

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD (Ps. 50)

What makes things ‘tick’? Why do things happen, and why do they happen the way they do? If God is in control, what exactly is He in control of? ... Do you ever ask those questions? ... Is it right to ask them?

Many people came to Jesus with questions. For example, there was the official, who asked, **Lk. 18:18** Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? ... A lawyer enquired, **Lk. 10:29** who is my neighbour? ... When Mary was listening to Jesus instead of helping her sister, Martha asked, **Lk. 10:40** Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? ... The disciples asked, **Mt. 18:1** Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? ... and during the forty days after His resurrection, they asked, **Acts 1:6** Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? ... We have many questions we would love to know the answers to.

Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Why does He allow them to happen to me, His child? I believe in Him, I belong to Him, I’m betrothed to Him as a member of His Bride ... so, why does He allow me to have heartaches and sadness? ... Would you confess to asking such questions? ... Is it wrong even to think them? ... Is it wrong to question God? ... David asked, **Ps. 10:1** Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble? ... **44:23** Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? ... **77:7** Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? ⁸ Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? ⁹ Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?

You might not be as abrupt as the Psalmist, nevertheless you want answers because it is hurting you not knowing. ... Is it wrong, therefore, *not* to bring your fears to the Lord, especially when He knows about them anyway, for He knows all our thoughts and worries!

No, it is not wrong to ask Him questions for when the Babylonian armies were ‘setting their sights’ on Jerusalem, through Jeremiah the Lord *invited* the people, **Jer. 33:3** Call unto me, and I will answer thee ... for He has promised, **Ps. 91: 15** He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.

What does that mean? Does it mean God will keep His people from trouble? ... No, it does not say that. ... What His Word *does* promise is He will be *with* us in trouble and will ultimately deliver us out of it and He will *honour* us for trusting Him. ... He is proud of His glory, and when we give Him honour, He rewards us for giving Him His place. He has saved us for His glory, and for His glory

He keeps us for we are personal to Him! ... It will always be the very best He has for us when we honour Him, and give Him the glory, and He promises us His favour is guaranteed because all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Let's examine this further under the title, *God's Providence*. ... Some confuse it with 'fate'. ... What is 'fate' and what is 'providence' ... and what is the difference? ... Fate is *que sera, sera* ('what will be, will be'). ... Providence, on the other hand, rejects the notions of 'chance', or 'luck, or 'accident'. Instead, it is God's *providence* for what He ordains *must* be and *will* be, and it is how He is working to His plan, for His purposes, and to His glory. ... Basically, providence is *[God's]* will *[being]* done in earth, as it is in heaven (Mt. 6:10).

As we are aware, God does not always answer our prayers according to our will. ... He doesn't answer the way we would like Him to, or the way we think He should. Sometimes the psalmist concluded, God's not listening to me. He is maybe even 'asleep'. ... Be sure of this ... God never sleeps (**Ps. 121:3** he that keepeth thee will not slumber), and He is always watching and listening (**1 Peter 3:12** the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers). There is not a thought goes through your mind He does not know about ... in fact, He knows about it even before you think it!

So, He knows everything about us there is to know ... and many things about us we do not know. God is supremely powerful and eminently knowledgeable, - that is what we mean when we talk about the *sovereignty* of God because it focusses on His right and power to do as He wills ... and the term *providence* describes how He works out His purposes. ... **Is. 16:10** Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done *[Sovereignty]*, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure *[Providence]*.

When God, for example, announced to Habakkuk He would do something incredibly astonishing, the prophet was completely amazed ... "Lord, You *[in Your sovereignty]* are going to use the Babylonians to produce Your good pleasure *[God's providence]*?! ... Habakkuk could not understand for it is the *opposite* of what *he* would have done. He would never have countenanced using an evil nation to correct the Jews, but as Paul explains, **Rom. 11:33** O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! ... Paul also learned on occasions when he thought he wanted to go one direction, but the Lord turned him round and took him

another direction. ... God *rules*, and often He *overrules*! And if a Christian has to change their plans, it is always because God has something better in store.

Sometimes He leads us along paths we would not care to lead anyone. Sometimes those paths are rough and we can hardly keep ourselves upright, from stumbling, but remember those words of Job, *Job 23:10* But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. ... Why is He trying me? Sometimes I might know, other times I might not know ... but *He* knows, and in His providence, He has a purpose behind what He is doing which will make it worthwhile, *Is. 55:8* For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. ... We do not understand, and often we are not even supposed to, *Rom. 11:34* For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? ³⁵ Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? ³⁶ For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. ... That is the believer's comfort for everything which happens to us is to God's glory. ... There are no accidents in the Christian's life. There is nothing which comes our way outside of the will of God. ... That is hard to hear, and hard to take in, but since God is in control of all things, - His *sovereignty*, - He will keep me through them, - His *providence*.

In His presence, there is never any panic, - there is no panic in Heaven, no dread, no fear! That is because the saints and angels in Heaven can clearly see God is in control and He fulfils all His promises. The issues which have us stressed and alarmed, He knows about them and He has them under His control. ... How you are suffering with a degenerative illness, or cancer, or a stroke, or the onset of all which comes with getting older ... God is greater and more glorious and more loving than we could imagine. And that is why being able to understand His providence gives us the increased faith to know Him more in our circumstances, to fear Him with the Godly fear with which He blesses His people, who keep on trusting and loving Him through it all.

