### God’s Providence

**1. Definition**

As Lord of heaven and earth, God has all authority to direct events in the universe, including the forces of nature and the course of human history. The question is how much God actually intervenes in earthly affairs. Is He the cause of all that occurs? Here, we enter a discussion of God’s providence.

We will contrast here God’s providence with His working of miracles – the subject of our next section. Providence is a manifestation of His immanence. It is His subtle, inconspicuous work. When working miracles, though, God is in His “transcendent mode.” He intrudes upon the normal course of affairs in a dramatic, supernatural fashion.

The question of God’s providence involves the issue of human freedom. Does God in His work of providence also exercise control over human decisions? Subsequent chapters will delve into that topic.

John of Damascus writes about providence:

Providence, then, is the care that God takes over existing things. And again: Providence is the will of God through which all existing things receive their fitting issue. But if Providence is God’s will, according to true reasoning all things that come into being through Providence must necessarily be both most fair and most excellent, and such that they cannot be surpassed.[[1]](#footnote-1)

However, contrary to the Damascene’s claim that providence leads to things that are “most excellent, and such that they cannot be surpassed,” in our experience we observe many events in nature and history that are truly harmful and not helpful. This leads us into a discussion of the so-called “problem of evil” – why God allows evil in His world. We raise this question in chapter 19.

**2. Biblical Data**

**a. Old Testament**

The books recording the earliest history of God’s dealings with people are the Torah and the book of Job. In Job, Elihu claims that God can control the powers of nature and employ them for His own purposes: “For He draws up the drops of water, they distill rain from the mist…. Behold, He spreads His lightning about Him, and He covers the depths of the sea. For by these He judges peoples; He gives food in abundance” (Job 36:27-31).

Elihu continues his comments on God’s providence:

For to the snow He says, “Fall on the earth,” And to the downpour and the rain, “Be strong.” He seals the hand of every man, that all men may know His work. Then the beast goes into its lair and remains in its den. Out of the south comes the storm, and out of the north the cold. From the breath of God ice is made, and the expanse of the waters is frozen. Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning. It changes direction, turning around by His guidance, that it may do whatever He commands it on the face of the inhabited earth. Whether for correction, or for His world, or for lovingkindness, He causes it to happen (Job 37:6-13).

In the Torah, defeat in battle is often attributed to God’s intervention.[[2]](#footnote-2) Other passages also demonstrate God’s control over both events in nature and happenings in history. Punishment by means of natural catastrophe and military action are described together in Deuteronomy 28:15-68 and Leviticus 26:14-33. These punishments are inflicted due to violation of the covenant. Another example is when God closed all the wombs in the house of Abimelech until Abraham prayed for him (Gen 20:17-18).

On the other hand, God can direct nature and history to bring blessing to His people. The same chapters cited above reveal this to be true (Deut 28:1-14; Lev 26:3-13). Other examples also exist where divine providence resulted in blessing, such as when Abimelech took Sarah for a wife, but God did not allow him to touch her (Gen 20:1-6), and when God led the servant of Abraham to find a wife for Isaac through a “chance” meeting at a well (Gen 24). God was also credited for Leah’s fertility in childbearing (Gen 29:31). Moreover, God granted success to Joseph in whatever he did: whether in the home of Potiphar, in prison, or in Pharaoh’s house (Gen chps. 39ff).

The Old Testament historical books are rich with examples of God’s governance of nature and history, both for blessing and for chastisement. Because they seized the ark of the covenant, “the hand of Yahweh was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors” (1 Sam 5:6). God struck Nabal for refusing to help David (1 Sam 25:38). In another instance, the Lord used illness to punish Israel for David’s transgression (2 Sam 24:15). We also recall the time when Israel suffered famine due to Saul’s sin (2 Sam 21:1). Drought can also be a means of divine punishment (1 Kin 8:35-36; 17:1; 2 Chr 7:13). On two occasions, God used lions to fulfill His purpose (1 Kin 13:24-28; 2 Kin 17:25-26).

God is not limited to use natural phenomena for chastisement, but can direct historical events toward that end as well. In most cases, this involves military action. He raised up various Gentile oppressors to do His will: Mesopotamia (Judg 3:7-8), Moab (Judg 3:12-14), Egypt (1 Kin 14:25-26; 2 Chr 12:2), Assyria (2 Kin 15:29-30), Babylon (1 Chr 6:15; Ezra 5:12), and others (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Kin 11:14-15; 2 Kin 24:2; 2 Chr 28:5). Through Naaman, the captain of the Syrian army, God gave victory to the Syrians in war (2 Kin 5:1). A striking example was when Israel outnumbered their enemies, but nonetheless suffered a humiliating defeat because of the Lord’s intervention (2 Chr 24:23-24).

