

USING HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS IN PREACHING ABOUT
THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD AT PIONEER BAPTIST CHURCH,
HARRODSBURG, KENTUCKY

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To my wife, Corrie,
the greatest example
I could ever imagine
of God's gracious,
meticulous providence
in my life

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose and Goals	1
Context of Ministry	3
Demographic Information	3
History of Pioneer Baptist Church	5
Current Church Climate	6
Rationale	9
Definitions and Limitations	11
Research Methodology	13
2. A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR USING HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS IN PREACHING ABOUT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD	16
Matthew 16:18	16
What Is the Church Which Jesus Promises to Build?	17
What Is the Rock upon Which the Church Is Built?	21
What Does Jesus Mean the Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail Against It?	25
Biblical Theology and History	28
Old Testament Testimony	29
New Testament Testimony	32
The Providence of God	36

Chapter	Page
Theology, History, and the Pastor’s Task	41
The Positive Component	42
The Negative Component	43
Conclusion	44
3. A THEOLOGY OF PROVIDENCE	45
Introduction	45
Providence Defined	47
Various Views of Providence	50
Orthodox Views of Providence	53
Classic Determinist or Calvinist View	53
Compatibilist Middle Knowledge or “Modified Calvinist” View	60
Classic Free Will or Arminian View	64
Unorthodox Views of Providence	72
Open Theist View	72
Process or Neo-Orthodox View	76
Providence and History	83
Ramifications of Views of Providence and History	84
Providence and Church History	85
Conclusion	86
4. HISTORY IS HIS-STORY: GOD’S PROVIDENCE THROUGH 2,000 YEARS OF CHURCH HISTORY	88
Scheduling of Elements	88
Study on Use of Historical Illustrations	89
Focus Group	91
Pre-Series Questionnaire Administration	92
Synopsis of Sermon Series	92

Chapter	Page
Post-Series Questionnaire Administration	96
Feedback from Focus Group	97
Post-Series Focus Group	101
5. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF PROJECT AND GOALS	103
Analysis of Survey Responses	103
Analysis of Focus Group Feedback	104
Focus Group Meetings	104
Focus Group Sermon Series Evaluation Form	106
Evaluation of Goals	106
Evaluation of Process	110
Analysis of Project Timing and General Church Demeanor	110
Written Survey Analysis	111
Sermon Series Process Analysis	112
Theological Reflection	112
Personal Reflection	113
Conclusion	115
Appendix	
1. HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATION FROM SERMON No. 4	116
2. HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATION FROM SERMON No. 9	119
3. SERMON EVALUATION FORM	122
4. FINAL SERMON SERIES FORM (FOCUS GROUP)	124
5. CONGREGATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE	126
BIBLIOGRAPHY	131

PREFACE

The Scripture evidences its veracity when the wise writer declares, “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand” (Prov 21:19). This project has taught me the meticulous providence of God, not just academically, but anecdotally as well. I am thankful to God for his provision of grace through Jesus Christ.

This project is a sliver of the results of the investment in my life of countless men and women. First among them are my parents, who, from before my birth prayed for me, then from the day of my birth, vividly communicated the gospel through their words and lifestyle. Thank you for modeling faith in a God who is faithful.

To the people of Pioneer Baptist Church, Harrodsburg, Kentucky, who have loved and served God through their love and service to my family, I am grateful. Brandon Carrier has been a blessing throughout my ministry. While I am privileged to know him by the title Associate Pastor, it is a greater source of joy to call him by the title friend.

I am eternally indebted to my professors at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who have used their spiritual gifts for my enrichment. I am thankful to call them partners in the gospel. Of particular note are Professor Chad Brand, my project supervisor, who has given great encouragement, insightful direction, and necessary correction throughout this project. Each of those aspects has been sanctifying in my life and ministry.

To my colleagues in my expository preaching cohort, thank you for your wisdom, insight, and levity. Few would think that preaching seminars could contain as much laughter as we experienced in fellowship with one another.

Finally, to my wife, Corrie, who has lovingly and devotedly supported and encouraged me every day of our life together, thank you. To our children, who bring such joy and laughter to my life, you are living reminders of God's grace.

To God be the glory, great things he has done, and great things he will continue to do.

Andrew M. Dyer

Harrodsburg, Kentucky

May 2011

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to learn to use historical illustrations in expository sermons of texts highlighting the providence of God at Pioneer Baptist Church, Harrodsburg, Kentucky.

Goals

This project sought to accomplish five goals. These goals served as the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to review sermons of preachers who use historical illustrations effectively. This goal was achieved by identifying preachers in contemporary evangelicalism that often use historical illustrations in expository sermons. Next, I evaluated selected sermons of these preachers in order to identify key characteristics that mark good historical illustrations. This knowledge allowed me to craft engaging, relevant illustrations pertaining to the texts I preached.

