

## Chapter 1. God's Special Care of His People

As well as being head to His people in the church, Christ is also ruler of the whole world. He controls events in the world for the highest good of the church. My purpose here is not so much to deal with those who do not believe in God. I want to convince those who say that God exists that the special workings of His providence are not mere accidents. There are many people who call themselves Christians who look on things that happen in their lives as just natural events. They think of the affairs of the world and of God's saints as not being governed by providence, but by natural causes. That is to live as though there is no God! Let anyone who thinks this way consider the following questions:

### **1. How is it that, so many times, the people of God have been saved from danger and evil by a power greater than the power of nature, and in a way which has often been against the course of nature?**

Waters overflow and drown all that they can, but the Red Sea was divided and a wall of water on each side allowed the children of Israel to pass safely through. Fire burns to the utmost of its power, but when Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, threw the three godly young Jews into the fiery furnace, the intense flame had no power to hurt one hair

of their heads, but at the same time it killed those who had thrown them into the fire. It is natural for wild beasts like lions, when hungry, to kill animals or men for their food, but those in the den where Daniel was put for a whole night did him no harm.

**2. How is it, if they are not ordered by a special providence, that natural causes work together in such strange ways for the benefit of the saints?**

In the story of Joseph there are twelve steps of providence by which he became Prime Minister of Egypt. If only one had failed, the story would have been very different. In Esther's time, there were seven acts of providence fitting in with each other to bring about the downfall of wicked Haman and the saving of the Jews from destruction. God is able to do different things to take care of His people, just as a workman uses all sorts of tools in his work. In the same way as a workman takes a rough bit of wood and makes it into a work of art, so there is a most skilful hand that uses the tools in the workshop of providence.

**3. If the affairs of God's people are not governed by a special providence, how is it that the most clever and powerful means employed to destroy them have no effect, and the weak and feeble means employed for their safety are successful?**

Such was the great power and skill used by Pharaoh in his attempt to destroy God's people Israel, that it would seem to natural reason to be impossible for them to escape. The Roman emperors, who conquered the world, employed all their power against the poor, defenceless church, but the church lived on! If half that power had been employed against any other

people, it would certainly have destroyed them completely. God made good His promises: 'I will make a full end of all the nations ... of you I will not make a full end' (Jer. 30:11). And, 'no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed' (Isa. 54:17).

On the other hand, what weak and unlikely means were chosen for the planting of Christianity in the world. Christ did not choose men of authority in the courts of kings, but twelve ordinary men, the chief among them being fishermen. These were sent out, not together, but some to one country and some to another, and yet in how short a time the gospel spread and churches were planted by them in the different kingdoms of the world. From that time until our own day, a special providence has watched over Christians in times of danger and prevented all attempts to destroy them.

**4. If all things are governed by natural causes, how is it that men are turned from the evil way along which they were going at full speed?**

Paul was on his way to Damascus to put Christians to death when he was suddenly struck down by a light from heaven. He was turned from his purpose and was made an apostle of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:1-18). Later, when the Jews plotted to kill him as he was brought as a prisoner from Caesarea to Jerusalem, the governor Festus (though he did not know of the plot) decided to judge Paul at Caesarea and not at Jerusalem, so bringing their plans to nothing (Acts 25:1-4).

Augustine, a great leader of the early Christian church, was going to a certain town to teach the people there, and took a guide with him to show him the way. The guide missed the usual road, but taking a different route they arrived safely at the town. Afterwards they found they had escaped death at

the hands of enemies who had lain in wait to kill Augustine on the road.

Who can fail to see the finger of God in these things?

**5. If there is not an overruling providence ordering all things for the good of God's people, how is it that the good or evil which is done to them in this world is repaid to those who bring good or evil upon them?**

When Pharaoh ordered the killing of all the sons born to the children of Israel, the midwives refused to obey his command. For this the Lord dealt well with them (Exod. 1:21). Rahab hid the spies sent into Jericho, and she was kept safe when all the people of the city were destroyed (Josh. 6:25). The Shunammite woman was kind to Elisha the prophet and provided a room for his use at all times, and God gave her the joy of having a son (2 Kings 4:9-17). Publius, the chief man on the island of Malta, gave Paul a lodging after his shipwreck. The Lord speedily repaid him for that kindness and healed his sick father (Acts 28:7-8).

