (Prov 21:30)

## ENEMIES RESTRAINED

'And as they journeyed, a terror from the LORD fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. (Gen 35:5)

'And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, and they made no war against Jehoshaphat.' (2 Chron 17:10)



Scripture also speaks of God 'gathering' His enemies, against His people, to a place of their destruction:

## TO THE THRESHING FLOOR

'Now many nations are assembled against you, saying, "Let her be defiled, and our eyes gaze upon Zion." But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD; they do not understand his plan, that he has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor.'

(Mic 4:11-12)

## ASSYRIA BROKEN

'The LORD of hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand, that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and on my mountains trample him underfoot; and his yoke shall depart from them, and his burden from their shoulder." This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?' (Isa 14:24-27)

## THE DAY OF THE LORD

"For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped... Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle." (Zec 14:21)



In conclusion of part one, the Scriptures tell of God's complete domination of all earthly authority. He is after all, "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords..." (1 Tim 6:15). And so we say with confidence, that all the decisions of our presidents, all the acts of our governments, wise or unwise, just or unjust, are yet under God's irresistible direction and following His good purpose in Christ: "...to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." (Col 1:20)

"No doubt all history in the last resort must be held  
by Christians to be a story with a divine plot."

- C. S. Lewis

PART 2:

# GOD'S RULE OVER EVENTS

"Providence does not mean that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, He governs all events." - John Calvin

The focus of this chapter is on God's direction of all earthly circumstances. The scope includes natural phenomena and other seemingly 'accidental' or 'fortuitous' events. Once established, it shall be seen that God alone directs all the affairs and conditions that surround and shape the lives of his creatures. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Little wonder then that words such as 'luck' and 'chance' are not found in the mouths of any of the prophets or apostles. They understood that all things come, directly and indirectly, from the hand of God. We will begin by considering God's ordering of the natural world and then settle on some famous Bible 'coincidences'.

## HE SENDS RAIN

"...he gives rain on the earth and sends water on the fields..."  
(Job 5:10)

"Rain in abundance, O God, you shed abroad..." (Ps 68:9)

"The LORD will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless the work of your hands." (Deu 28:12)

'After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." (1 Kgs 18:1)

## HE WITHHOLDS RAIN

"...then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land yield no fruit..." (Deu 11:17)

"I (God) will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." (Isa 5:6)

## HE COMMANDS THE STORM

"He covers his hands with the lightning and commands it to strike the mark". (Job 31:32)



"...fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word!"  
(Ps 148:8)

"He gives snow like wool; he scatters hoarfrost like ashes. He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs; who can stand before his cold?" (Ps 147:16-17)

"Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now." (Ex 9:18)

"The storms and seas obey him He made the storm still, and the waves of the sea were hushed" (Psa 107:29)

"His way is in the whirlwind and storm, the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers..." (Nah 1:3-4)

'He (Jesus) awoke and rebuked the wind and the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind eased, and there was a great calm... And they (disciples) were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?" (Mk 4:39, 41)

## HE CREATES THE WIND

'For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought, who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth— the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name!' (Amos 4:13)

## LORD OF THE HEAVENS

'Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night...'

(Jer 31:35) "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!... You have set your glory above the heavens. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him...?" (Ps 8:1, 3-4)

## HE SUSTAINS ALL LIFE

"O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great... These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust."  
(Ps 104:24-29)

"The eyes of all look to you (God), and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing." (Ps 145:15-16)

"He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry" (Ps 147:9)

“The LORD will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. (Deu 28:12)

“For he makes sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.” (Matt 5:45)

“And he (Jesus) is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col 1:17)



The above Scriptures are a small selection among dozens that prove God’s mastery of the natural world. From the stroke of a lightning bolt to the stirring of the sea, the Lord commands it. Surely no believer would argue here. We give thanks for our daily bread because we discern His hand of provision in all our earthly blessings. By giving thanks we acknowledge that things might have been different should the Lord have willed it so. Following this, we will now see that His rule extends beyond nature to include all eventualities:

## ALL THINGS FROM GOD

“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” (Rom 11:36)

## ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8:28)

## PROSPERITY AND CALAMITY

“I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.” (Isa 45:7)

‘In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.’ (Ecc 7:14)

## LIFE AND DEATH

“See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.” (Deu 32:39)

## RICH AND POOR

“The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour...” (1 Sam 2:7-8)

## GOOD AND BAD

'...but though he cause grief, he will have compassion... for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men. To crush underfoot all the prisoners of the earth, to deny a man justice in the presence of the Most High, to subvert a man in his lawsuit, the LORD does not approve. Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the LORD has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?'