The second goal was to improve my preaching by presenting historical events with relevance and freshness to my current congregation. Historical illustrations are one of the most difficult types of illustrations to use to connect with a modern audience. Many historical illustrations are so overused that they have been dubbed “dead Englishmen illustrations.”¹ They can be a key tool for spiritual maturity if delivered effectively, however. Because people share the common ground of human experience,

¹Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 164.

historical illustrations naturally arrest the attention of the congregation. One of the areas of needed personal growth in my preaching is to share illustrations that engage both the mind and the feelings, as opposed to a tendency only to inform the mind. This objective was to provide common human experiences and personalities from these historical events to effectively bridge time and culture so that a twenty-first century congregation would think, “That man or woman is just like me!”

The third goal was to lead the congregation to identify and appreciate key persons and events in church history. Experience shows that most believers have a very short-sighted view of history. A basic familiarity and elementary understanding of key figures and events in church history serves as a catalyst in a believer’s spiritual growth by providing a framework to assimilate connected theological teaching.

The fourth goal was to equip the congregation for ministry in our world through the use of historical illustrations. Within each message was contained some application that connects immediately to life in a twenty-first century context. Whether it be increased confidence and skill in witnessing to Jehovah’s Witnesses because of understanding the Arian controversy at Nicea, or living in freedom from guilt because of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, or seeing how persecution moves the church forward in godliness through the destruction of Jerusalem, each sermon was designed move the congregation toward biblical obedience and more effectively fulfilling the Great Commission.

The final goal was to preach a series of expository sermons focusing on the providence of God. Using Matthew 16:18 as the foundational text, I sought to show how God has fulfilled his promise to build and protect his church throughout history. Congregants were led to understand that since God has worked providentially in the lives of the faithful in ages past, he is working in their lives as well. This understanding allows individual believers to live with confidence and joy even in the midst of difficult circumstances. The challenge of this goal was to build the theme of God’s sovereign

providence consistently throughout the series of messages.

Context of Ministry

Pioneer Baptist Church is located in Mercer County, Kentucky, immediately outside the town of Harrodsburg. Pioneer is a fifty three year-old Southern Baptist congregation with traditional church structure, Sunday school, and blended-traditional worship. Pioneer Baptist averages 75 in Sunday morning worship attendance and 45 in Sunday School. Recent informal surveys showed that a large percentage of attendees have had one of two experiences: either they have begun attending in the past three years, or they have been attending twenty years or longer. Fewer than 5 percent of the congregation on an average Sunday started attending between four and nineteen years ago.

Harrodsburg is a small town surrounded by rural farmland. A majority of the county population are lifelong natives of the immediate area. More and more people in Mercer County are commuting to Lexington for work, as well as activities like church and recreation. Harrodsburg continues to be a small, independent town not intimately connected to any metropolitan area, however.

Mercer County is saturated with churches. The mailing list of the Mercer County Ministerial Association lists seventy-six churches. There are currently twenty-one churches in the Mercer Association of Kentucky Baptists, the local Baptist association. Due to the large number of churches and the ratio of churches to population, most persons identify, at least nominally, with one or more churches.

Demographic Information

Within a five-mile radius of our church, we have not only the city of Harrodsburg and southern Mercer County, but also northern Boyle County and the northwest quadrant of the city of Danville. Historically, Pioneer Baptist has only drawn from Mercer County; however, in the past few years, some have started coming to

worship from Boyle, Washington, and Fayette counties. In this five mile radius lives a population of 12,738 people, comprising 5,445 households.² The racial makeup of the area shows 91.6 percent (11,665) of residents are white, while 5.4 percent (694) are black. Other prominent races in the area include Hispanic 2.4 percent (312) and Asian 0.7 percent (92). All other races, including those reporting multi-racial status, account for 2.3 percent. One of the challenges facing the church is to move beyond a homogeneous unit and effectively reach other subcultures in our community so that our congregational makeup accurately reflects the diversity of our community.

The median age of the residents in the community is 39.5 years. The area is lower to middle class with a median household income of \$38,867 and a per capita income of \$20,298. This income data would be consistent with the relative education level of the populace, in which 41.2 percent of people 25+ have a high school degree only, while 22.1 percent have no high school degree. Only 10.9 percent of people have a college degree, with 5.6 percent holding a graduate or professional degree.

Other information of note shows that 51.9 percent of the families in our area are married with no children. On the other hand, single-parent families make up 31.9 percent of the population. These two statistics combined remind local congregations to be strategic in planning outreach events. If a church in our area is myopic in its outreach vision (for example, targeting only families with children), the church will miss impacting over one-half of the local population.

Projections of future change show little to no growth in our immediate area. Five year projections from the most recent data show a population increase by the year 2014 of 0.9 percent. Also, projections show an aging population, with a 10.3 percent increase in residents age 55-64 and a 17.3 percent increase in residents 65-74.