Aside from punishing His people in general, the Lord used various means to punish individuals. Ahab was fatally struck by a “random” arrow from a Syrian soldier (1 Kin 22:34). The Bible records that the Lord “killed” Saul by the hand of the Philistines (1 Chr 10:14). Ahaziah’s visit to Joram was not accidental, because by it God planned the former’s “destruction” (2 Chr 22:7).

On the other hand, the Lord can turn situations in someone’s favor. He send rain to ease a drought (1 Kin 18:1). He gave the ability to conceive children (Ruth 4:13; сf. 1 Chr 26:5). In relieving a famine, God “visited His people in giving them food“ (Ruth 1:6).

Historical events can also result in blessings from the Lord. Sometimes it manifests in victory in battle (Judg 4:14-15; 20:35; 1 Chr 5:21). Seemingly “coincidental” occurrences can be designed by the Lord. Ruth “happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz” (Ruth 2:1-3). No matter how hard Saul pursued David, he could never corner him, because “God did not deliver him into his hand” (1 Sam 23:14; сf. 23:27-28; 26:12).

Moreover, when the Amalekites plundered David’s camp, God intervened so that David and his men received everything back without any loss (1 Sam 30:1-2, 19). God gave David success in all his endeavors (1 Chr 11:9) and orchestrated events that led to him becoming king (2 Sam 3:9-10). When David’s dynasty apostatized, the Lord nevertheless gave David’s descendants favor before the king of Babylon and thereby preserved his royal line (2 Kin 25:27-30).

Through divine providence, people often received guidance from the Lord. When Saul sought his lost donkeys, God led him to Samuel. From this meeting, Saul not only received assurance concerning his animals, but his appointment as the future king of Israel (1 Sam 9:16). Furthermore, Yahweh publically confirmed his appointment as king through the casting of lots (1 Sam 10:20-21). Casting lots was an instrument of guidance in other instances as well (see 1 Sam 14:41). Jonathan was guided by signs when deciding to launch an attack on the Philistines (1 Sam 14:8-12). Even the Philistine priests discerned by signs that Yahweh sent distress on them (1 Sam 6:9-10).

However, it is important to note that the Old Testament abounds with examples when people thought that God was leading through circumstances where that was not the case. It is probable that, superstition guided their interpretation of these events. Note the following cases:

- Judg 18:10 – the spies from the tribe of Dan suppose that God gave a certain defenseless city into their hands.

- Judg 21:3, 15 – God is blamed for the annihilation of the tribe of Benjamin.

- Ruth 1:13, 19-21 – God is blamed for deaths in Naomi’s family.

- Ruth 4:12 – It is felt that God must give children.

- 1 Sam 23:7 – Saul mistakenly thinks that God has given David into his hand.

- 1 Sam 24:4 – Certain men wrongly suppose that God has delivered Saul into David’s hand (see 1 Sam 26:8).

- 2 Sam 4:5-8 – Assassins of Ish-bosheth think that they are doing God’s will.

- 2 Sam 16:10f – David assumes that the Lord commanded Shimei to curse him.

- 1 Kin 17:18-20 – Elijah and the widow of Zarephath suppose that God took the life of her son.

We continue with the study of the Old Testament poetical books. Psalm 44 attributes Israel’s victory over the Canaanites, not to Israel’s army, but rather to the Lord: “For by their own sword they did not possess the land, and their own arm did not save them, but Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your presence, for You favored them” (Ps 44:3). Sometimes, however, God was with the enemy’s army instead (Ps 89:38-45).

Much is said about the Lord directing the forces of nature:

- You shed abroad a plentiful rain, O God (Ps 68:10).

- You rule the swelling of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them (Ps 89:9).

- For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind, Which lifted up the waves of the sea…. He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed (Ps 107:25-29).

- He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; who makes lightnings for the rain, who brings forth the wind from His treasuries (Ps 135:7).

The Psalmist views God’s intervention in nature as a means of showing care for His creation: “Who covers the heavens with clouds, who provides rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow on the mountains” (Ps 147:8); “He gives to the beast its food, {and} to the young ravens which cry” (Ps 147:9); “The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing” (Ps 145:15-16; сf. Ps 136:25).