(Lam 3:31-38)

"...Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips." (Job 2:10)

## DISASTER & DESTRUCTION

"Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing? Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?" (Amos 3-6)

Therefore thus says the LORD: "Behold, against this family I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks..." (Mic 2:3)

"Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals and produces the weapon for its purpose. I have also created the ravager to destroy..." (Isa 54:16)

## DISABILITIES

Then the LORD said to him (Moses), "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" (Ex 4:11)

## AN ACCIDENTAL DEATH

'Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand... ill appoint for you a place to which he may flee.'  
(Ex 21:13)

## CASTING OF LOTS

'The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.'  
(Prov 16:33)

## DEATH OF A BIRD

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father." (Matt 10:29)

## GOD GIVES THE GROWTH

"What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor

he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."  
(1 Cor 3:5-9)

## IF THE LORD WILLS

"...Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." (Ps 127:1)

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" --yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." (Jas 4:13-15)



With this truth in mind, we'll reflect on some famous examples of Scripture providences. These extraordinary stories prove that God's Word is not idle, that He actually does exercise his will in 'all things'.

## GOD WILL PROVIDE A LAMB

And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood,

but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."  
...But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide..." (Gen 22:7-8, 11-14)

## JOSEPH SOLD AS A SLAVE

'And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt...'

(Joseph to his treacherous brothers): "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me here before you to preserve your life..." "...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."  
(Gen 37:28, 45:5, 50:20)

## RUTH FINDS BOAZ

'Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the



Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz...'  
(Ruth 2:1-3)

## THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

'When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.' (Gen 29:31)

'Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (Gen 30:2)

'Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." (Gen 30:22-23)

'And her (Hannah's) rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb.' (1 Sam 1:6)

## THE DEATH OF A CHILD

'David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD' the child who is born to you shall die."

Then Nathan went to his house. And the LORD afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David and he became sick.'

(2 Sam 12:13-15)

## SAMUEL FINDS SAUL

'Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed to Samuel: "Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him king over my people Israel..." 'When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, "Come let us go back (home), lest my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious about us." But he said to him, "Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man who is held in honor; all that he says comes true. So let us go there. Perhaps he can tell us the way we should go"... And Saul said to his servant, "Well said; come let us go." So they went in to the city where (Samuel) the man of God was.' (1 Sam 9:15-16, 9:5-10)

## A LUCKY SHOT

'Thus says the king (Ahab), "Put this fellow in prison and feed him meagre rations of bread and water, until I come in peace." And Micaiah said, "If you return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me." And he said, "Hear, all you peoples!" So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead (to make war)... But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armour

and the breastplate. Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded" ... So the king died, and was brought to Samaria. And they buried the king in Samaria. (1 Kgs 22:27-37)

## THE SUFFERING OF JOB

And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has... But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand..." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. '...and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and

daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you." Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:8-12, 1:14-21)

## AND THE LOT FELL ON JONAH

'But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god... And they said to one another, "Come let us cast lots that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.' (Jon 1:3-8)



So we see the hand of God in all circumstances, on earth and in heaven, the good and the bad. The Divine Director, mysteriously and wondrously working 'all things according to the counsel of His will.' What a comfort for His people, our guarantee that He is able to turn our defeats, our tragedies and even our sins to lasting good. For further consideration, read the Book of Esther, from beginning to end a model of Divine providence.

"God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.  
Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will.  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face."

- William Cowper

PART 3:

# GOD'S RULE OVER INDIVIDUALS

"When we submit our lives to what we read in Scripture, we find that we are not being led to see God in our stories but our stories in God's. God is the larger context and plot in which our stories find themselves." - Eugene H. Peterson

While in the previous two chapters we viewed God's providence through a broad lens, we'll now turn our focus home, to His rule of individuals. In an age of individualism and asserted self-determination, nothing, but nothing, is more offensive than the doctrine of Divine sovereignty. While the idea of God's sovereignty has always appeared galling to our sinful natures, in the present culture, with its motto 'my life, my rules' it is something like sacrilege. Our pride is content to let God have His way over nations and nature but flies into hysterical rage at the mere suggestion that we are not free to act apart from His will, accusing God of inconsistency and unfair play. Nevertheless, Scripture presents us with a God who is not only active in the big picture of history, but One who governs the hearts of all, from the least to the greatest of His creatures.

