

Lesson 5

“The Works of God—What He Has Done”

2 Kings 19

Purpose:

Your students will come to understand the meaning of God’s works of creation and providence and how to apply these works to their lives, as King Hezekiah learned.

In a Nutshell:

The works of God may be summarized under five broad categories: creation, providence, revelation, salvation, and judgment. Most of what the Bible tells us that the God of heaven has done, is doing, or shall do may be understood as belonging to one of these categories. The last three, revelation, salvation, and judgment, are works of God this series of studies covers in other lessons (revelation – Lesson 2, “The Bible: the Book God Wrote – Part 1”; salvation – Lesson 11, “God’s Saving Grace”; and judgment – Lesson 12, “The Future”). This lesson will cover the first two, creation and providence.

In 2 Kings 19:1, King Hezekiah tears his clothes, covers himself with sackcloth, and enters the house of God. He does so because Assyria had besieged the fortress cities of Judah and was threatening to destroy their kingdom with curses against the Lord. Under these conditions, Hezekiah prayed.

In his prayer the king remembers that God made heaven and earth, God’s work of creation (v. 15). In view of that supernatural work of God, he prays for deliverance from this enemy who had defeated every other foe and who grossly outnumbered his forces. Hezekiah needed a miracle from the God who had worked miraculously to make all things.

Israel got their miracle in the overnight death of 185,000 Assyrian troops (v. 35). But they got more than this. The prophet Isaiah explained to them that God is not only the God of the miraculous, He is also the God that is in complete control of every circumstance, including the successes and victories of Assyria (vv. 23-27). Hezekiah thought he needed God to intervene, but in reality the God who made all things in heaven and in earth is also the God who is governs at all times all things in heaven and in earth. He does not intervene so much as complete His plan. This is God’s work of providence. Even when we need a supernatural miracle, it is only because God’s plan has desired it so to be.

To the Testimony!

God’s Supernatural Work of Creation

Gen. 1:1 1. *Atheism* is the belief that God does not exist. *Polytheism* is the belief that many gods exist. *Pantheism* is the belief that everything is God. How does the very first verse of the Bible contradict each of these false views of God?

Answer: Gen. 1:1 contradicts atheism with the phrase, “In the beginning God.” It contradicts

polytheism with the singularity of the verb *created* (Hebrew: *bārā'*; note that the Hebrew word for *God* is actually a plural of majesty), and it contradicts pantheism because God is the subject and the heavens and the earth are the object of the creating (See Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 207).

Application: To understand creation correctly is to understand God correctly (Rom. 1:20). At the root of the rejection of creation is the rejection of the Creator (vv. 21-23). Evolution is not really new. It is only the latest religion to reject the Creator, like atheism, polytheism, and pantheism. When it comes to origins, the Bible makes four points very clear at the outset.

- (1) The origin of the universe happened supernaturally (by God), not naturally (by nature). The word translated *created* here always refers in the OT to something that God does, i.e. something that requires His supernatural power (see Exod. 34:10 and Num. 16:29-30). This means that conclusions about that origin are matters of faith, not science (Heb. 11:3).
- (2) The origin of the universe included the creation of non-physical entities (Col. 1:16; Ezek. 28:13-15). The view that says all reality in the universe can be explained by science (scientific reductionism) is a philosophical belief about the universe that is incorrect. True science can help us understand only the physical part of God's creation (cp. Ps. 51:10).
- (3) The origin of the universe happened at a specific point in the past (Ps. 90:2, John 1:1-3, 17:5, 24). The universe is not eternal, but God is. The first and second laws of thermodynamics (conservation and entropy) indicate that the universe's origin happened at a specific point in the past. These laws forced scientists to agree with the Bible again.
- (4) God rested on the seventh day, meaning He ceased creating (Gen. 2:2-3). The process that created the universe stopped. The first sabbath precludes forever theistic evolution.

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Interesting Insight!

Dr. Robert Jastrow was a Columbia University PhD in theoretical physics. He began working for NASA when that organization was founded, and he served as the first chairman of its Lunar Exploration committee. He was the Chief of the Theoretical Division at NASA and then the founding director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies. He taught Geophysics and Earth Sciences at Columbia University and Dartmouth University. In 1978 Dr. Jastrow wrote a book called *God and the Astronomers*, in which he said the following:

“At this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries” (p. 116; p. 107 in the 1992 edition).