The prophetic books focus on Yahweh employing foreign military might to punish both His wayward people and other nations as well. Isaiah writes, “He will also lift up a standard to the distant nation, and will whistle for it from the ends of the earth; and behold, it will come with speed swiftly” (Isa 5:26). God speaks of Babylon’s coming attack again Judah: “I Myself will war against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm, even in anger and wrath and great indignation” (Jer 21:5). Ezekiel prophecies the same:

Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord Yahweh, “Behold I will arouse your lovers against you, from whom you were alienated, and I will bring them against you from every side: the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, {and} all the Assyrians with them” (Ezek 23:22-23).

In the prophets Joel’s words, “Yahweh utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His word. The day of Yahweh is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?” (Joel 2:11). Micah prophesies against the Northern Kingdom: “For I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the open country” (Mic 1:6). We can also cite Zephaniah: “So I will stretch out My hand against Judah And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Zeph 1:4), Habakkuk: “For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans” (Hab 1:6), and Obadiah: “’Though you build high like the eagle, though you set your nest among the stars, From there I will bring you down,’ declares Yahweh” (Obad 4).

In execution of His judgments, the Lord may choose any means He pleases: Assyria (Isa 37:26-27), Philistia and Syria (Isa 9:11-12), Babylon (Ezek 29:19; Lam 1:14), etc. He may even arouse civil war among God’s people, Israel: “Manasseh {devours} Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh, {and} together they are against Judah. In {spite of} all this, His anger does not turn away and His hand is still stretched out” (Isa 9:21; сf. Isa 19:2).

Although in the above citations, God claims an active participation in the overthrow of the disobedient, in Lamentations 2:3 He appears to simply withdraw His protection instead: “He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy.” Nevertheless, in the preceding verse Yahweh again takes an active posture: “The Lord has swallowed up; He has not spared all the habitations of Jacob. In His wrath He has thrown down the strongholds of the daughter of Judah.”

The Lord not only punishes Israel by the hand of Gentiles, He also punishes other Gentiles in the same fashion. His hand was stretched out against Egypt (Jer 46:8-10), Philistia (Jer 47:4), Babylon (Jer 50:18), Assyria (Nah 2:13), Tyre (Ezek 26:3), Edom (Ezek 25:14), Elam (Jer 49:35), and others. Many of these nations were once God’s instruments of chastisement for Israel, but they were actually seeking their own gain, as Isaiah writes,

Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hands is My indignation, I send it against a godless nation and commission it against the people of My fury to capture booty and to seize plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets. Yet it does not so intend, nor does it plan so in its heart, but rather it is its purpose to destroy and to cut off many nations (Isa 10:5-7).

Therefore, the time will come when the Lord’s instruments of punishment will themselves be punished:

Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh of hosts, “O My people who dwell in Zion, do not fear the Assyrian who strikes you with the rod and lifts up his staff against you, the way Egypt {did}. For in a very little while My indignation {against you} will be spent and My anger {will be directed} to their destruction” (Isa 10:24-25).

The prophets also speak of God’s providential guidance of nature for judgment. First, we note a statement concerning God’s absolute control over natural forces: “When He utters His voice, {there is} a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causes the clouds to ascend from the end of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain and brings forth the wind from His storehouses” (Jer 51:16). God can accomplish His purpose of correction through drought (Isa 19:5-10; Jer 14:1-6), famine and illness (Jer 27:8; 29:18), wild animals (Ezek 5:17), fire and brimstone (Amos 7:1-4), earthquakes (Ezek 38:19), or storms (Jon 1:4). In the book of Jonah, God commanded a fish (2:10) and a worm (4:5-8) to perform His will. Even casting lots brought an answer from the Lord (1:7).

On the other hand, the prophets record how God used historical events to favor His own. For example, Yahweh raised up Cyrus to release His people from captivity (Isa 44:28ff; сf. Ezra 1:1). He granted favor before the king of Babylon so that the latter was kindly disposed to the remnant of Judah remaining in Palestine (Jer 42:12).