## ACCORDING TO HIS WILL

'...he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" (Dan 4:35)

## OUR STEPS ARE FROM GOD

"A man's steps are from the LORD, how then can a man understand his way?" (Prov 20:24)

"The heart of a man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps." (Prov 16:9)

"I know, O LORD, that the way of a man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps." (Jer 10:23)

## GOD'S PURPOSE PREVAILS

"Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand." (Prov 19:21)

## HE FASHIONS OUR HEARTS

'The LORD looks down from heaven, he sees all the children of man, from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions the hearts of them all observes all their deeds.' (Ps 33:13-15)

## HE DETERMINES OUR DAYS

"Your eyes saw my unformed substance, in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them." (Ps 139:16)

"Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass..." (Job 14:5)

"My times are in your hand..." (Ps 31:15)

"And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place..." (Acts 17:26)



We could hardly ask for a plainer word: God's will, not ours, is the determining factor in any human decision. The term 'heart', Scripture's way of describing our innermost being, the source of all our inclination and desire, is said to be shaped and fashioned by a most wise God. This is how He governs, not by compelling unwilling subjects but by moulding their hearts so that they willingly carry out all His purposes. Observe the following examples of God leading, keeping and overruling:



## HE PUTS DESIRES IN HEARTS

"Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing into the heart of the king to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem." (Ezra 7:27)

"But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you." (2 Cor 8:16)

## HE TURNS HEARTS

"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD, he turns it wherever he will." (Prov 21:1)

'And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them...' (Ezra 6:22)

"Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that these people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and you have turned their hearts back..." (1 Kgs 18:37)

## JUDAH IS STIRRED

'So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.' (Hag 1:14)

## CYRUS AN INSTRUMENT OF GOD

'...the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom...'

(2 Chron 36:22)

"Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings... I will equip you, though you do not know me..."

(Isa 45:1-5)

## ABIMELECH KEPT FROM SIN

'And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.'" In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her." (Gen 20:2-6)

## PAUL LABOURS BY GRACE

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them (the apostles), though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." (1 Cor 15:10)

## NEW COVENANT, NEW HEART

"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." (Ezek 36:26-27)

"I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever... I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn away from me."  
(Jer 32:40)

## REPENTANCE AND FAITH GRANTED

"For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake..."  
(Phil 1:29)

"When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." (Acts 11:18)

“And when he (Apollos) wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed...” (Acts 18:27)

“And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth...”  
(2 Tim 2:24-25)

“And he (Jesus) said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” (Jn 6:65)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Eph 2:8-9)

‘And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.’ (Acts 13:48)

“No one can come to me (Jesus) unless the Father who sent me draws him.” (Jn 6:44)

## **O B E D I E N C E   G R A N T E D**

“O LORD, you will ordain peace for us; you have done for us all our works.” (Isa 26:12)

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Eph 2:10)

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (Phil 2:12-13)

“Now may the God of peace... equip you with every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.” (Heb 13:21)

## **JUDAH MADE OBEDIENT**

‘The hand of the LORD was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king commanded by the word of the LORD.’ (2 Chron 30:12)

## **LYDIA 'S HEART IS OPENED**

‘One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.’ (Acts 16:14)

## CHOSEN BEFORE BIRTH

"Yet you (God) are he who took me (David) from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God." (Ps 22:9-10)

And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad--in order that God's purpose of election might continue--not because of works but because of him who calls she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Rom 9:10-13)

"For you have heard of my (Paul's) former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles..." (Gal 1:13-16)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons

through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved... In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will." (Eph 1:3-6, 11)



Though God is never the author of any sin, Scripture tells us that He channels man's disobedience to his design. A prime example (mentioned earlier) is found in the life Joseph; after revealing his identity to his double-crossing brothers, he says; "...You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good..." (Gen 50:20). So while softening and guiding the hearts of His people, God is said to harden and blind the hearts of the wicked. These dreadful Scriptures prove the saying of the psalmist; "Surely the wrath of man shall praise you..." (Ps 76:10)

## PHARAOH IS HARDENED

'And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I put in your power. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go." (Ex 4:21)

'For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show forth my power in you, and my

name may be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills and he hardens whomever he wills."

(Rom 9:17-18)

## **SIHON IS HARDENED**

"But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him, for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as he is this very day." (Deut 2:30)

## **ENTIRE CITIES HARDENED**

'There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. They took them all in battle. For it was the LORD's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the LORD commanded Moses.'

(Josh 13:19-20)

## **HEATHENS ARE BLINDED**

'And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand.' (Isa 44:17-18)



## ISRAEL BLINDED

'And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs and those great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear." (Deut 29:2-4)

"O LORD, why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart, so that we fear you not." (Isa 63:17)

"What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, 'God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.'" (Rom 11:7-8)

'Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled... Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn and I would heal them." (Jn 12:39-40)

## KINGDOM HIDDEN FROM SOME

'And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that 'They may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed

hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”  
(Mk 4:11)

‘At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.” (Matt 11:25-26)



Just as the Lord stirs and incites nations against each other, so he does with individuals. How often we see Him using wicked men to discipline his children and to manifest His displeasure at their sin:

