

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION Chapter 3

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AS SEEN IN HUMAN HISTORY

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Transcript

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Since God is the Creator of all things, He is their perpetual Preserver and Regulator. And since man is the chief of His earthly creatures, it is unthinkable that God has left him entirely to himself. The same all-mighty Being who created every part of it, directs the vast machinery of the universe and controls equally all the hearts and actions of men. But the same unbelief which seeks to banish God from the realm of creation, denies that He has any real place or part in the moral government of the world. The one, it is said, is regulated by the (impersonal) "laws of Nature," while man, endowed with "free will," must not be interfered with, but left to work out his own destiny, both individually and collectively considered. We have shown how utterly irrational is such a view as it pertains to the material sphere, and it is no more difficult to demonstrate how thoroughly untenable it is as applied to the moral realm. The palpable facts of observation refute it. The affairs of every individual, the history of each nation, the general course of human events—all bear evidence of a higher Power super-intending the same. In reading history most people are contented with a bare knowledge of its salient facts, without attempting to trace their causes or ascertain the connection of events. For the most part they look no farther than the motives, designs and tendencies of human nature. They perceive not that there is a philosophy of history. They rise not to the realization that the living God has absolute sway over this scene, that amid all the confusion of human wills and interests, all the malice and wickedness of Satan and his agents, the Lord God omnipotent reigns—not only in Heaven but over this earth—shaping all its affairs, directing all things to the outworking of His eternal purpose. Because the reading of human history is done so superficially, and few have more than a general acquaintance with its character, our present line of argument may not be so patent or so potent to some. Nevertheless, it should be more or less obvious unto any person of ordinary intelligence that in the course of the centuries there are clear marks of an over-ruling and presiding Power above the human. Since there can be no effect without a previous cause, no law without a law-giver, neither do events come to pass fortuitously. Any thoughtful student of history is obliged to conclude that its records are something more than a series of disconnected and purposeless incidents: rather do they evince the

working out of a plan. True, its wheels often appear to move slowly, and not infrequently at cross-purposes, nevertheless, the sequel shows they work surely. It is in the combination of events leading up to some grand end that the workings of Divine Providence most clearly appear. As we perceive the wisdom of the Creator in so admirably fitting each member of the human body to perform its designed functions, so we may discern the hand of the moral Ruler of this world in the adapting of appropriate means to the accomplishment of His ends, in the suitability of the instruments He has selected thereunto, in making each separate human actor play his part, each individual contribute his quota in producing the desired effect. As in the mechanism of a watch, each pivot is in place, each wheel in motion, so that the main-spring guides its index, so in the complicated machinery of history every single circumstance pays its mite toward the furthering of some grand object. Proofs of a presiding Providence are to be found in the life of each individual. Where is the man who has not passed through experiences which made him feel in his heart there must be a God who watches over him? In the unexpected and remarkable turns in the course of his affairs, in the sudden thoughts and unaccountable decisions which lead to most important results, in his narrow escapes from grave danger, he has evidence of a higher power at work. Even the most giddy and thoughtless are, at times, forced to take notice of this. That we are under a Moral Government which dispenses rewards and punishments in a natural way is also plain to our sense and proved by personal experience. Vicious actions speedily meet with retribution, by involving their perpetrator in disgrace, by often reducing him to poverty, subjecting him to bodily disease and mental suffering, and brining about an untimely death. On the other hand, we find that virtuous actions not only result in inward peace and satisfaction, but lead to respect, health and happiness. If there be no living God presiding over this scene, how can we possibly account for the almost exact ratio between the two sexes? Each year there are born into this world millions of males and of females, and yet the balance between them is perfectly preserved. Their parents had no say in the matter, nor did medical science regulate it! The only rational explanation is that the sex of each child is determined by the Creator. Again—if there be no personal Creator fashioning human countenances, how are we to explain their unvarying variation? The features of the human countenance are but few in number, yet so much does their appearance differ, both singly and in their combination, that out of countless millions no two people look exactly alike! Suppose the opposite. If a likeness were common, what incalculable inconvenience and confusion would ensue. If only 100 men in a single large city had the same build and countenance, impersonation would be practiced without fear of detection, and criminals could not be identified. Such endless dissimilarities among those descended from common parents must have the Almighty for their Author. That the One from above regulates all human affairs is demonstrated on every side of us, look where we may. In the instances alluded to above, the individual is entirely passive, for it is by no decision of his that he is born male or female, black or white, a giant or a dwarf. But consider something yet more striking, namely, that even our voluntary actions are secretly directed from on high. Each year hundreds of thousands of both young men and women choose their ordinary vocations or careers: what is it which moves them to make a proportionate selection from such a variety of alternatives? Is it nothing but blind chance that each generation is supplied with sufficient physicians and dentists, lawyers and school teachers, mechanics and manual laborers? Many of our youth emigrate: what hinders all from doing so? Some prefer a life on the land, others on the sea— why? Take something still more commonplace: today I have written and mailed seven letters—suppose every adult in Great Britain did the same! The complicated machinery of modern life would speedily break down and utter chaos would obtain were not an omniscient and omnipresent Being regulating it. It may be objected that the machinery of our complex social life does not always run smoothly—that there are strikes and lock-outs which result in much inconvenience, that at times the railroads are blocked with traffic, that hotels are overcrowded, and so on. Granted, yet such