We conclude our Old Testament study with the exilic and post-exilic literature. God again employs nature (Zech 10:1) and human effort (Zech 9:13-15), yet in the latter example, God is now punishing the Gentiles through Israel. Three writings of this era focus heavily on God’s providence: Daniel, Esther, and Haggai. The latter book relates how the Lord withheld rain in Judah because God’s people were negligent in constructing the temple:

“You have sown much, but harvest little; {you} eat, but {there is} not {enough} to be satisfied; {you} drink, but {there is} not {enough} to become drunk; {you} put on clothing, but no one is warm {enough;} and he who earns, earns wages {to put} into a purse with holes…. Why?” declares Yahweh of hosts, “Because of My house which {lies} desolate, while each of you runs to his own house” (Hag 1:6-9; сf. 2:14-19).

The book of Daniel demonstrates God’s lordship over world leaders. First, He gave Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1:2) along with other kingdoms: “You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory” (Dan 2:37; сf. 5:18). God gives that authority to whom He pleases (Dan 4:17, 27, 32; 5:21). He gave authority to four successive kingdoms, but at the same time set limits to their reigns (Dan 7; сf. 11:27).

Amazingly, throughout the entire book of Esther, we see no direct mention of God. However, He is unquestionably active in every chapter. Esther gains favor before the king and as a result becomes queen. God’s intention is to save Israel from annihilation through her (Est 4:14). Other “coincidental” occurrences happen in Israel’s favor. Yahweh robs King Ahasuerus of sleep so that he orders the chronicles be read to him. There he discovers the heroism of Mordecai (Est 6:1). Furthermore, Haman appears in the king’s court at the exact moment when the king was seeking a way to honor Mordecai (Est 6:4).

In summary, we will consider Boyd’s view concerning the nature of Old Testament narrative. He feels that the Old Testament record does not always distinguish what God personally did from that which He simply allowed. Nearly everything that occurs is attributed to Him. This underscores the existence of only one God at a time when polytheism was prevalent. In Boyd’s words, “The one and only Creator takes responsibility (though never the moral culpability) for all that comes to pass in his creation.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Langford agrees. He observes that in the Old Testament, people tended to see God’s hand in everything. Referring to Amos 3:6, he writes, “It would never have occurred to the Jewish writers to contrast events in which God was active with those in which he was not.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

**b. New Testament**

The New Testament appeals to God’s providence with less frequency than the Old Testament does, but focuses more on God’s miraculous deeds. Nonetheless, we can highlight cases of His immanent work.

God’s providence was in force at birth of Messiah. For example, John the Baptist’s father, Zechariah, was chosen by lot to enter the temple to burn incense (Lk 1:9). There, he saw a vision in which he learned of his son’s birth. In addition, Augustus’ census brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, where the Messiah was prophesied to be born (Lk 2:1-4). Moreover, the prophetess Anna “by chance” happened upon Joseph and Mary when Simeon was blessing the infant Messiah (Lk 2:38).

Curiously, most of the other examples of God’s providence occur in Luke’s other volume – the book of Acts. Matthias was chosen by lot as the twelfth apostle (Acts 1:24-26). Luke records Stephen’s speech, which included a reference to God’s favor shown to Joseph by Pharaoh (Acts 7:10), and of God’s providential care for baby Moses (Acts 7:21). Luke also relates Paul’s sermon where he announced, “He made from one {man} every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined {their} appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation” (Acts 17:26). Not by accident, the apostle Paul, who had long intended to preach in Rome, ended up there at the expense of the Roman Empire (Acts 23:11). Finally, Paul met up with Philemon’s runaway slave Onesimus in jail, whom he led to Christ (Philemon 10).

**3. Theological Reflections**

God’s works covers a spectrum of divine acts, which must be distinguished from one another.[[5]](#footnote-5) First, we heed the caution of scholars not to confuse God’s work of creation with His providence. His work of creation is complete, crowned by the celebration of the Sabbath. God creates nothing new through providence. Creating something new would imply that He left some deficiency in the original created order.[[6]](#footnote-6) Nonetheless, He does continue to interact with the world He made. In chapter 12, we discussed God’s continuing work under the rubric of “concurrence.” He supplies the power that maintains creation’s existence and enables it to function.

Beyond “concurrence,” God can employ the natural processes that He designed to automatically function in creation to accomplish His aims. We call this “general providence.” In addition, He may at times exercise more direct control over natural forces or historical events to execute His will. This is termed “special providence.” Finally, the Lord can supersede natural law to perform a miracle, the topic of our next section.