²Unless otherwise noted, all census data comes from MapFacts Demographic Summary (2007 Scan/US Estimates) [online]; accessed 09 June 2008; available from <http://www.scanus.com>; Internet. A hard copy was provided by LifeWay Church Services.

When it comes to issues of faith and values, the research indicates a “very high” faith receptivity.³ Our community prefers a “very traditional” church style and holds an “extremely high” fondness for the Baptist denomination.⁴ These particular insights are encouraging. Pioneer, a traditional Baptist church, fits well into the niche of the surrounding community.

History of Pioneer Baptist Church

Pioneer Baptist Church was planted on June 22, 1958.⁵ The church was organized from the Mud Meeting House Baptist Mission that was begun by Harrodsburg Baptist Church in 1949. The church began with 124 charter members, a parcel of donated land on Sparrow Lane, and a basic doctrinal statement. The new congregation was led by Pastor Ray Fowler.

Fowler resigned in October 1959, after leading the church just over one year. In December of 1959, the members called E.V. Carrier to serve as pastor. Carrier served this church faithfully until 1963, and shortly after his resignation J.W. Knight became the pastor.

During this initial decade of ministry, Pioneer Baptist Church was blessed by God as evidenced through numerical growth and a passion for reaching the community with the gospel. Also during this interval, several members were called to vocational ministry. Just seven and one-half years after the church completed the initial building, a

³FirstView 2009 (Sources: Claritas, Census Bureau, Percept) v19.1a; (Percept Group, Inc. Rancho Santa Margarita, CA) [on-line]; accessed 9 March 2009; available from <http://link2lead.com/MyCommunity/10Facts.aspx?Report=S>: Internet.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Unless otherwise noted, all information regarding the history of Pioneer Baptist Church, Harrodsburg, Kentucky, comes from Andrew M. Dyer, “A Brief History of Pioneer Baptist Church: 1958-2008” (church bulletin, “Foundations and Futures: A Celebration of God’s Faithfulness, 50th Anniversary, Pioneer Baptist Church,” 13 September 2008).

shortage of space led the congregation of Pioneer to break ground for the building that serves as the existing Worship Center.

In 1970, Pioneer Baptist Church called Hershell Luttrell as pastor. During this time, like many other churches, Pioneer was blessed to serve the community through a large bus ministry. Luttrell resigned in 1975. Following Luttrell's ministry, the congregation was shepherded by Henry Hedgespeth, who served from 1976-1980. By the late 1970s membership had grown to over 300, and there was an average Sunday School attendance of 150 people.

The 1980s were marked by the tenures of pastors Steve James (1981-1985), Bobby Estes (1985-1988) and Sherman Ramsey (1988-1992). Throughout these years, God continued to show His faithfulness to His people of Pioneer Baptist Church.

Lewis Walter served the longest pastorate of Pioneer Baptist, serving from 1992 until 2000. During this time, Pioneer continued its tradition of ministry in the community, delivering their first "ton of food" for the Christian Life Center, a Harrodsburg ministry for those in need. In 2001, Ray Spicer was called as pastor. He resigned in 2002. Michael West became the eleventh pastor for the congregation. He began his ministry in 2003 and served until 2006.

Pioneer Baptist Church has experienced several periods of turmoil, primarily resulting from internal strife. This resulted in a slow and steady decline in worship attendance, taking the congregation from an average weekly attendance of well over 100 prior to 1980 to the mid 50's by 2006.

Current Church Climate

I currently serve the church as Senior Pastor, a position I have held since November 2006. I am joined on our staff team by Brandon Carrier, who has served as Associate Pastor since March 2002. Brandon and I have known each other since we were both students at Campbellsville University in 1997, and he was instrumental in my

becoming pastor at Pioneer. Because of our close relationship and the mutual trust and respect we have, our church has reaped many benefits of having a staff that has a unified vision, shares a common philosophy of ministry, and seeks to model biblical fellowship in serving one another.

Pioneer Baptist Church is seeking to be a biblically defined and healthy body of Christ, elevating the Word and the gospel as the central focal points in our ministry. Our worship service is intentionally cross-centered and musical style is downplayed, eclipsed by biblical content. Although technically we would be considered blended in worship style, the style is more of a result of planning around the textual theme than an intentional effort to choose various musical genres or styles.

Our church is committed to expository preaching. This emphasis on expository preaching is a change that occurred at the insistence and practice of my immediate predecessor, Michael West. In seven years, verse-by-verse exposition has become the preferred style of preaching, and indeed the style insisted upon, by a vast majority of our local congregation. Each fall since 2009, Pioneer now hosts the Central Kentucky Bible Conference, which exposes church members, as well as those from other area churches, to expository preaching.