occurrences are the exception rather than the rule. But we may draw an argument of Divine Providence from the very commotions and confusions which do obtain in the world. Seeing it does occasionally pass through disturbances, is it not evident that there must be a mighty Power balancing these commotions, yea curbing them, so that they do not speedily issue in the total ruin of the world? The same One who has put the fear of man into wild beasts and a natural instinct for them to avoid human habitations, preferring to resort unto the jungles and deserts, to prowl for their prey in the night, and in the morning return to their caves and dens, sufficiently places His restraining hand upon the baser passions of men as to ensure that degree of law and order which makes life possible amid fallen and depraved creatures. Were that restraining Hand altogether removed, any guarantee of safety and security would be non est. God is no idle Spectator of the affairs of this earth, but is the immediate Regulator of all its events, and that, not only in a general way, but in all particulars, from the least to the greatest. If, on the one hand, not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Divine will (Matt. 10:29), certain it is that on the other no throne can be overturned without His ordering. "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36). God is not only "King of saints," but He is "King of nations" (Jer. 10:7) as well. God reigns as truly over His foes as He does over His friends, and works through Satan and his demons as truly as by His holy angels. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, and He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Prov. 21:1). God presides over the deliberations of parliaments and influences the decisions of cabinets. Human governments act only as they are moved by a secret power from Heaven. Jehovah rules in the councils of the ungodly equally as in the prayerful counsels of a church assembly. The designs, decisions and actions of all men are directed by Him unto those ends which He has appointed, yet that in nowise annuls their moral agency or lessens their own guilt in sinning. The government of this world is as much a work of God as was the creation of it, and while there be some things as inscrutable about the one as the other, yet each alike bears unmistakably upon it the Divine impress. There are riddles in each which the wisest cannot solve, but there are also wonders in each before which all should be awed. Broadly speaking, the moral government of God consists of two things: in directing the creatures' actions, in apportioning rewards and punishments according to the actions of rational creatures. No evil comes to pass without His permission, no good without His concurrence; no good or evil without His over-ruling—ordering it to His own ends. "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3), and in His balances everything is weighed. The distributions of Divine mercy and of vengeance are, to some extent, apportioned in this life, but more particularly and fully will they be made manifest in the Day to come. God rules in such a way that His hand should be neither too evident nor too secret, and by adopting this middle course, room is left for the exercise of faith, while the unbelief of Infidels rendered without excuse. Nothing happens simply because it must, that is, of inexorable necessity. Fate is blind, but Providence has eyes—all is directed by wisdom and according to design. The history of each nation is the outworking of the Divine plan and purpose concerning it. Yet it is equally true that the history of each nation is determined by its own attitude toward God and His Law. In the experience of each one it is made to appear that "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 34:3). Thus the Word of God and the Providence of God are complementary: the former sheds light on the latter, while the latter illustrates and exemplifies the former. Therefore in His government of this world, God displays His manifold perfections: His wisdom and goodness, His mercy and justice, His faithfulness and patience. The rise, progress and triumphs of each nation, as also its decline, fall and ignominy, are according to both the sovereign will and the perfect righteousness of the Lord. He rules "in the midst of His enemies" (Ps. 110:2), yet His rule is neither capricious nor arbitrary, but a wise and just one. The prosperity of nations generally tends to the increase of vice through affording fuller opportunity to indulge its lusts; and in such cases sore calamities are