Let us discuss this spectrum of divine activity in more detail.[[7]](#footnote-7) First, when God made the universe, He installed in creation certain powers of self-governance. By virtue of the operation of natural laws, the universe, in a certain sense, can operate autonomously, independent of God’s direct control. However, we acknowledge that God’s operation by the principle of “concurrence” will always come into play (see chapter 12).[[8]](#footnote-8)

This view differs from the theory prevalent in the Middle Ages, that God continually controls and directs all processes in the universe. It also differs from the Calvinistic view of “universal providence,” by which God directly controls all that occurs without exception. Another errant view is process theology, which claims that God is not in control of natural processes, but can only exert a positive influence over them.

Although natural laws can operate, in a certain sense, independent of God, we still call this “general providence.” It is “providence” in the sense that through the regular activity of the natural world, God accomplishes an aspect of His overall plan. Regularity in the universe creates the conditions under which free creatures, i.e., humans, can make decisions and predict to some degree their results. Without this stable factor, which God has instilled in creation, it would be impossible for people to exercise true freedom of will. Therefore, God established the principle of “general providence” for the sake of human freedom.

Along with support for human freedom, general providence, expressed in the operation of natural laws, provides the world with the necessary elements for survival. Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 5:45: “He causes His sun to rise on {the} evil and {the} good, and sends rain on {the} righteous and {the} unrighteous.” The Old Testament affirms the same: “He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the labor of man, so that he may bring forth food from the earth” (Ps. 104:14).

“Special providence” involves God’s active direction of natural forces or historical events for His divine purposes. Unlike general providence, this does not involve the regular operation of natural processes, but occurs only in special circumstances. Often they are considered coincidences, yet the timely manner of their happening suggests a divine origin. They are assessed by the eyes of faith that see in them the Lord’s hand and providential work.

Most of the examples we presented in the previous section are cases of special providence, for example, when Artaxerxes “by accident” learned of Mordecai’s heroism at the exact moment when Haman entered the kings’ court to ask for Mordecai’s demise (Est 6:1-4).

Difficult questions arise, however, regarding this spectrum of God’s activity – from creation to special providence.[[9]](#footnote-9) According to the views defended above, there exists a place for random, chance occurrences. If natural processes do possess a certain autonomy, then events can occur as a result of those processes for which God is not “to blame.” Langford defines chance, or “coincidence,” as an “unexpected event that is not deliberately planned by man or God, but just allowed to happen under the ordinary laws of nature.”[[10]](#footnote-10) So then, calamities may occur “from the autonomy of nature.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

On the other hand, the Calvinistic school categorically rejects the suggestion of chance occurrences. For example, Helseth denies that God endows creation with inherent powers that enable it to operate independent of His direct control. For him, general providence is eclipsed by special providence. In other words, God absolutely directs all natural happenings and historical events to accomplish His desired goals.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Claiming that all providence is “special,” Bowne makes the following generalization: “If there be purpose in anything, there is purpose in everything.”[[13]](#footnote-13) In Calvin’s words, “Single events are so regulated by God, and all events so proceed from his determinate counsel, that nothing happens fortuitously.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Quoting Turriten, Helseth writes:

God providence “consists not only in the conservation of things, but also in the concourse of God; not indifferent and general (in the sense that it passively allows second causes to determine themselves), but particular and specific.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

In the following chapters, we will address the claims of Calvinism. In addition, in our conclusions to this chapter we will further clarify the idea of chance occurrences.

Another question is phrased “the God of the gaps.” According to this hypothesis, God is needed only in those cases where a certain phenomenon does not correspond to the operation of natural laws. Atheists often work off the idea that God is needed only to close the “gaps” in our knowledge. The time will come, they suggest, when our understanding of the natural world will allow us to close these gaps without resorting to God. Then, faith in God will be totally irrelevant.

We respond, however, that according to the principle of “concurrence,” discussed previously, God is constantly active in providing support for the existence and actions of the universe (see chapter 12). God is the Sustainer of His creation. He is active not only in areas that natural law cannot explain (the “gaps”), but in all that occurs in nature. Therefore, in reality, there are no “gaps.”

Furthermore, scholars openly admit that they cannot close all the “gaps” in explaining natural phenomena. On the atomic level, much is puzzling and unpredictable, which we will explore later in this chapter. The proposition that natural laws will someday explain all happenings in the universe is overly optimistic.