## PURPOSE OF THE WICKED

‘The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.’ (Prov 16:4)

## SAUL STIRRED BY GOD?

“Now let my lord the king (Saul) hear the words of his servant (David). If it is the LORD who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is of men, may they be cursed before the LORD...” (1 Sam 26:19)

## STRIFE IN DAVID'S HOUSE

'Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you (David) out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it (adultery) secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun." (2 Sam 12:11-12)... 'Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened." So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.' (2 Sam 16:21-22)

## GOD STIRS ISRAEL'S FOES

'He turned their hearts to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants.' (Ps 105:25)

## SHIMEI'S CURSING FROM GOD

'Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head." But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?" (2 Sam 16:9-10)

## DAVID IS INCITED

'Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying "Go and number Israel and Judah." So the King (David) said to Joab, the commander of the army, who was with him, "Go through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and number the people..."

(2 Sam 24:1-2)

## GATHERED TO KILL CHRIST

"...for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with all the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." (Acts 4:27-28)

"Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him (Jesus)..." (Isa 53:10)



Furthermore, God often wills that the wicked be deceived to follow unwise counsel resulting in their defeat or destruction. The verses below speak for themselves:

## ELI'S SONS CANNOT OBEY

'Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.' (1 Sam 1:22-25)

## ABSALOM FOLLOWS BAD ADVICE

'And it was told David, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O LORD, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." (2 Sam 15:31) 'And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel." For the LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring harm upon Absalom.' (2 Sam 17:14)

## AMAZIAH'S FOOLISHNESS

'But Amaziah would not listen, for it was of God, in order that he might give them into the hand of their enemies, because they had sought the gods of Edom.' (2 Chron 25:20)

'But it was ordained by God that the downfall of Amaziah should come about through his going to visit Joram. For when he was there, he went out with Joram to meet Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the LORD had anointed to destroy the house of Ahab.' (2 Chron 21:16)

## THE PROPHETS DECEIVED

"And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel." (Ezek 14:9)

## GOD DECEIVES AHAB

'And Michaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, 'I will entice him.' And the LORD said to him, 'By what means?' And he said, 'I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.' Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you." (1 Kgs 22:19-23)

## A SPIRIT IN SENNACHERIB

'Thus says the LORD; "Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the young men of the king of Assyria have reviled me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he will hear a rumour and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword of his own land.'" (Isa 37:6-7)

## JEREMIAH IS SEDUCED

"O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed." (Jer 20:7)

## JUDAH IS DECEIVED

'Then I said, "Ah LORD GOD, surely you have utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'It shall be well with you,' whereas the sword has reached their very life." (Jer 4:10)

## THAT I MIGHT DEVASTATE THEM

"Moreover, I gave the statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life, and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the LORD." (Ezek 20:25)



Finally, consider the last and most tragic state of hardness imposed by the Lord. When sinners do not see fit to acknowledge God and utterly reject 'the love of the truth' (2 Thes 2:10), He hands them over to their own debased minds, that they should not return from this state, but be ultimately condemned. Such miserable beings are sent 'strong delusions' ensuring their enslavement to all that is vain:

## **G O D   S E N D S   D E L U S I O N**

'Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.' (2 Thess 2:11-12)

## **G I V E N   O V E R   T O   D I S H O N O U R**

"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie..." (Rom 1:24)

"For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those contrary to nature..." (Rom 1:26)

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done." (Rom 1:28)



## PUT IT INTO THEIR HEARTS

'And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.' (Rev 17:16-17)

## DESTINED TO STUMBLE

"So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,' and 'a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do." (1 Pet 2:7-8)

## THE POTTER'S RIGHT

"Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honoured use and another for dishonourable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory- even us whom he has called..." (Rom 9:21-25)



# CONCLUSION

A famous theologian has wisely remarked: "We should neither scrutinize those things which the Lord has left concealed nor neglect those things he has revealed, lest we be condemned for excessive curiosity on the one hand, or for ingratitude on the other". It is for you dear reader, to come to a conviction whether or not God is to be either the responsive spectator of human choices or their overall director. We trust that your method - as also the one we have presented here - will be the same as the 'noble Bereans', who responded to that strange new message of a strange itinerant preacher not with wholesale rejection nor gullible acceptance but the 'noble' manner of 'examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so' (Acts 17:11).

It is our hope that as you have studied these passages from the Word of God you will begin to see the avalanche of evidence showing the God of the Bible to be One whose Throne rules over all, and whose council and plan for human history and individuals will be accomplished. May these truths lead not to controversy or factious separation among brothers and sisters but rather may they serve to unite us afresh, in common humility, to bow our knees together before such a great and good Father, asking that He lead us all in paths of righteousness for His great name's sake. Amen.