The church has seen steady growth in average worship attendance, rising from 68 in 2007 to 82 in 2008 (24 percent). Average attendance has fluctuated from the low-90s for the first quarter of 2009 to around 75 currently. Part of this has been the launching of a few key couples and families into vocational ministry positions in other churches. Since October 2008, twelve adults have joined and we have baptized a significant number of young adults. A large percentage of this new growth has come from mature believers who have moved into the area and were looking for a church with the priorities of Pioneer. In informal interviews, the overwhelming top answer to what they were looking for in a church was expository/biblical preaching.

Pioneer Baptist Church is a church in transition. Among the most drastic changes include a change in doctrinal statement from the *Baptist Faith and Message*, 1963 to the *Baptist Faith and Message*, 2000. Another move that has impacted the church is an increase in our Cooperative Program giving from 6 percent in 2006 to 10 percent in 2010. We have restructured the process whereby we identify deacons and have added three deacons to give a total of five. The deacon ministry has also transitioned to a service/need-oriented model rather than an executive board model. We are currently conducting a study on biblical church membership, with the anticipation of being more biblically obedient in guarding regenerate church membership. Also, we have recast the models for our youth and children's ministries to be family-driven, meaning they require and expect high levels of parental involvement and leadership. All of these transitions have been well-received and have positioned us to match more effectively the model of the church shown in the New Testament.

The church continues to serve and minister to the community. Believers have begun new ministries like DivorceCare,⁶ Way of the Master⁷ evangelism training, AWANA, and Financial Peace.⁸ Additionally, we have begun discipleship groups for men and are currently in the process of beginning groups for women. The passion and expectation for mission projects on a local, state, and international level continues to increase. This increased zeal for missions has included our first ever church-wide international mission trip in June 2009.

Pioneer Baptist Church has found a niche among the students of Centre College as well. Each week, between 4-12 students journey to Harrodsburg from

⁶ *DivorceCare* (Wake Forest, NC: Church Initiative, 2004).

⁷ Kirk Cameron and Ray Comfort, *The Way of the Master Basic Training Course* (Bartlesville, OK: Genesis, 2006).

⁸ Dave Ramsey, *Financial Peace* (Brentwood, TN: Lampo Group, 2001).

Danville, Kentucky to join us in corporate worship. The church has launched an on-campus Bible study to help evangelize and disciple these students.

Rationale

Providence is where theology and life intersect. In those moments that make life memorable, usually marked by intense pain or overwhelming joy, the questions of how God works and why he works in certain ways come to the forefront. One of the greatest challenges a pastor faces is teaching and modeling a biblical view of providence so that Christians may be equipped with a biblical understanding as well.

Every person has, at some level, a theology of providence. That theology may be that God does not exist, and therefore events are random and chaotic. Some believe that a Creator exists, but he either does not know or is powerless to exercise his will concerning future events. Others have a fatalistic view that makes God a “puppet-master” and humans the victims of his whims. However, each of these falls short of a scriptural understanding of providence that gives hope, comfort, and peace, and joy in all of life’s circumstances.

One of the best ways to teach providence is to demonstrate how God has faithfully used biblical promises to bless his people throughout history. Showing how a text has impacted the lives of individuals in history gives confidence to a preacher to implore the congregation to apply the message. Additionally, it adds *gravitas* and calls for hearers to consider more carefully whether or not they will obey. It is a “real life” example of what obedience or disobedience to this text looks like.

Historical illustrations also bring theology to life. Theology does not exist in a vacuum. The study of doctrine, apart from historical background or life situations, leads to a “truncated theology.”⁹ One of the key ways God uses to build his people’s faith in

⁹Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1937), 5.

him is giving examples of his goodness and grace from the lives of those who have lived previously. For example, pastors must preach on issues like justification and grace. However, a sermon's impact has quite a different effect on a congregation when illustration of justification comes from the life of John Bunyan.

The use of historical illustrations in expository preaching is also vital to the local church because it affects the life and mission of the church. History is replete with situations, personalities, and doctrinal crises which frame the context in which we do ministry today. One writer, addressing the importance of the subject writes,

[Church history] involves Christianity not only in its internal and institutional development, but also in its relationships to the surrounding culture, institutions, movements, philosophies, and religions. This broadens the parameters considerably, to the point of touching upon all the major facets of Western civilization--which, incidentally, provides the context for contemporary ministry.¹⁰

For example, the Arian controversy is alive and well in the twenty-first century in the form of the teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses. Therefore, if we want to reach those in our communities who follow this teaching, we are greatly aided by understanding the controversy from centuries prior.

Among the members of Pioneer Baptist Church in Harrodsburg, Kentucky, is a dearth of knowledge of the key events, people, and debates in church history. This problem is compounded by a lack of understanding of the true nature of God's providential governance. This ignorance or confusion is a problem for understanding and applying Scripture and its application in the lives of the hearers.

