

God Rules the World

The hollow thud of a distant explosion does little to dull the broken-hearted sobs of the grief-stricken woman. Slowly she explains her plight. Bereft of husband and children, homeless and helpless, she is alone in this war zone—one of thousands, the telecast announces. Kosovo? East Timor? Angola? Does it matter? Wherever it is, it is the latest reminder that we live in a world that is often cruel and unfair, a world that seems to lunge from one crisis to another, a world apparently spiraling out of control. All this is fuel to the fire for those who see God as the proverbial absentee landlord, caring nothing for his tenants, taking no interest in their circumstances.

Even those who believe that God exercises some providential control over the world are often unsure if He really concerns Himself with the details of history and the everyday experiences of human life. They see God in the image of the business man who lays down a general plan, but who is too great, too distant, to be troubled with the mundane details of his business. He may well be disappointed and frustrated by the failings of his employees. Isn't God similarly disappointed and frustrated by the failings of His creatures? And doesn't this view neatly account for the marred state of the modern world?

Does this describe the God of the Bible? Is God utterly apart from our world? Has He made it, only to walk away?

Preserver of the World

God has not abandoned the world He created! The Bible constantly affirms that He sustains and preserves what He has made. "Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and *thou preservest them all*; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee" (Nehemiah 9:6). "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Colossians 1:17), "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3).

Yes, God continues to work in relation to what He has created. He works to maintain and uphold that creation.

Precisely how He does this is mysterious; it is beyond us. What we can say is that when He works in providence, He works according to the nature of His creatures, accommodating Himself to the laws He has established in the material and mental realms. Preservation never runs counter to creation. God does not violate in providence what He has established in creation. Consequently, we may not always sense what God is doing as the preserver of all things.

The danger is that we confine His working to the level of the miraculous, or at least the dramatic, when all the while He is maintaining what He has made by ordinary means. In fact, His power in preservation is just as real and just as positive as that which He exercised in the work of creation. And this power is vital

prime example of the controlling influence of God's will.

Proverbs 21:1 reminds us that the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, and there is a very obvious demonstration of that truth in the case of Cyrus, whose spirit was stirred up by the Lord (Ezra 1:1), and in the case of Darius, whose heart the Lord turned unto Israel (Ezra 6:22). Perhaps the language used in these examples conveys an important truth.

The impulse to action proceeds from God. He prompts and enables men to work as they do. He is the prime mover. Yet He does not take away their freedom. The actions are theirs, and the responsibility for the actions is theirs, but God is accompanying the actions at every point, carrying them through according to the counsel of His own will.

Neither Joseph nor his brothers, nor indeed the disinterested spectator, may have had any sense of this as it developed. This is still the case with so much that God allows to happen in our world. Only the passing of many years will tell the tale and perhaps only eternity will reveal the whole story.

Ruler of All

We are indeed subjects of a God who is ruler of all things. Today, many speak of the fatherhood of God, and, yes, He is Father to His redeemed people. But He is also King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the supreme ruler of the universe, working out His own purpose in and through all the changing circumstances of life.

The great things and the small, the most deliberate and the seemingly accidental, the

“He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?” — Daniel 4:35

for the continued existence of His creation. We who are part of that creation possess no power sufficient to maintain our own existence “for in him, we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). We depend upon the will and working of our Creator for continued existence.

The Prime Mover

It follows that God is operating in every action of man. No natural or human power works simply by itself, independently. Yes, such powers are real but God is cooperating with them in working out His own will and purpose.

Remember Joseph's experience. We know the evil intention of his brothers in selling him into slavery and the fruit of that intention. But how did Joseph account for his removal to Egypt? He said, “So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God” (Genesis 45:8; cf. vv. 5, 7). He was in Egypt because God wanted him to be there, a

But can this really be so with everything that men do? There is so much in our world that is evil, wrong, sinful. How can a God who is holy and righteous, intolerant of sin, have anything to do with actions that are obviously the outworking of sin? It would be easy to say that God has no control over such things, but that would be a denial of scriptural teaching.

Returning to the story of Joseph, we may find that the incident to which we have already referred is instructive. The actions of Joseph's brothers were sinful. While God did not cause the sin, He permitted it and overruled it for the fulfilment of His own will (Genesis 45:5f). Again, God placed certain restraints on the actions of these men, initially preventing them from taking Joseph's life and ultimately from shutting him out of their lives forever. Thus God used the evil deed for His own good purpose: “As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Genesis 50:20).

good deeds and the evil are all under His control. “He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?” (Daniel 4:35).

Benjamin Russell Hanby's question and answer is not just a carol for Christmas; it conveys a truth that is both thrilling and timeless:

*Who is He who from His throne
Rules through all the world alone?
Tis the Lord! O wondrous story!
Tis the Lord, the King of glory!
At His feet we humbly fall;
Crown Him, crown Him
Lord of all! ■*

Rev. Timothy Nelson is the minister of Rasharkin Free Presbyterian Church. He also teaches New Testament Greek at the Whitefield College of the Bible, Northern Ireland.

