

# Trusting God in Adversity





# Introduction

In his monumental book, *East of Eden* (1952), John Steinbeck observed that “nearly everyone has his box of secret pain, shared by no one.” Whether the pain is mild or horrific, physical or emotional, fading or intensifying, or the result of the past or present, we are reminded by R.C. Sproul that “it is normal to wonder where God is in such circumstances. It is where the rubber of human anguish meets the road of divine providence.” Having investigated the question of God’s sovereignty (Part 4: *Is God Really in Control?*) and examined Romans 8:28 (Part 5: *All Things Working Together for Good*), we now turn our attention to another important question: *Does anything fall outside God’s will and concern? What is the extent of God’s providence?*

# God's Control Over the World

“Nothing is more important...than for God's people to be firmly convinced that Scripture teaches God's efficacious, **universal control** over the world, and teaches it over and over again. Scripture mentions and implies this control in many different historical and doctrinal contexts and applies it to our own life with God in a great number of ways....**For not even the smallest motion of the smallest object can occur without his government, preservation, and concurrence**” (John Frame).



# What Is Under God's Providence?

- Natural world (grass, snow, hail, rain, lightning, clouds, stars, rotation of the planets, volcanos, famine, etc.)
- Miracles
- Animals and plants
- Seemingly random or chance events
- Events fully caused by God and fully caused by the creature
- Nations, governments, and human history
- All aspects of our lives (talents, abilities, life-span, success, failure, decisions, sins, salvation, relationships, etc.)

# What Is Providence?

- **Providence**, *n.*, the foreknowing and protective care of God; divine direction, control, or guidance (OED).
- The word is from the Latin, *pro + videre*, which means foresight, foreknowledge, providence.
- The term *providence* is not found in Scripture.
- Providence “has been traditionally used to summarize God’s ongoing relationship with his creation” (Dr. Wayne Grudem).
- The concept is multifaceted.

# God's Works of Providence

## The Westminster Shorter Catechism



*with Scripture Proofs*

**Q. What are God's works of providence?**

- A. God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.
- B. WSC Scripture References:** Ps. 145:17; Ps. 104:24; Is. 28:29; Heb. 1:3; Ps. 103:19; Mt. 10:29-31.

# General Providence

- God created the heavens and the earth (Ps. 136:5-9).
- God gives His people food and water (Ps. 107:33-43; Ps. 136:25).
- God delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt (Ps. 136:10-16).
- God gave the promised land to Israel (Ps. 136:17-22).
- God's greatness, mighty and wondrous acts, awesome deeds, and "the fame of your abundant goodness," is extolled by King David (Ps. 145:1-7).
- "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing." (Ps. 145:15).





*Ship in a Storm*

Ivan Aivazovsky

1887



# Terrifying Storm on the Sea: Psalm 107:23-31

“Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep. For **he commanded and raised the stormy wind**, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits’ end. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. **He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed**. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men!”

# God's Providence Over Nature

- “For to the **snow** he says, ‘Fall on the earth,’ likewise to the **downpour**, his mighty downpour” (Job 37:6). “He loads the thick cloud with **moisture**; the clouds scatter his **lightning**” (Job 37:11). God speaks to Job: “Have you entered the storehouses of the **snow**, or have you seen the storehouses of the **hail**, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war?” (Job 38:22-23). “He gives **snow** like wool; he scatters **hoarfrost** like ashes” (Ps. 147:16). “**Fire** and **hail**, **snow** and **mist**, stormy **wind** fulfilling his word!” (Ps. 148:8).
- **Ice**: “By the breath of God, **ice** is given, and the broad waters are **frozen fast**” (Job 37:10).

# God's Providence Over Nature

- “For as the **rain** and the **snow** come down from heaven and do not return there but **water** the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall **accomplish that which I purpose**, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Is. 55:10-11).
- “Or who shut in the **sea** with doors when it burst out from the womb...and **prescribed limits for it** and set bars and doors, and said, ‘**Thus far shall you come, and no farther**, and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?” (Job 38:8-11).

# God's Providence Over Nature

- “The **clouds** poured out water; the skies gave forth **thunder**; your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder was in the **whirlwind**; your **lightnings** lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook” (Ps. 77:17-18). “His **lightnings** light up the world; the earth sees and trembles” (Ps. 97:4).
- “He it is who makes the **clouds** rise at the end of the earth, who makes **lightnings** for the **rain** and brings forth the **wind** from his storehouses” (Ps. 135:7).
- “Has the **rain** a father, or who has begotten the drops of **dew**? From whose womb did the **ice** come forth, and who has given birth to the **frost** of heaven?” (Job 38:28-29).

# God's Providence Over Nature

- “When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of **waters** in the heavens, and he makes the **mist** rise from the ends of the earth. He makes **lightning** for the rain, and he brings forth the **wind** from his storehouses” (Jer. 10:13; cf. 51:16).
- “Ask **rain** from the Lord in the season of the spring rain, from the Lord who makes the storm **clouds**, and he will give them showers of **rain**, to everyone the vegetation in the field” (Zech. 10:1).
- “Can you send forth **lightnings**, that they may go and say to you, ‘Here we are’?” (Job 38:35).



# God's Providence Over Nature

- “I form **light and create darkness**, I make **well-being** and create **calamity**, I am the Lord, who does all these things” (Is. 45:7).
- “Though the **fig tree** does not bud and there are no **grapes** on the vines, though the **olive** crop fails and the fields produce no **food**, though there are no **sheep** in the pen and no **cattle** in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior” (Hab. 3:17-18).



# Acts of God



**Jerry Bridges**  
*Trusting God*  
1929-2016

“The truth is, *all* expressions of nature, *all* occurrences of weather, whether it be a devastating tornado or a gentle rain on a spring day, are acts of God. The Bible teaches that God controls all the forces of nature, both destructive and productive, on a continuous, moment-by-moment basis.”

# God's Sovereignty

- “Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine” (Job 41:11).
- Job: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2).
- Job’s friends: “And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him” (Job 42:11).
- “To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue” (Prov. 16:1).
- “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps” (Prov. 16:9).

# God's Sovereignty

- “The Lord Almighty has sworn, ‘Surely as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand...For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?’” (Is. 14:24,27).
- “The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations” (Ps. 33:10-11).
- “What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do” (Is. 46:11).
- “Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that will prevail” (Prov. 19:21).



# God's Sovereignty

- “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord” (Prov. 21:30).
- “Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it” (Is. 5:19).
- “He thwarts the plans of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success” (Job 5:12).
- “The counsel of God is the unity of the ‘thoughts of His heart,’ i.e., of the ideas, which form the inmost part, the ultimate motives of everything that takes place. The whole history of the world is the uninterrupted carrying out of a divine plan of salvation, the primary object of which is His people, but in and with these are included humanity at large” (Keil & Delitzsch).



# One All-Comprehending Plan



**Charles Hodge**

1797-1878

President of Princeton Theological Seminary

1851-1878

- “The reason, therefore, why any event occurs, or that it passes from the category of the possible into that of the actual, is that God has so decreed. The decrees of God, therefore, are not many, but one purpose. They are not successively formed as the emergency rises, but are all parts of one all-comprehending plan.”
- “History in all its details, even the most minute, is but the evolution of the eternal purposes of God.”

# God's Control, Authority, and Presence



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“This world does not just drift along on its own, but is the place where a great person lives and acts.”