Because expository preaching matters, and because it is so enhanced by the effective use of historical illustration, I proposed to use historical illustrations to preach

¹⁰Terry Chrisope, "Why Pastors Need Church History," *The Founders Journal* 14 (Fall 1993) [journal on-line]; accessed 20 March 2009; available from <http://www.founders.org/journal/fj14/article4.html>; Internet.

biblical texts on the providence of God at Pioneer Baptist Church, Harrodsburg, Kentucky. My goal was to preach texts that figure prominently in showing God's providence in key events throughout church history and to use historical illustrations effectively to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of the text and vital importance of immediate obedience to the text.

Definitions and Limitations

The following definition will be used for expository preaching. Expository preaching is explaining and proclaiming God's truth from a specific unit of Scripture that equips God's people to correctly apply it to their lives. This definition encompasses several vital characteristics of expository preaching. First, the immediate text limits the bounds and subject of the sermon.¹¹ One may only preach topics contained within that particular passage. Second, the text must be interpreted correctly using grammatical and historical data. This interpretation includes the hard process of exegesis and hermeneutics. These two concepts are wedded and essential in expository preaching.¹² Third, the truth is not just explained, but the gospel is proclaimed. Albert Mohler points out, "The preaching of the apostles always presented the kerygma—the heart of the gospel. The clear presentation of the gospel must be a part of the sermon, no matter the text."¹³ There is a vast difference between telling a truth and calling on individuals to believe and be changed because he/she has acted upon a truth. Finally, there is the aspect of application. Application is not optional in expository preaching; it is essential.¹⁴ One

¹¹Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 22.

¹²Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching & Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 44.

¹³R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He is Not Silent* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 20-21.

¹⁴Haddon W. Robinson, *We Believe in Biblical Preaching* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1972), 13.

cannot claim to have expository preaching where application is not present.

In this project, I have used the following definition of providence from the Second London Confession (1677):

God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy. (Hebrews 1:3; Job 38:11; Isaiah 46:10, 11; Psalms 135:6; Matthew 10:29-31; Ephesians 1:11)¹⁵

This definition faithfully articulates an historic Baptist understanding of providence in language that is still contemporary enough to be understood by a modern congregation.

Additionally, I used the following definition of church history: “Church history is the narration of all that is known of the founding and the development of the kingdom of Christ on earth. The term church history is commonly used to designate not merely the record of the organized Christian life of our era, but also the record of the career of the Christian religion itself.”¹⁶ While I recognize that many definitions have been offered throughout history, this definition is clear, and comes from an established Baptist historian, and would be widely accepted in my church context.

The limitations and delimitations of this project are several. The initial limitation was attempting to identify specific events in church history that are influential and most relevant to a rural Kentucky Baptist congregation. Many key events were omitted that are equal to, or even surpass, those included in importance and scope. I readily admit that argument contains validity. However, such events have been omitted because it was hard to identify one particular text that heavily contributed to the event,

¹⁵“Divine Providence,” Second London Confession of Faith (1677), ch. 5, para. 1, cited in William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*. rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1969), 256.

¹⁶Albert Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, vol. 1, *Ancient and Medieval Church History* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1906), 4.

hard to define a specific date or range of dates for the event, or hard to explain the event in the scope of a thirty-five minute sermon.

Because the project was only fifteen weeks in duration, some long-term results were not measurable. In addition, because the messages were preached on consecutive weeks at the eleven o'clock worship service on Sunday, many in the congregation missed one or more of the messages, thereby leaving gaps in the knowledge to be tested.

Research Methodology

This project used a few specific tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the task. Weeks 1 and 2 of the project were used for personal preparation in research and analysis of sermons utilizing historical illustrations. After the sermons were been identified, the illustrations were evaluated for content, style, effectiveness, and relevance to the passage. Factors strengthening or weakening the effectiveness were also be identified and described.

Week 2 was used to conduct the pre-project survey and research. The first step in this process was to identify and recruit a focus group of 6-8 people who would evaluate each sermon and provide written feedback. Additionally, this group met during the series for oral feedback, suggestions, and encouragement. A separate instrument for retention and critique was given to this focus group.

The second step was to establish a baseline for general church attendees of current knowledge and understanding of key events and personalities in church history, as well as presuppositions, understanding, and preferences regarding expository preaching. This was done by giving a written survey that covers events, doctrines, texts, and names associated with historical events. The survey also addressed definitions and characteristics of various preaching styles. Also included were some subjective questions regarding motivation, relevance, and anticipation of the study. This research was conducted by way of written survey available to anyone in the congregation willing to

participate. The initial, or pre-series, questionnaire was completed the Sunday prior to the beginning of the sermon series both during the Sunday school hour and made available for later completion.

Weeks 3-13 consisted of preaching an eleven-week sermon series from key texts in church history. The texts were expounded and the historical events, including the personalities, eras, cultures, and theological disputes surrounding them, served as illustrative material, primarily in introductions and conclusions. Sermon notes were given each week in the forms of a bulletin insert and media slides.