Still another issue arises regarding the relationship between God’s providence in history and human free will. If God indeed respects human freedom, does that not limit what God can do in His special providence to direct history according to His will? Do not human choices, rather than God’s will, determine what history will record? Langford responds that even if a certain individual does not act in line with God’s intention, the Lord is more than sufficiently wise able to work around such barriers so that the end result is in accordance with His plan.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Finally, it is vital to distinguish God’s providence from the pagan conception of “fate.” Webster notes that God’s providence is guided by His benevolent nature and leads toward a specific goal. Fate, though, according to Webster, is unreliable, capricious, and lacks good intention.[[17]](#footnote-17) Moreover, unlike God our Father, fate is impersonal.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**4. Conclusions**

If we accept that in His general providence, God allows natural processes to freely operate, then a place exists for random, chance occurrences in the universe. This would mean that not all natural phenomena are under God’s direct control. Another factor to consider here is that through Adam’s disobedience, God cursed the planet (Gen 3:17) and death entered the world (Rom 5:12). The powers of nature, which God established for people’s benefit, may now lead to death and destruction. Romans 8:20-21 teaches that creation was subject to futility and to slavery to corruption. Therefore, the Fall released destructive elements into nature that bring harm to people and the world in general.

We also take into consideration that God allows Satan and demons a certain degree of freedom to utilize these destructive forces. The classic example is Satan’s attack on Job and his family through sickness and storm (Job chaps. 1-2).

Therefore, in regard to natural phenomena, three causes can be highlighted. First, in line with His special providence, God can directly control events in the natural world. Second, according to the principle of general providence, natural processes can operate with a certain autonomy and, due to the presence and effect of sin and death in creation, can lead to destructive acts. Third, the Devil can at times utilize the forces of nature against humanity.

Regarding the cause of historical events, we must factor human free will into the equation. Out of respect for human freedom, God may allow actions that are not according to His will. Complicating this factor is the influence of Satan on human choices.

Consequently, we may again highlight three reasons events in history occur. First, God may direct the course of history directly. Second, Satan can intervene and provoke wrong choices. Third, people exercise their personal freedom, which at times may bring negative results.

Therefore, when some disaster occurs in nature or misfortune in history, the question arises: is this from God, from chance (i.e., autonomous natural forces), from Satan, or from wrong human choices? The solution to this dilemma requires wisdom from God, which He promises to give generously to all who ask (Jam 1:5). Interestingly, this passage promising God’s wisdom in located in a context dealing with trials. So then, whenever we are passing through trails, the Lord is ready to reveal its cause.

Drawing from examples from Scripture, a storm can arise for various reasons. In Jonah chapter 1, the Lord aroused the storm. In Matthew chapter 8, when Jesus and His disciples were in route by sea to deliver a demon-possessed man, Satan interfered with the forces of nature. We would also posit that in most cases, such a disturbance results from autonomous natural forces under the influence of the Curse. How is one to distinguish these? It is possible only by wisdom from the Lord.

Blindness is another example. In Acts chapter 13, Paul struck the false prophet Bar-Jesus with blindness by the power of the Holy Spirit. In John chapter 9, a man was blind so that God would be glorified by his healing. Again, wisdom is needed to know how to respond to each situation.

Our final example, taken from 2 Kings 3:4-11, illustrates well our point here. When the king of Moab rebelled against Israel, King Jehoram, judging by circumstances, concluded that God was intending to give him and his allies over to defeat. Jehoram exclaimed, “Yahweh has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab.”

Jehoshaphat, however, understood the situation better. He inquired, “Is there not a prophet of Yahweh here, that we may inquire of Yahweh by him?” Instead of passively accepting defeat, Jehoshaphat sought God’s wisdom. When he received the Lord’s answer, he was ready to enter the battle with assurance of victory. Similarly, whenever life throws us a challenge, we can appeal to God for wisdom to know the cause of the trouble and how to respond appropriately.

1. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 2.29 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Num 14:9; 21:29; Deut 2:21-22, 31-32; 3:1-4; 7:1-2, 20, 23-24; 9:1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Boyd G. A. Response to William Lane Craig // Boyd G. A., Craig W. L., Helseth P. K., Highfield R., Jowers D. Four Views on Divine Providence. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. – Kindle Edition, 2406-2411. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Langford M. J. Providence. – London: SCM Press, 1981. – P. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Sonderegger K. The Doctrine of Providence // Murphy F. A., Ziegler P. G. The Providence of God. – London; New York: T.T. Clark, 2009. – P. 145-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Langford, p. 7-53, 125, 163-164. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Thomas Aquinas so reasoned. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Langford, p. 78-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., p. 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
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