necessary for the checking of their wickedness, or, when it has come to the full, to destroy them as the Egyptian and Babylonian empires were. The history of Israel affords the most striking example of what has been pointed out above. So long as they honored God and walked in obedience to His Law, so long they prospered and flourished—witness their history in the days of Joshua and David. But when they worshipped the idols of the heathen and became unrighteous in their conduct man with man, sore chastisements and heavy judgments were their portion, as in the times of the judges and of the Babylonian captivity. Observe, too, the futile attempts made by the most powerful of their enemies to secure their extirpation: the efforts of Pharaoh, of Haman, of Sennacherib to overthrow the purpose of Jehovah concerning His people resulted only in their own destruction. Note how an exact retribution—"poetic justice," worldlings would call it—overtook Jezebel: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth" (1 Kings 21:19), who was murdered at the orders of that wicked queen, there was her corpse consumed by dogs (2 Kings 9:36). On the other hand, behold how God blessed those who showed kindness to His people: as Rahab and the whole of her family being delivered when Jericho was destroyed because she had sheltered the two Israeli spies; and the Shunnamite woman supernaturally provided for throughout the sore famine for her befriending of the Prophet Elijah. What incredulity regards as "coincidences" right reason views as wondrous providences. The book of Esther furnishes a most vivid illustration and demonstration of the invisible yet palpable working of God in human affairs. In it we are shown the Jews brought to the very brink of ruin, and then delivered without any miracle being wrought on their behalf. The very means employed by their enemies for their destruction were, by the secret operations of God, made the means of their deliverance and glory. Writing thereon, Carson rightly said: "The hand of God in His ordinary Providence linked together a course of events as simple and as natural as the mind can conceive, yet as surprising as the boldest fictions of romance." The series of events opened with the king of Persia giving a banquet. Heated with wine, that monarch gave orders for his royal consort to appear before the assembled revelers. Though such a request was indecorous and distasteful to the queen, yet it is remarkable she dared to disobey her despotic husband. Whether a sense of decency or personal pride actuated her, we know not—but in voluntarily acting according to her own feelings, she ignorantly fulfilled the will of Him whom she knew not. That the king should subject her to a temporary disgrace for her refusal to heed his behest might be expected, but that he should give up forever one whom he so much admired is surprising. How extraordinary it was that the deposing of Vashti made way for the elevating of a poor Jewess to the rank of queen of the Persian empire! Was it nothing but a "happy coincidence" that she should be more beautiful than all the virgins of over a 100 provinces? Was it only a piece of "good luck" that the king's chamberlain was pleased with her from the first moment of her arrival, and that he did all in his power to advance her interests? Was it simply "fortunate" for her that she instantly met with favour when the king set eyes upon her? Was it only by blind chance that the conspiracy of two of the king's servants was thwarted and that Mordecai and all his people were saved from disaster? Haman was sure of victory, having obtained the king's decree to execute his bloody designs. Why was it, then, that the king was sleepless one night, and why should he arise and, to pass the time away, scan the court records? Why did his eye happen to alight on the reported discovery of the plot on his own life? Why had Mordecai been the one to uncover the scheme and his name entered into the report? Why was the king now—at this critical juncture in Israel's affairs—so anxious to ascertain whether Mordecai had been suitably rewarded? Cold logic is not sufficiently credulous to regard these things, and the grand sequel to them all, as so many fortuitous events. The book of Esther plainly evinces that the most trifling affairs are ordered by the Lord to subserve His own glory and effect the good of His own people. Though He works behind the scenes, He works none the less. He does indeed govern the inanimate world by general laws of His own appointing, yet He directs their operations-or suspends them