Answer: What Dr. Jastrow came to understand is that faith in the Creator and the science of the creation are not in conflict. What can be rightly concluded from the study of the physical creation in no way precludes the existence of the nonphysical universe, nor the supernatural origin of the universe. Rejection of these realities is not good science, but bad faith.

Gen. 1:2–2:3 2. How long did it take God to create the universe (Exod. 20:11)? What materials did God use to create the universe (Heb. 11:3)? What was the universe like just after God created it (Gen. 1:31)? How do these truths compare with the doctrine of theistic evolution, that God used evolution to create the world?

Answer: God created the universe in six 24-hour earth days, out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), and very good. Theistic evolution teaches that God created the universe over billions of years, out of preexisting materials of less complexity, and through a process that included all the death, decay, and misery that our world possesses today. These understandings are clearly incompatible.

Robert Reymond makes the following observations about the meaning of the word *day* in the Genesis 1 account of creation [*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, pp. 393-394]:

1. The Hebrew word for *day* (*yôm*) is used over 2200 times in the OT with the vast majority of these usages meaning a 24 hour day. At times context can demand a different interpretation, but not in Genesis 1. The pressure for a different interpretation in this case does not come from the context, but from the desire for an interpretation that can accommodate evolutionary theory.
2. The phrase “the evening and the morning” occur 30 times outside of Genesis, always referring to a literal 24-hour day.
3. As in Genesis 1, the word for *day* is accompanied by an ordinal 476 other times in the OT, in each case referring to a literal 24-hour period.
4. The text says that on day four, the sun was created to rule the day and the moon was created to rule the night (Gen. 1:16-18). These are two heavenly bodies given for days and years (see 1:14; McCune, 335). This indicates that the days of creation included the daytime/nighttime cycle, and that 365 of them make up a year. Note that God did not make days on day four, but rather the sun and moon.
5. Moses establishes the celebration of the Sabbath as a 24-hour day of rest on the creation account, stating explicitly that God created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh day (Exod. 20:11; 31:15-17).
6. Whenever the plural *days* (*yāmîm*) occurs (Exod. 20:11 and 857 other times in the OT), it always refers to 24-hour days, not ages.
7. The word Moses would have used had he wanted to speak of indefinite ages is *’ôlām*. Note that Adam and Eve survived most of day six and all of day seven (McCune, 335).

Application: The Evangelist Ray Comfort once said that the argument over the age of the universe is like passengers on an airplane in a nosedive about to crash arguing about how old the plane is. That unfortunate comment misses what Hezekiah saw in the doctrine of God’s work of creation (2 Kings 19:15). When Hezekiah affirmed that God had made heaven and earth, he trusted that God did the supernatural, not that He used billions of years of natural processes. Understanding that God made heaven and earth supernaturally, Hezekiah asked God to deal in a powerful way with Sennacherib. And so He did. We need that faith too.

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Rom. 5:12 3. From where did death come according to the Bible? Why is this doctrine incompatible with the idea that man evolved from lower lifeforms?
8:18-23

Answer: Death came from man's sin (Rom. 5:12). This doctrine is incompatible with evolution because evolution requires that man came from death. Some try to claim that only human death came through man's sin, but that idea fails to recognize the connection Paul makes in Romans 8 between man's groaning and the groaning of creation. Both await the redemption that deals with man's sin because both are caused by man's sin. Creation's painful groaning was not the Creator's creative genius, it was His judgment on man's sin which will be corrected by His plan for man's redemption.

Application: Men question why God would create such a world of suffering and hardship. The Bible's answer is that this is not the world God created. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Whatever is not very good in God's universe is that way in judgment upon man's sin. It is a work of God's judgment, not a work of His creation. It is also significant that the doctrine of creation explicitly states that God assessed all He had made as very good. There is nothing in the universe that is morally neutral.

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Ps. 50:10-12 4. A copyright is a law which protects an author's ownership of what he has
Exod. 19:5 written. A patent is a legal device which protects an inventor's right of owner-
Job 41:11 ship over something he has invented. What right does creation give God in re-
Deut. 10:12-14 gard to the universe?
Rev. 4:11

Answer: Creation gives the Creator the right of ownership of the universe, including me. It belongs to Him. It was made for His pleasure. He will dispose of it as He sees fit.