During these weeks, supplemental elements were presented or made available that directly connect with the focus of the sermon that morning. Included in this study were supplements such as a film on the life of Martin Luther, a plan for reading *Pilgrim's Progress* together, and a missions night following the sermon on William Carey, which promoted mission trips for the upcoming seasons. In addition to the sermon specific supplements two "question and answer" nights were held where questions were allowed from any of the sermons in the series.

Week 14 consisted of a redistribution of a similar survey to the one taken in step 1. This post-series questionnaire tested for any change in the objective content knowledge of the subject as well as test to see if interest and value issues changed. The survey contained the exact same format and questions in sections 1, 2, 3, and 4 as the initial test, but questions were in a different order to ensure authentic results. Sections 5 and 6 were added that contain subjective questions regarding an evaluation of the preaching, the value of the study, and perceived changes by the congregation in relation to the subject. Again, the survey was offered to anyone who took the initial test, who was willing to participate and was distributed immediately following the service on the day of the final sermon. Others who were in attendance for one or more of the messages, but unavailable at the time the survey was given were allowed to complete it anytime over the next three weeks. The focus group had its follow-up evaluations during this week.

Week 15 consisted of compiling and analyzing the data received throughout the project. Also, the final week included personal reflection and follow-up, in preparation for recording and organizing my thoughts for writing chapter 4.

Conclusion

Wedding faithful biblical exposition with the themes of the doctrine of providence and key events in church history is challenging. However, the fruit of doing so is sanctification and faith in the lives of believers. That faith is rooted in the biblical text. Therefore, it is with great joy that this project was attempted and with great thankfulness to God that it was completed.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR USING HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS IN PREACHING ABOUT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Matthew 16:18

At a climactic point in his earthly ministry, Jesus promised to build his church (Matt 16:18). In this promise, Jesus not only purposes to build his church, he ensures its future adding the promise the “gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Because the promises of Jesus are true and sure, including his promise to build, protect, and sustain his church, one should be able to see clearly evidence of the fulfillment of that promise looking back throughout history. John Foxe said of Matthew 16:18, “The whole course of the Church to this day may seem nothing else but a verifying of the said prophecy.”¹

In order to understand this promise, one must examine the context in which it was given. Jesus spoke these words immediately after Peter’s great confession in Caesarea Philippi, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). To which Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 16:17).

This statement by Jesus emphasizes God’s providential sovereignty in revealing the truth of the identity of Jesus to Peter. Peter’s confession of Jesus as the promised Christ was not knowledge he arrived at due to his own ingenuity or insight, this knowledge was a gift of grace from God. This dialogue between Peter and Jesus brings us to the crux of this study, Jesus’ statement in Matthew 16:18, “And I tell you, you are

¹John Foxe, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* (1563; Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1981), 1.

Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Although some New Testament scholars say centuries-old debates about this passage cloud our ability to read this text as Jesus actually intended it, the main idea in this passage is very simple and crystal clear.² The main subject and verb are contained in the statement made by Jesus, “I will build my church.” Everything else in the surrounding phrases and verses expands and expounds on this central truth. In examining these elaborations to understand rightly what this building of the church means, three essential questions must be answered: First, “What is the ‘*church*’ to which Jesus refers?” Second, “What is the ‘*rock*’ upon which this church is built?” Third, “What does it mean that the ‘gates of hell shall not prevail against it’?”

A proper interpretation of Matthew 16:18 is foundational for a study of using historical illustration to teach the providence of God because without clarity concerning what Jesus means when he speaks of the church that he will build, there is no basis for evaluating whether or not his promise has been kept. Conversely, church leaders and members can identify and evaluate historically what the schemes of the gates of hell have been in the past, as well as the doctrines and practices that God has sovereignly protected and used. Essentially the fidelity of the Bible for the church and the fidelity of the church to the Bible can be observed through a view of providence with its foundation in this passage of Scripture.

What Is the ‘Church’ Which Jesus Promises to Build?

In contemporary Western culture, there is much confusion regarding the meaning of the word “church.” This confusion is due to the multiple and various uses of the word. “Church” is used to describe “1) a place of meeting; 2) a local organization of

²Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 278.

believers; 3) the universal body of believers; 4) a particular denomination, for example the Lutheran Church; and 5) an organization of believers related to a particular area or nation, for example, the Church of England.”³

However, in the New Testament the word *church* is only used to describe either a local congregation or all believers everywhere throughout all ages, depending upon its context.⁴ The Greek word Matthew uses is *ἐκκλησία*, which is translated “church” in all modern English translations. *ἐκκλησία* refers to the church as those who are “called out ones,” as seen etymologically, coming from the compound verb *ἐκκαλεω* (“to call out from”). However, as Carson cautions, “Usage is far more important than etymology in determining meaning.”⁵