when He pleases—so as to accomplish what He has decreed. He has also established general moral laws in the government of mankind, yet He is not tied by them: sometimes He uses means, at others He uses none. As the sun and rain minister to the nourishment and comfort of the righteous and wicked alike, not from the necessity of general laws but from the immediate Providence of Him who has ordained all things, so the free determinations of men are so controlled from on high that they effect the eternal designs of God. So, too, the Book of Esther reveals that it is in the combination of incidents the working of Providence most plainly appears. There is a wonderful series of linking events which lead to the accomplishment of God's glorious purpose: the actions of each person are links in the chain to bring about some appointed result—if one link were removed the whole chain would be broken. All lines converge on and meet in one center: all things concur to bring about the decreed event. If the record of any Gentile nation were fully chronicled, and had we sufficient discernment and perspicuity, we should perceive as definite a connection between one event—which now appears to us isolated—and another, and the hand of God controlling them as in the history of Israel. But even a fragmentary knowledge of general history should be sufficient to reveal to any man the directing hand of God in it and the testimony it bears to the truth of the Bible. It abounds in illustrations that, "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong" (Eccl. 9:11). The most numerous and powerful armies are no guaranty of success, as has frequently been demonstrated. Providence disposes the event: without any miraculous interference the best trained and equipped forces have been defeated by much weaker ones. The discovery of America by Columbus, in time for that land to afford an asylum for persecuted Protestants, the invention of printing just before the Reformation, the destruction of the "Invincible Armada" of Spain, are more than "coincidences." Why has England always had a man of outstanding proportions—genius, valor, dynamism, dogged determination—at each critical juncture of her history? Cromwell, Drake, Nelson, Wellington, Churchill—all were the special gifts of God to a people under His peculiar favour. A real, if mysterious, Providence is obviously at work, controlling the gradual growth of each empire and of the combination of nations: as in the federation of the ten kings of Revelation 17:16, 17—the Divine plan is brought to fruition by those whose intention it is to accomplish their own purpose. "For God hath put it in their hearts to fulfil His will," though that in nowise lessens their sin: none but the hand of the Almighty can bring good out of evil and make the wrath of His enemies to praise Him. The more their chronicles be studied, the stronger should be our conviction that only the action and interposition of God can account for many of the outstanding events in human history. The rise and careers of individual tyrants also illustrates the same principle. How often have the workings of Providence verified the Word that "the triumphing of the wicked is short" (Job 20:5). At longest it is but brief because limited by the span of this life, whereas their sufferings will be eternal. But often God blows upon the plans of ambitious oppressors, crosses their imperious wills, and brings them to a speedy ruin in this world: He did so with Napoleon, the Kaiser, Mussolini and Hitler! He raised them on high that He might cast them down by a more terrible fall. We have called attention to the revelation which God has made of Himself in human history, that is, to the cumulative evidence which the affairs of individuals and of nations furnish that a Divine Person has full control over those affairs, and orders and directs them all unto the accomplishment of His own eternal purpose. The Ruler of this world makes use of the opinions and motives, the resolves and actions of men, yea, overruling their very crimes to further His design and promote His own glory. Every occurrence upon the stage of human events is not only to be traced back to the Divine counsels, but should be viewed as the outworking of a part of His vast plan. We should behold God in all the intrigues of courts and governments, in all the caprices of monarchs, in all the changes of kingdoms and empires; yea, in all the persecutions of the righteous, as really and as truly as in the progress of the Gospel: though in the former it is more the secret workings of His justice, as it is the more open manifestations of His grace in the latter. "The lot is cast into the lap, but