Of course, all of us believe what the Bible says, but *do* we believe what the Bible *teaches*? ... How easy it is to 'nod in agreement' with what we are studying, but what are we like when we need to really believe and take in what God's Word teaches us considering this matter ... when it tells me I have to take my cares and burdens to the Lord and leave them with Him? ... Do I, can I, do that?! ... How easy do I find it?

What about when I'm anxious concerning climate worries, or another world war, or the financial upheaval, the political instabilities. ... Well, what about God in it all? Where is He? What is He doing? ... He is not distressed, nor fearful, for as Habakkuk realized, **Hab. 2:20** the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him. ... When we see evil increasing to become the 'norm', - **Ps. 37:13** The Lord shall laugh at him [*the godless!*] for he seeth that his day is coming. **14** The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. **15** Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. **16** A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. **17** For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous. ... The world's leaders are under God's authority.

God is judging this world because of its sin and rebellion, but His present judgment is nothing like His approaching great day of judgment when all will finally be brought to account. We live in uncertain times, but there are no uncertainties with God ... and there is no uncertainty for His people for He promises the believers, **Ps. 37:11** the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. ... **16** A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. **17** ... the LORD upholdeth the righteous. **18** The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever. ... Who does Jesus promise, **Mt. 5:5** Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth? ... He promised it to His saved people, - that is His *plan*, - and He will make it happen ... that's *providence!*

It is beyond amazing, and far exceeds our ability to grasp how He keeps it all in His will. Jesus asked, **Mt. 10:29** Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. **30** But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. **31** Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. ... **Lk. 12:27** Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **28** If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you? ... He does not only feed the birds, but He knows when every one of them dies and falls to the ground ... and He even has the individual hairs of our head numbered. ... It sounds so incredible, but if the Bible says it, - no matter how incredible, - it is true, and He explains, **Is. 55:8** my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. **9** For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. ... And that is the God Who is *our* God. ... Augustine said, "Trust the past to God's mercy, the present to God's love, and the future to God's providence" ... He is in charge, from beginning to end, and

into eternity! ... **Lk. 12:32** Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

John Calvin wrote in his *Institutes*, “Thus it is that we may patiently pass through this life with its misery, hunger, cold, contempt, reproaches, and other troubles – content with this one thing: that our King [Jesus] will never leave us destitute, but will provide for our needs until, our warfare ended, we are called to triumph.” ... Everything is under His sovereign rule, and nothing is outside of His control ... and that is the solution to our earthly worries! Consider this complex world He created, and how He keeps it, **Ps. 104:27** O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. **25** So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. ... **27** These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. **28** That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. **29** Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. **30** Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth. ... God makes the grass grow on the hills (**Ps. 147:8**), He made a great fish to swallow Jonah (**Jonah 1:17**), and a plant to shade him (**Jonah 4:6**), and a worm to attack the plant (**Jonah 4:7**) ... He brings the wind out of His storehouses (**Ps. 135:7**) ... Every creature of the forest belongs to Him, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, and He knows all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts are His (**Ps. 50:11**) ... Every star in the universe, he calleth them all by their names (**Ps. 147:4**). ... The Jews in Jerusalem were distraught because the enemy was surrounding their city, they wept, **Is. 49:14** The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. But that was not true, and the Lord sent Jeremiah to assure them, **Is. 49:16** Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me *Under My protection!* ... “Steadfast and sure while the billows roll ... fastened to the Rock which cannot move ... grounded firm and deep in the Saviour’s love”. **Ps. 147:3** He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.

God does not intend for us to live in despair. We are not like a ‘cog’ in the ‘wheel’ of a vast and impersonal mechanism ‘chugging along’ meaninglessly from day to day. Instead, this world is God’s creation, and you and I are His precious children ... more precious to Him than all He has created. The heavens declare His glory (**Ps. 19:1**), and the firmament sheweth his handywork. **2** Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. **3** There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. **4** Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, **5** Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. **6** His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

And, of course, **Eccles. 3:1** To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: **2** A time to be born, and a time to die ... and throughout *everything* He is our God, the Faithful and true One. He has saved us and keeps us, and He will keep on keeping us until He brings us home to Glory, **Rom. 8:32** He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? ... John Flavel explains, “Grace makes the promise and providence the payment”. ... And on the anxious and difficult path God has set before us to travel, ... keep trusting and believing ... “He giveth [*you*] more grace as [*your*] burdens grow greater, He sendeth more strength as [*your*] labours increase; to added afflictions He addeth His mercy, to multiplied trials He multiplies peace. ... When we have exhausted our store of endurance, when our strength has failed as the day is half done ... fear not that thy need shall exceed His provision ... the Father both thee and thy load will upbear. [*For*] His love has no limits, His grace has no measure, His power no boundary known unto men; for out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.” ... That is the providence of God, preparing us in this life for that day when He will call us home to Himself, for all eternity, to His Glory! Amen.