Application: What this means for our lives practically is that God is the Potter, and we are the clay (Jer. 18:1-17). As Creator, He is also owner, and we must recognize the implications of this. The redeemed of the Lord, of course, are doubly-owned, having been bought back with a precious price, the blood of the Son of God (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23). This means that our Creator is worthy of our love and obedience (Deut. 10:12-13). No true creationist can live as though he is the owner of his own life (Rom. 1:21-23).

God's Natural Work of Providence

Isa. 46:5-11 5. The word *providence* includes two Latin roots that together mean *to see before*. God, in His work of providence, sees the end from the beginning, meaning that the course of history is His execution of His plan for the universe designed to bring Him pleasure (Isa. 46:10). The fulfillment of the many prophecies of Scripture demonstrates God's ability not only to see the future, but also to execute His purpose through it (v. 11). What can the God of providence do that an idol cannot according to Isa. 46:7?

Answer: The God of providence can hear the one who cries to him and save him out of his troubles in a way an idol of stone or wood cannot.

Application: The word of the Lord in Isaiah 46 was given to call Israel from her idols to faith in the true God of providence who never fails. He carries His people through life (vv. 3-4), whereas idols are things that we must carry (v. 7). Rom. 11:36 and Eph. 1:11 assure us that God's plan to carry us through life has accounted for everything. He is in absolute control of all that comes our way. So He is well qualified to hear our cry and save us out of all our troubles.

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Rom. 8:28 6. We normally express thanks to someone from whom we have received something beneficial. Paul tells us, "in everything give thanks" to the God of providence. What does this tell us about the work of God's providence in our lives?
1 Thess. 5:18

Answer: That we should give thanks in everything to the God of providence tells us that in our lives everything we experience we receive as a gift of God's providence for our benefit. That is Paul's faith expressed in Rom. 8:28.

Application: Scientists are actively seeking what some like to call a "theory of everything." God's work of providence is the believer's law of everything:

- The Lord blessed Abraham in all things (Gen. 24:1).
- He hath made with me [David] an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure (2 Sam. 23:5).
- All things come of thee, and of thine own

have we given thee (1 Chron. 29:14).

- I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me (Ps. 57:2).
- All things are delivered to me [Jesus] of my Father (Luke 10:22).
- For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen (Rom. 11:36).
- That God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).
- In all things His preeminence (Col. 1:18).

Gen. 45:4-8
50:19-21

7. Joseph's life was an exhibition of God's work of providence. A course was set early by two dreams that Joseph had of his family bowing down to him (Gen. 37:1-11). After suffering many cruel betrayals and frustrations beyond his control, Joseph experienced the future and purpose that God had providentially planned for him. What role did the plans of Joseph's brothers play in that outcome (Gen. 45:4, 8; 50:20)? What must we conclude about God's work of providence from the role that the brothers played?

Answer: The brothers' role in the plan of God for Joseph's life was their hatred for Joseph and their selling him into slavery. God used their evil intentions for His own good intentions, namely to send Joseph to Egypt where he would be able to save the lives of many people. What we must conclude about God's work of providence in this regard is that his plan cannot be frustrated by the sin and evil that is in the world. In fact, His providence is so powerful that He can use the sin and evil in the world to further His own good plan and purpose.

Application: The understanding of God's work of providence Joseph attained gave him great spiritual power over his own sin and evil. Because God ultimately had been in control of every circumstance he faced, he found grace and power to not hold his brothers as responsible for that ultimate control. He did not have to worry about judging their sins – he could leave that to God (45:5; 50:19). He could worry instead about how to return good for evil (50:21).

Notes: We know that the sin and evil of Joseph's brothers could not threaten God's providential plan for Joseph's life, but what might have happened to God's plan for Joseph if he had not been the faultlessly faithful believer he was? Perhaps we find an answer to that question in the words of Mordecai to Esther at another time when Israel needed the Lord's deliverance (Esth. 4:14). The dreams of Joseph's earlier life would still have found fulfilment, and Israel would still have been delivered, but Joseph and his house would have experienced nevertheless much destruction and harm that he was spared through his faithfulness to the God of providence.

Job 1:1-12
2:3-7

8. God's work of providence, like all of His mighty works, is not something we can fully comprehend. We know as little about how to do providence as we do about how to create the universe. God is holy and forbids sin, and yet the sins of man are prophesied as a part of the plan that God sees before and uses to accomplish His good purpose (Matt. 27:9-10; Acts 2:23). The book of Job touches on this mystery. Was the calamity and evil Job experienced the product of God's or Satan's work in Job's life? What do we learn about providence from this?