the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (Prov. 16:33) whether or not we perceive it. The One who rules the planets is equally master of every human despot. We supplied proof of that in connection with Ahasuerus. Consider now another example. As a judgment upon their long-continued sinfulness, God delivered the Jews into the hands of an invading power, and suffered the flower of their nation to be carried captive into Babylon. Yet His judgment was tempered with mercy, for He assured His covenant, though wayward people, that after 70 years they should return to Palestine. That promise was definite and sure: but how was it to receive its fulfillment? They were utterly incapable of delivering themselves from the midst of the mightiest empire on earth, and there was no friendly and powerful nation demanding their emancipation. How, then, was the Lord's Word to be made good? God had indeed delivered their forefathers from Egypt by a series of great marvels, but from Babylon He freed them without a single miracle. The manner in which He did so supplies a striking example of His providential workings and an illustrious illustration of how He shapes the history of nations. "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of Heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is the God), which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:1-4). This is the famous Cyrus whose name occupies a prominent place upon the scroll of secular history. He was the ordained conqueror of Babylon, and when the empire of Nebuchadnezzar and Darius fell before his sword, instead of keeping the Jews in bondage, he decreed their liberation. But why should he do so? Was he a worshipper of Jehovah and a lover of His people? Far from it: he was a heathen idolater! The prophecy of Jeremiah had evidently been read by him, though it effected not his conversion, for he continued a devotee of his own gods. But God so impressed his mind by that prophecy, and secretly wrought in him a desire and determination to free the Jews that he made an authoritative proclamation to that effect. God gave His people favour in the eyes of the Persian king, and wrought in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure; yet in the forming and carrying out of his decision, Cyrus acted quite freely. Thus with the greatest of ease God can effect His own purpose, and without the use of force remove any obstacle standing in the way. If (as so many students of prophecy believe) God has predestined that the Jews shall, after centuries of weary wandering among the Gentiles, once more occupy the land of Palestine, and if His time be now ripe for the fulfillment of that decree, then neither the Arabs nor anyone else can prevent their doing so. Whatever method or means God uses will in no wise alter the fact that there will be spread before the eyes of the world a demonstration that One immeasurably superior to man is ordering its affairs. Time will show: but up to now it looks as though God is repeating what He did in and through Cyrus. First, He moved the British Government to take over the mandatory control of Palestine, which has been administered for a quarter of a century at great inconvenience and at heavy cost of life and money, without a "thank you" from anyone. Now He has "stirred up the spirit" of the U.S. Government to insist on the entry of more and more Jews into that land. God has "His way in the whirlwind" (Nahum 1:3). Let us now carefully consider the objection of the skeptic. If an infinitely wise and benevolent Being be in full control of all the affairs of earth, then why is there so much evil, so much suffering and sorrow? Justice is a rare commodity between individuals or nations—the ruthless and powerful seize the prey, while the conscientious and honest are despoiled. Mercy appears to be mainly a consideration of prudence, for who acts generously or leniently when another is thwarting his own interests?—witness, for

example, the toll of the road. If a God of love presides over the scene, then why has He permitted the horrible holocaust of the past few years, with such widespread havoc and misery? The first answer is, Because the earth is inhabited by a rebellious race, which has revolted from its Maker, and is now being made to feel that "the way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15). Since man himself was the one who deliberately dashed into pieces the cup of felicity which was originally placed in his hands, he has no legitimate ground for complaint if he now finds that the potion which he has brewed for himself is as bitter as gall and wormwood. The Infidel may reject with scorn the contents of the first three chapters of Genesis, but in so doing he casts away the only key which unlocks to us the meaning of human history, the only explanation which rationally accounts for the course of human affairs. If it be true that man was made by a holy and gracious God and was under moral obligations to serve and glorify Him, and if instead of so doing he cast off allegiance to Him and apostatized, what would we expect the consequences to be? Why, that man should be made to feel His displeasure and reap what he had sown. If this world lies under the righteous curse of its Creator because of man's sin and its Ruler be displaying His justice in punishing offenders and vindicating His broken Law, in what other ink than that of blood and tears may we expect human history to be written?! Does the alternative hypothesis of evolution offer a more satisfactory solution? Very far from it. If man started at the bottom of the ladder and during the course of the ages has gradually ascended, if the human race be slowly but surely improving, how comes it that this twentieth century has witnessed such an unprecedented display of savagery and degradation?! If an omniscient and beneficent God be governing this world, why is there so much wickedness and wretchedness in it? We answer, in the second place, to demonstrate the truth of His own Word The accounts which that Word gives of the corruptions of human nature have been widely refused, as being too gloomy a diagnosis of the same. The descriptions furnished by Scripture of man's depravity have been haughtily despised by the wise of this world. Nevertheless, the annals of human history furnish abundant verification of the same. It may not be palatable to read, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5), that "man is born like a wild ass's colt" (Job 11:12), that "The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (Ps. 58:3)—yet universal observation discovers clear proof of the verity of the same. Children do not have to be taught to be intractable, to lie and steal. Remove restraints, leave them to themselves, and it quickly appears what is born and bred in them. The widespread juvenile delinquency of our own day is very far from exemplifying any progress of the human race! It certainly is not flattering to proud human nature to be told in the unerring Word of Truth, that, as the result of the Fall, man's heart is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9), yet every newspaper we open contains illustrations of the teaching of Christ that, "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23). Thousands of years ago God described mankind thus: "Their throat is an open sepulchre: with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known" (Rom. 3:13-17). And why is this? The closing words of the same passage tell us: "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (v. 18). Who that has any acquaintance with the chronicles of history can deny that indictment? Who with the present state of society before his eyes can deny it? The very Word of God which men will not receive by faith is being verified in their very sight! Why does God permit so much human misery? We answer, in the third place, to manifest the glory of His own perfections. The frightful calamity of war causes many to deny or seriously doubt the reality of Divine Providence, for when that fearful scourge falls upon the nations, it appears to them that Satan, rather than the Lord, has charge of things and is the author of their troubles. At such a time God's own people may

