



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 5.14 – The Doctrine of Providence or Preservation

### Accidents or Chance?

Many people in the world today do not believe there is any design or purpose in what happens in our world. In fact, they even believe that the existence and development of the world is merely a chance event – an accident, so to speak – unplanned and undesigned by anyone. We also often talk about “accidents” and “coincidences”.

The Bible also itself addresses us from our point of view and speaks of chance and accident. For example, God’s law made a distinction between a killer who premeditated his crime and a killer who **“did not lie in wait”** (Exodus 21:13-14) but killed someone by accident. The law also distinguished between a man who throws a stone at someone to hurt him and a man who **“uses a stone, by which a man could die, throwing it at him without seeing him, so that he dies, while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm”** (Numbers 35:23). In another example, God’s prophet told King Ahab in advance that King Ahab would die in an upcoming battle. To try to protect himself, Ahab disguised himself, and none of the enemy forces chased him to kill him. But the Bible account says: **“Now a certain man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor”** (1 Kings 22:34). From our point of view it was only by chance that Ahab was struck in this way, but from God’s point of view this happened exactly as God designed it. As far as God is concerned, there is no such thing as chance or an accident.

The book of Ecclesiastes views things in two ways: “under the sun”, and according to God’s viewpoint. The author says: **“I returned and saw under the sun that – The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all”** (Ecclesiastes 9:11). The fastest man does not always win the race, because something happens to prevent it. Is this chance or accident? From man’s point of view, it is by chance or an accident. But God controls all events, and He has reasons for what He does or allows to happen, even though we may never know what those reasons are.

In His parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus Himself spoke of chance. He said that when the wounded man was lying by the roadside, **“by chance a certain priest came down that road”** (Luke 10:31). This is the way we ordinarily speak, and Jesus spoke that way too. But since God Himself is in control of all things (without exception), there is really no such thing as “chance”. With God there are no accidents. God’s spokesman Isaiah says: **“I, the LORD, do all these things”** (Isaiah 45:7). Jeremiah understood that the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple was no accident. **“Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, when the Lord has not commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed?”** (Lamentations 3:37-38). The prophet Amos also testified: **“If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?”** (Amos 3:6).

In our thinking and speaking we need to recognize that the idea of mere chance events denies the fact that God is complete control of the world. But on the other hand, we dare not teach that since everything happens under God’s control, we have no responsibility for anything that happens. We are not fatalists<sup>1</sup> or determinists<sup>2</sup>, but we teach both God’s absolute control and human responsibility,

<sup>1</sup> Fatalists believe that everything that happens is predetermined and inevitable.

<sup>2</sup> Determinists believe that everything is determined or caused by an outside force or by a person’s previous choices.

without trying to figure out how these two things fit together.

### Questions

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1. What do some people mean when they say that our world came into being by chance?
2. What distinction does God's law make between intentional murder and accidental murder?
3. How was King Ahab killed?
4. What had God said about King Ahab's death?
5. Explain the phrase: "**Time and chance happen to them all**" (Ecclesiastes 9:11).
6. Why is nothing an accident from God's point of view?
7. What are two opposite errors that we need to avoid in our thinking and speaking?