Answer: What happens to Job is both the product of God and the product of Satan according to the text. In so far as it is the product of Satan's work in Job's life, it is evil opposition to the will of God. In so far as it is the product of God's work in Job's life, it is the victorious accomplishment of the purposes of ultimate good for Job and of magnifying His own glory. What this says about God's work of providence is that our conventional ways of thinking about causation are insufficient to grasp accurately the relationship between evil and the work of God's providence. We must simultaneously say that God is not the author of sin, for He is holy (Jam. 1:13), while we must also say that He is ultimately responsible for all that happens as

He uses it for His glory and good purposes (Rom. 11:36).

Application: What this means is that there are two practical ways to look at the sin and evil that affect our lives each day. In one sense, they are caused by the violation of God's will, just like Job's trials were caused by Satan's opposition to God and Job (Job 1:12). We need to recognize that violation, call for confession of that sin (especially when it is our own), and make things right before God. But second, sin and evil are caused by God's work of providence in an ultimate and secondary sense, just like Job's trials were the result of God lifting His hand against Job to strike him without cause (Job 2:3, 2:5). We need to recognize that work of providence and seek to understand God's purpose in allowing our lives to be touched by the sin or evil that has brought us harm, be it our own or that of another person, or that of Satan, as in the case of Job.

Notes: The ability to distinguish between Satan's role and God's role in the cause of Job's suffering may be helped by distinguishing between primary and secondary causation. Calvin wrote: "God's providence does not always meet us in its naked form, but God in a sense clothes it with the means employed" (Institutes I.17.3; see also Warfield's discussion in the "Interesting Insight!" quotation below). Perhaps it is helpful to use God's work of creation as an analogy for understanding God's work of providence in this regard. God is the ultimate cause of all things, in part, by virtue of His establishment and maintenance of the law of cause and effect. But just as the introduction of sin ruined the original form of God's creation, so also it has brought a similar ruin to the original form of God's providence. Just as we are loathe to think with the theistic evolutionist that sin, pain, and suffering were a part of God's work of creation, so might we be to think that they are intrinsic to God's work of providence. God is responsible for all things in His establishment and maintenance of the law of cause and effect, but He is not the originator of sin in either His work of creation or His work of providence. He is eternal, and so God sees the end from the beginning. He intervenes supernaturally so as to redirect the natural course of cause and effect, which He controls, as needed to execute redemption's plan and save and shepherd His people. But His work of providence transcends and overcomes sin; it does not cause it in a primary sense. His work of providence causes sin only in the secondary sense that He allows the natural law of cause and effect to operate uninterrupted for His greater good. In His sovereignty He could have prevented Satan's attack on Job, except that He would have been choosing the lesser good, which He could not do in His inscrutable and infinite wisdom.

Calvin provides counsel for practical application of God's work of providence to our lives: "If Job had turned his attention to the Chaldeans, by whom he was troubled, he would immediately have been aroused to revenge; but because he at once recognized it as the Lord's work, he comforts himself with this most beautiful thought: 'the Lord gave, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' [Job 1:21]" (Institutes I.17.8). And, "Meanwhile, nevertheless, a godly man will not overlook the secondary causes. And indeed, he will not, just because he thinks those from whom he has received benefit are ministers of divine goodness, pass them over, as if they had deserved no thanks for their human kindness; but from the bottom of his heart will feel himself beholden to them, willingly confess his obligation, and earnestly try as best he can to render thanks" (Institutes I.17.9).

Interesting Insight!

“All things without exception, indeed, are disposed by Him, and His will is the ultimate account of all that occurs. Heaven and earth and all that is in them are the instruments through which He works His ends. Nature, nations, and the fortunes of the individual alike present in all their changes the transcript of His purpose. . . . Nor is there really any lack of recognition of ‘second causes,’ as we call them. They are certainly not conceived as independent of God: they are rather the mere expressions of His stated will. But they are from the beginning full recognized, both in nature – with respect to which Jehovah has made covenant . . ., establishing its laws . . . – and equally in the higher sphere of free spirits, who are ever conceived as the true authors of all their acts There is no question here of the substitution of Jehovah’s operation for that of the proximate causes of events. There is only the liveliest perception of the governing hand of God behind the proximate causes, acting through them for the working out of His will in every detail” [Benjamin Warfield, “Predestination,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952), 272-273].