find it difficult to stay their minds on Him and rest implicitly in His wisdom and goodness. Yet the Word reveals that God is no mere distant Spectator of the bloody conflicts of men, but that His righteous and retributive agency is immediately involved therein, though that neither mitigates the guilt of the human instigators nor destroys their free agency. Their consuming egotism, insatiable greed, horrible barbarities—proceed entirely from themselves and are of their own volition; nevertheless, the Most High directs their lusts to the execution of His own designs and renders them subservient to His own honour. The affairs of nations are ordered by a Divine hand. Their rise, development and progress are "of the Lord," so also are their decline, adversities and destruction. God's dealing with Israel of old was not exceptional, but illustrative of His ways with the Gentiles throughout the last 19 centuries. While Israel's ways pleased the Lord, He made their enemies to be at peace with them; but when they gave themselves up to idolatry and lasciviousness, war was one of His sore scourges upon them. Whenever Divine judgment falls upon either an individual or a nation, it is because sin has called loudly for Him to vindicate His honour and enforce the penalty of His Law. Yet warning is always given before He strikes: "space to repent" is provided, the call to forsake that which displeases Him, opportunity to avert His wrath—and if this warning be disregarded and the opportunity to escape His vengeance be not improved—then is His judgment doubly righteous. Ordinarily God makes use of men—a Nebuchadnezzar, a Caesar, a Hitler—as the instruments by which His judgment is inflicted, thereby demonstrating His sovereignty over all, who can do nothing without Him, yet who must play the part which He has ordained. In various ways does the Ruler of this world manifest the glory of His attributes. By the display of His infinite patience in bearing with so much longsuffering those who defy Him to His face and continue in their obduracy. By exhibiting the exceeding riches of His mercy in sometimes calling the most outrageous rebels out of darkness into His marvelous light, bringing them to repentance and granting them pardon: thus it was with King Manasseh and Saul of Tarsus. By manifesting the strictness of His untempered justice in hardening others in sin to their own destruction. "Behold therefore the goodness and the severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou shalt also be cut off" (Rom. 11:22). By showing forth His wondrous power, both in directing and curbing human passions. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee [as that of Pharaoh's was made to do]: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain" (Ps. 76:10), for He holds in check the fiercest as much as He sets bounds to the turbulent seas. The depravity of human nature, the potency and prevalency of evil, and the power and malice of the Wicked One in whom the whole world lies, only makes more evident and wonderful the Providence of God. Since holiness be so universally hated and the saints of the Lord so detested and persecuted by the great majority of their fellow men, had not God so signally interposed for their preservation, the last of His people had long since perished amid the enmity and fury of their implacable enemies. Were there no other evidence that the living God governs this world, this one should suffice: that though His servants and sons have been so strenuously opposed in this scene, yet they have never been totally rooted out of it; that though the most powerful governments have sought their complete destruction, and though they were weak and possessed of no material weapons, yet a remnant always survived!—as real a marvel that is as the preservation of the three Hebrew youths in the fiery furnace of Babylon. What has just been pointed out has not received the attention which it justly claims, for it is a conspicuous feature of history and one that has been frequently repeated. The saints of God in Old Testament times, in the early centuries of this Christian era, and throughout the Dark Ages, when both pagan and papal Rome made the most determined efforts to completely annihilate them, had good reason to confess, "If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us. Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul; then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the LORD who hath not given us as a

