



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

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 5.4 – The Doctrine of Providence or Preservation

### God's Control and Direction of All Events and Human Actions

God does indeed control and direct all events and human actions. After they crossed the Red Sea in their escape from the land of Egypt, Moses and the children of Israel acknowledged that God is the Ruler and Governor of the world. They sang: **"The LORD shall reign forever and ever"** (Exodus 15:18). David acknowledged this as well: **"The LORD sits as King forever"** (Psalm 29:10), and also when he praised the Lord: **"Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations"** (Psalm 145:13). After God gave Daniel the content and meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel **"blessed the God of heaven"** and said: **"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him"** (Daniel 2:19-22).

God's government extends beyond His chosen people. Even though the Old Testament talks mostly about the history of the Israelites, God told them more than once that He was not a local god, but the absolute Ruler of all lands and all times. Moses said to them: **"Know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the LORD Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other"** (Deuteronomy 4:39). The Psalms say the same thing: **"The LORD Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth"** (Psalm 47:2) **"Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all the deep places"** (Psalm 135:6). Even mighty King Nebuchadnezzar had to acknowledge God's rule after God humbled him by inflicting on him a period of insanity: **"He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"** (Daniel 4:35). The apostle Paul was not ashamed to declare this truth to the proud Athenians: **"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands"** (Acts 17:24).

The Lord's control extends to the tiniest of His creatures and to the minutest details of their activities. God said through Asaph: **"Every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine"** (Psalm 50:10-11). According to Psalm 139, God even knows every thought that goes through the minds of every person, as well as every word they speak. Think of the vast universe with all the stars. God **"counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name"** (Psalm 147:4). Jesus assured His disciples that not one sparrow falls to the ground without His Father's permission, and that even the hairs of their head are numbered (Matthew 10:29-31).

Man has vainly tried to control the forces of nature. We have little power against such events as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, volcanoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis. But God is always in control. **"He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures"** (Psalm 135:7). Jesus told His disciples that it is His Father in heaven that makes the sun rise and sends rain on the earth (Matthew 5:45).

There have been mighty nations on the earth, powerful kings, nearly invincible armies. Is God impressed with their strength? God gives His prophet Isaiah this response: **"Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales...All nations before Him are as**

**nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless”** (Isaiah 40:15-17). God uses one nation to punish another. We read in the books of the prophets that God used the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians to accomplish His purposes. **“The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations”** (Psalm 33:10-11).

God also directs the destinies of individual human beings. After God answered Hannah’s prayer for a son, she confessed: **“The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory”** (1 Samuel 2:6-8). In the midst of his afflictions, Job recognized that it was God who was afflicting him: **“You put my feet in the stocks”** (Job 13:27). David realized that God was involved with every detail of his existence: **“You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb... My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them”** (Psalm 139:13-16). **“A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps”** (Proverbs 16:9).

We know God wants all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4), so we also know that God’s direction of the world always has a beneficial purpose: to bring people to repentance and gain for them eternal salvation. Although His gracious purpose is thwarted by some, there are always others whom He brings to faith in His Son. It is especially for their benefit that things happen as they do: **“We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”** (Romans 8:28). **“The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him”** (Nahum 1:7). Psalm 136 shows how everything God does is in accordance with His mercy. Whether He is creating the world or guiding His nation of Israel, we read: **“His mercy endures forever”** (Psalm 136, every verse). His intention for those who trust in Him is very simple. In the words of Asaph: **“You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory”** (Psalm 73:23-24).

## Questions

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1. How did Daniel express the thought that God rules over all things?
2. How did God explain to His people that He was not just a local god?
3. What was King Nebuchadnezzar forced to acknowledge concerning the true God?
4. To what extent is God involved in all of His creatures?
5. What must we say about all the forces of nature?
6. What are the nations of the earth like in relationship to God?
7. What are some examples of how God has brought down the proud and lifted up the lowly?
8. What did God know about David even before David was born?
9. What is God’s goal and purpose in ruling the world?
10. What does it mean that **“all things work together for good”**?