The usage of *ἐκκλησία* occurs in the Gospels only here and in Matthew 18:17.⁶ The word is found an additional 114 times in the other New Testament writings, of which 109 refer to a local Christian assembly.⁷ The book of Acts uses the term *ekklesia* to refer to the assembly of Christ’s followers in Jerusalem, Antioch, Derbe, Lystra, and Ephesus, respectively. However, Acts also refers to the multitude of congregations “throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria” as the *ἐκκλησία*, singular (Acts 9:31). This plural usage is clear scriptural evidence of “church” referring to a universal body of believers. Additionally, Acts once refers to God’s Old Testament

³Daniel L. Akin, “Ecclesiology: Definition of the Church” (classroom lecture notes, 27070—*Introduction to Christian Theology, Pt. 2*, Winter 2002, printed notes), 4.

⁴Mark Dever, “The Church,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2007), 771.

⁵D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 369.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Dever, “The Church,” 771.

people as the *ἐκκλησία* (Acts 7:38), a common term used in the Greek Old Testament (LXX) for the assembly of the congregation before the Lord.⁸

Certainly the way Jesus goes about building this *ἐκκλησία* is by calling out a people from all nations through the power of the gospel, by the word of his disciples. Jesus prayed for the future church as “those who will believe in me through [the disciples’] word” (John 17:20). Even in the Old Testament, we see a pattern of God calling people to himself to be a gathering, a body, of worshippers before him.⁹ So, the call to follow Jesus is a call from the world into the collective church and particularly into local assemblies, or churches.

The first recorded use in the Scriptures of Christ’s naming of his people as the “church” occurs here in Matthew 16:18. In the Scriptures, naming implies authority or ownership. By naming the assembly of his people the church, Christ is claiming ownership and guardianship over it. Harkening back to Genesis 2, Mark Dever says, “As Adam named his bride, so Christ named the church.”¹⁰ Furthering this idea, in Matthew 16:18, Jesus promises to build “my church.” The pronoun is emphatic by position,¹¹ indicating that this group “belongs to and is governed by him.”¹² The fact that the church belongs to Christ is highlighted by the fact that the church is the only institution that our Lord promised to build and bless. The church belongs to Christ not only in that Christ founded it, but that he purchased it with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

⁸I. Howard Marshall et al., eds. *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), s.v. “church.”

⁹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 853.

¹⁰Dever, “The Church,” 771.

¹¹Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Dallas: Word, 1995), 471.

¹²Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 681.

The clear message of the New Testament is that the church not only belongs to Christ, but because of his sole ownership he has authority over the church. This authority includes the right to rule, govern, and build his church. This authority is seen in that Christ is declared the head of the body—the church—by the New Testament writers (Eph 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:18). The Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 describes the task to which the called out church is called—making disciples—as grounded in the fact that “*all* authority is granted to [Jesus] in heaven and on earth.” Thus, the authority of Christ is bestowed upon all his followers who are commissioned to faithfully take the message of the gospel to the “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Although there are many images used in the New Testament for the church,¹³ in the immediate context of Matthew 16, the church is viewed as part of the “kingdom of heaven” on earth. Careful consideration of 16:18 provides the context for understanding the remainder of the promise, particularly Jesus’ words in verse 19, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” Although much debate has ensued over exactly what these words of Jesus in Matthew 16:19 mean, it is evident that the church is intimately tied to the kingdom of God in Christ. Anthony Hoekema argues “The church is not a kind of parenthesis or interlude awaiting [Jesus’] return to establish his kingdom, but that the church is the chief agency of the kingdom.”¹⁴

John Piper also links Christ’s promise to build his church with Jesus’ words about the kingdom, recorded in John 10:16, “I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.” Piper states,

This is what the power of the kingdom does. Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a net that was cast into the sea of humanity and “gathered fish of every kind” (Matt 13:47). The kingdom of God, as Jesus presents it, is not a realm or a people, but a rule or reign Some skeptics have tried to find a contradiction between

¹³For further study, see Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960).

¹⁴Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 216.

Jesus' message of the kingdom of God and the subsequent rise of the church. But there is no contradiction. The kingdom creates the church. Or, to say it another way, the King, Jesus, builds his church.¹⁵

What Is the Rock upon Which the Church Is Built?

The interpretation of this passage has been a source of immense controversy particularly between Catholics and Protestants, as well as Catholics and Orthodox throughout the years. Roman Catholic theology traces its roots to Cyprian, an early Church Father, who used Matthew 16:18 as the basis for teaching that the church was founded on the bishops, who were the real successors of the apostles and were chosen by the Lord himself.¹⁶ While Cyprian ascribed no supremacy or primacy to the bishop of Rome, by the beginning of the third century his interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19 had become the source of great controversy in the church, and by A.D.533 the Roman Church was using this statement of Jesus to teach that the church is built on Peter, the first bishop of Rome. The line of thought continued that since Peter was the first bishop of Rome, soon to be called the Pope, papal authority was, therefore, the highest divine authority on earth, even beyond that of Scripture. Protestants have continually rejected the Catholic view, while offering differing, often opposing interpretations of what Matthew 16:18-19 does mean.