prey to their teeth" (Ps. 124:2-6). It is quite possible, perhaps likely, that before this present century has run its course, the restraining hand of God will again be wholly removed from their foes and His people subjected to martyrdom. Should such prove the case, He will, unto the end, maintain to Himself a witness in the earth. Why is there so much suffering and sorrow in this world? Fourth, for the good and gain of God's own people. As there is not a little in the realm of creation which sorely puzzles both the naturalist and the scientist—as there is much in God's written Word that is opposed to proud reason—so many of His governmental works often appear profoundly mysterious. That the wicked should prosper so much and flourish as the green bay tree, while the righteous are often in sore straits and at their wit's end to make ends meet; that the most unscrupulous attain unto positions of prestige and power, while the most virtuous and pious have been counted as "the offscouring of all things," and ended their days in a dungeon or by suffering a cruel martyrdom; that when God's judgments fall upon a nation they are no respecter of persons, the relatively innocent suffering from them as severely as the most guilty—these and similar cases which might be instanced present real problems to those who reflect upon the same. True, but the more thoughtfully they be examined, especially in view of the hereafter, the less difficulty they present. The thoughts of the materialist and skeptic extend no farther than the narrow bounds of this life, and consequently he sees these things in a false perspective. Because of their misuse of them, the temporal mercies enjoyed by the wicked become a curse, hardening them in their sins and fattening them for the slaughter. On the other hand, afflictions often prove a blessing in disguise unto believers, weaning their affections from the things of earth and causing them to seek their joy in things above. God often thwarts their carnal plans because He would have their hearts occupied with better objects. The more they are dissatisfied in the creature and discover that everything under the sun yields only vanity and vexation of spirit, the more inducement have they to cultivate a closer communion with the One who can fully satisfy their souls. It is not meet that the righteous should always be in a prosperous and happy case in their temporal estate, for then they would be most apt to seek their rest therein. On the other hand, if their portion were that of unrelieved affliction and misery, while the lot of the wicked was uniformly one of plenty and ease, that would be too severe a trial of faith. Therefore God wisely mixes His dispensations with each class respectively. God so orders His Providences that His people shall live by faith and not by sight or sense. That is not only for their happiness, but for God's honour. He frequently regulates things so that it may appear that the saints trust Him in the dark as well as in the light. An outstanding example of that is seen in the case of Job, who was afflicted as few have ever been. Yet in his blackest hour he averred, "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (13:15). How greatly is He glorified by such conduct! Tribulations are needful for the testing of profession, that the difference between the wheat and the chaff may appear. Heresies are necessary that lovers of Truth may be made manifest (1 Cor. 11:19). Trials are indispensable, that patience may have her perfect work. If in every instance the righteous were rewarded and the wicked punished in this life, the Day of judgment would be fully anticipated: but by furnishing some present instances of both the one and the other, the great Assize is presaged and the government of God vindicated. If temporal mercies and spiritual blessings were now evenly distributed, no demonstration would be made of the absolute sovereignty of Him who dispenses His favors as He pleases, and bestows upon or withholds from each individual that which seems good unto Himself. There are not more inequalities in the dispensations of Providence than in the realm of creation. In its widest aspect there is a noticeable and striking balance observable in the apportionment of mercies. As in Old Testament times Divine favors were largely confined to the seed of Abraham, so in the New Testament era unto the Gentiles. Something analogous thereto is seen in God's conduct toward the eastern and western parts of the earth. For 2,000 years after the Flood, learning, government and piety were largely confined to the east, while our forefathers in the west were a horde of savages. For the last 2,000 years the Gospel, with

all its beneficent by-products, has traveled westward. Perhaps in the next 2,000 years it will again move eastward. The living God controls all circumstances, commands all events, rules every creature, makes all their energies and actions fulfil His will, provides a sure and comfortable resting place for the heart. The present outlook may be dismal, but God reigns and is making all things work together for the glory of His name and the good of His people. If the human race is to occupy this earth for several more generations, or perhaps many centuries, then certain it is that out of the throes through which it is now passing shall issue the furtherance of the Gospel and the promotion of Christ's kingdom. The annals of human affairs can only be read intelligently and interpreted aright as we perceive that history is His-story. In the final Day of Manifestation it will be plain to all that, "He hath done all things well"; meanwhile, faith now knows that it is so.

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