

God's Sovereignty and Providence

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January 17, 2026

Integration Question: *How closely does God control the universe, especially moral creatures?*

How will you use your theology of providence to care for someone who has been slammed by the hardness of life?

Theological Statement

God rules as the sovereign King over all creation which means He has the freedom to do whatever He choose to, by any means He chooses to, without giving account to any person, nation, or spirit. Psalms 135 gives this beautiful depiction of God, saying “For I know that the Lord is great and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps (Ps. 135:5-6). The Apostle Paul closes his letter to his protégé, Pastor Timothy, charging Timothy to fulfill all they God has had said because God is “blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15). Paul’s stamp of authority derives from being a sent one of God who, as the Psalter declares, is king over all creation, including earth, people, nations, as He rules from his throne room in heaven (Ps. 47). Although God is the sovereign king over all, it does not mean He causes all things to happen. A clear example of this is seen in Jeremiah 32, where God tells the prophet Jeremiah that Isreal had turned their backs on Him by doing evil, worshiping false idols, and even sacrifices children to fake gods. God explains that He never commanded their actions of sin, nor did they enter His mind for Judah to fall away (Jer. 32:32-35). This story serves as a clear example that God does not ordain and decree all things that come to pass.

The very metanarrative of the Bible, the story of all and for all, reveals how a loving and sovereign God chooses to rule over creation. In the beginning, God created humanity as His image bearers, agents of free will, who were meant to receive God’s love and live in an eternal, loving relationship with Him in return. As a result, God chooses to limit Himself and how things

are done in this world because He faithfully partners with humans, giving us authority to be His co-rulers, and tasking us to continue bringing His rule and shalom to the rest of this world (Gen. 1-2). To be sure, there are still examples of God giving no choice in very specific situations such as John the Baptist being the forerunner of Jesus and Mary being Jesus' Mother. Nevertheless, humans constantly choose to serve ourselves and seek life and wisdom apart from God, rejecting His plan and falling victim to the evils of this world that we ourselves created and introduced (Gen. 3). For millennia, to no avail of every character preserved in Old Testament, Jesus, God himself in flesh, proved to be the long-awaited "seed of the women" (Matt. 1:1-16) who would crush the enemy (Gen. 3:15) and live as a all humanity was supposed to- submitted to the absolute way of God and wholly obedient to His Spirit (John 14:10). Jesus defeated the enemy by allowing death, the manifestation of sin and evil, to exhaust all its power on Him as He was tortured and murdered upon a cross (Col. 2:15), only to rise to life three days later and offer His life and Spirit to all who believe (Rom. 6). Consequently, God restored and redeemed all who place their faith in the sufficient work and blood of Jesus back into His image bearers to once again co-rule over creation and eradicate the evils of this world via the Way of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17-21). Currently, the way of the world is governed by the evil one (Eph. 2:2), even though God is sovereign over all, He let humans choose who they want to reign and rule them. While the effects of sin are felt by all people (Rom. 5:12-21), Jesus not only sympathizes with all of humanities pains (Heb. 4:15), but He also provides true life amidst the pain and suffering (John 10:10). Ultimately, God promised that He will eradicate all evil, and its effects, Himself as He will rule and reign forevermore in a renewed creation with His people (Rev. 21-22).

Ministry Application

How people understand the theology of God's sovereignty and providence is critical to how they relationally relate to God. Some people believe that God is solely responsible for the evils of this world because He decided before creation that He would directly bring the evil along with good, into existence. People with this viewpoint are either okay with a God who rules through evil (usually they blame it on their inability as humans to question and know the mind of God), or they want nothing to do with a God who rules through evil atrocities such as genocide or murder. My theology stated above offers a third viewpoint. For example, I had a couple who had recently had a miscarriage pretty far into their pregnancy. They did not know if they should praise God for His will being done because He had decided to bring about the miscarriage about before the foundations of the world were laid, or not to blame God because His character, fully revealed through Jesus, would not do such a thing. I was able to comfort the couple, based on my theology of God's providence, that this was not from God, but from the results of a fallen, chaotic, and sin filled world. We can trust that Jesus, the exact imprint of God, only brings abundant life, and it is the evil one steals, kills, and destroys. This couple not only found relief that they could trust God not to cause such a terrible thing, but they also found security in the fact that they were not alone. I shared with them that King Jesus hurts with them and sympathizes with their pain as He also cried painful tears. Jesus is the only one to offer ultimate hope by giving His people His Spirit to comfort us amidst the toils of this world. He is the only one who can always create everlasting beauty from ashes. And He is the only one to give eternal confidence that one day every evil will be no more.

Ironically, this same couple came to me amidst the 2025 California fires that decimated parts of the state and took over 400 lives, and asked what I thought the people of California had done for God to send down His judgment on them. Specifically, they wanted to know if, in

God's sovereignty, does He rule and reign through evils and atrocities. The answer to this question stems from how one understands God's sovereignty and providence. The Old Testament is clear that while God did not cause most evils (Deut. 32:32-35), He sometimes did ordain it as a way of judgment. For example, He used Israel to genocide the Amorites, whom He had been patient with for over 400 years (Gen. 15:16), as well as the Babylonians, an evil people, to conquer and exile the Israelite nation (Isaiah 45). I believe in the Old Covenant, God pronounced His judgment on people while they were still on earth that brought about death for those who rejected Him earlier than the anticipated end of their life judgment (an event that all people of all times will experience). But Jesus' life, death, and resurrection changed the course of history. Superficially, on the cross, Jesus took the full judgment of God to humanity upon Himself, so that under the New Covenant, humanity will not experience God using the evils of death until the final Day of Judgment. Because of this, I believe Jesus proclaimed that all stories of the Old Testament were all pointing to Him as the fulfillment of them (Matt. 5:17-20; Luke 24:27, 44-45). Jesus as the true revelation of God means that how Jesus lived and ruled on this earth, collected in the four Gospels, is how God rules and reigns now. Consequently, in the era of the New Covenant until consummation, people, like the young couple that sought my counsel, can be assured that fires decimating cities, war lords geocoding civilizations, or cancers attacking young children are not affiliated with God nor part of His judgment, but rather, are the results of human's inability to live as image bearers who advance the spiritual and physical realities of God's kingdom set forth by Jesus. This reality also means we, partakers of the New Covenant, are who God is using to advance His Kingdom and rule, destroying the works of the enemy with every act of selfless service, every proclamation of the gospel, and every sickness healed in the name of King Jesus.