In the same way, the evils done to God's people have been repaid to their enemies. As we have seen, it was Pharaoh's purpose to destroy the innocent children of the Israelites. God repaid him by killing all the firstborn of Egypt in one night (Exod. 12:29). Haman made a very high gallows for good Mordecai, and God so ordered it that Haman himself and his ten sons were hanged on it (Esther 7:10). Ahithophel plotted against David and counselled how to bring about his downfall. That very counsel rebounded on him and brought about his own ruin (2 Sam. 17:23).

After the cruel Roman Emperor Maximinus had ordered the Christian religion to be abolished completely, he was

struck down with a dreadful disease, like Herod in the days of the apostles (Acts 12:23). Sometimes the repayment of evil has been very exact. When Naboth had been killed, Ahab was told: 'where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood.' And this was exactly what happened (1 Kings 21:19 and 22:38).

So the Scriptures are made good by providence. 'Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling' (Prov. 26:27), and 'with the measure you use it will be measured to you' (Matt. 7:2).

## **6. If these things are merely accidental, how is it that they agree so exactly with the Scriptures in all details?**

Does God miraculously suspend the power of natural causes? This is no accident, but is in accordance with the Word: 'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you' (Isa. 43:2). Do natural causes work for the good of God's people? This is in accordance with the Scripture: 'all things are yours ... and you are Christ's' (1 Cor. 3:21, 23).

When providence keeps good men from falling into evil, or wicked men from doing evil, the truth and certainty of the following Scriptures are made known in a very real way: 'the way of man is not in himself ... it is not in man who walks to direct his steps' (Jer. 10:23); and 'The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps' (Prov. 16:9). When evil things men have done rebound on them, Psalm 9:16 is true: 'the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands.' Cyrus, head of the Persian Empire, let God's people go free

because Scripture said he should do so, although it was against his own interests (Isa. 45:13). All the people in the world always fulfil the purposes of God, even when they don't want to do so.

**7. If these things happen by chance, how is it that they occur exactly at the right time?**

The Old Testament is full of examples of such events. Hagar is told of a well of water when she thinks she has left the boy Ishmael to die of thirst (Gen. 21:16, 19). The angel calls to Abraham and shows him another ram for the sacrifice when he is about to kill his son Isaac (Gen. 22:10-14). King Saul was told: 'the Philistines have made a raid against the land', just as he was ready to take David and kill him (1 Sam. 23:27). News of an attack from another direction caused the army of Assyria to retreat from Jerusalem, just as they were ready to advance on the city (Isa. 37:7-8). When Haman's plot against the Jews was ready to be put into operation, 'On that night the king could not sleep' (Esther 6:1). Many similar happenings to God's people in later years could be told as further evidence of the very exact way in which providence works for them.

**8. If these things are merely accidental, how is it that they happen in accordance with the prayers of the saints, who know they have received very clear answers to the particular requests they have made (1 John 5:15)?**

Abraham's servant prayed for success as he went to seek a wife for Isaac. His prayer was answered according to the exact words he had used (Gen. 24:14, 46). The children of Israel cried to the Lord when Pharaoh and the Egyptians marched after them, and the Red Sea divided in front of them

## *God's Special Care of His People*

(Exod. 14:10). King Asa was faced with an army numbering many thousands more than his own, and he cried to the Lord his God. He said: 'O LORD, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come'. God's answer was to give him a great victory (2 Chron. 14:11). Peter was put in prison and the church prayed day and night for him. See how their prayers were answered in Acts 12:1-12.

Who can say that the providences of God do not show Him as a God who hears and answers prayer? 'For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless towards him' (2 Chron. 16:9).