Many Protestants do think of Peter as the rock to whom Jesus was referring, but not in the same sense as the Catholics. Protestant interpreters with this view take the phrase “upon this rock” as a pun, or play on words.¹⁷ The two terms, *rock (petra)* and the name *Peter (petros)*, both come from the same Greek root. Additionally, in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus and the disciples, there is no difference at all in the terms, they

¹⁵John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 337.

¹⁶Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1937), 228.

¹⁷Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 124.

are both *kepha*. Articulating the Protestant view that Peter is the rock, Edmund Clowney writes,

Because Peter knew on divine authority who Jesus is, Jesus acknowledged him to be a rock of foundation for the new form of the people of God. As Peter had acknowledged Christ, so Christ acknowledged Peter. Protestant exegetes have often tried to separate the confession from Peter, and to make the confession itself the rock upon which the church rests. . . . Peter is Christ's 'Rock': his witness and apostle. . . . Peter is the rock, but Christ is the Builder who sets his apostle in a foundational position.¹⁸

Proponents of this view see the play on words as continuing to Matthew 16:23, where Peter is called a different kind of rock—"a stone of suffering."¹⁹ This view commonly says that Jesus was not addressing Peter as an individual (in contrast the Roman Catholic view) rather as the leader and representative of the Twelve. Additionally, those that hold to this interpretation distinguish it from Catholic theology by making clear "the text says nothing about Peter's successors, infallibility, or exclusive authority."²⁰

In support of this argument would be Ephesians 2:20, where Paul writes that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone." Again, Clowney's explanation is helpful in understanding this view:

Peter and his confession stand together. But if Peter cannot be separated from his confession, neither can he be separated from the eleven. In Matthew 16:18, Peter is given the authority of the keys of the kingdom. In Matthew 18:18, the disciples receive that same authority. Jesus had addressed his question in 16:15 to the disciples, and Peter's answer was given on their behalf as well as his own.²¹

¹⁸Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church, Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 39-40.

¹⁹Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 278.

²⁰Carson, *Matthew*, 368.

²¹Clowney, *The Church*, 40.

Historically, the majority interpretation among Protestants has viewed the “rock” as Peter’s confession of Jesus’ identity upon which the church is built.²² Surprisingly, this was also the view of a large number of the early Catholic fathers. For example, Chrysostom says, “On this rock, that is, on the faith of his confession. . . . He did not say upon Peter, for it was not upon this man, but upon his faith.”²³ John Broadus cites Gregory of Nyssa, Isidore of Pelusium, Hilary, Theodoret, Theophanes, Theophylact, and John of Damascus as holding this interpretation.²⁴

Those who reject any interpretation that espouses Peter as the rock on which the church is to be built argue that the difference in form between rock and Peter in Jesus’ words is very significant and shows that this is intentionally not a pun.²⁵ According to this view, Jesus is contrasting the name Peter, which means “small stone” with “the rock,” literally “large stone.” G. Campbell Morgan popularly articulates this view saying, “not *Petros*, a piece of the rock, but *Petra*, the essential rock thou art of the rock nature, and thou shalt be built upon the rock foundation.”²⁶ He continues,

Remember, [Jesus] was talking to Hebrews. If we trace the figurative use of the word rock through the Hebrew Scriptures, we find that it is never used symbolically of man, but always of God. So here at Caesarea Philippi. It is not upon Peter that the Church is built. Jesus did not trifle with figures of speech. He took up their old Hebrew illustration—rock, always the symbol of Deity—and said, Upon God Himself I will build my Church.”²⁷

²²It should be noted that a minority of evangelicals distinguish their view that the rock is Christ himself rather than Peter’s confession of Christ. However, it is best to view these as synonymous views with differing shades of nuance. The reason for this is the revealed substance of Peter’s confession is the reality of Christ’s identity, thus Christ Himself.

²³John A. Broadus, *Commentary on Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990), 368.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Stein, *Jesus the Messiah*, 163.

²⁶G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1929), 211.

²⁷*Ibid.*

The “rock” refers to the good news in Peter’s confession of 16:16, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Christ is referring to the content of what Peter has just said and not to Peter himself.

Arguments concerning whether or not Jesus intends a pun do not make the ambiguous antecedent of “this rock” any clearer. It is probable that Jesus’ use of a pun could just as easily have highlighted a contrast between Peter and the rock as it is that the pun would have spotlighted a link.

While some argue “if it were not for Protestant reactions against extremes of Roman Catholic interpretation, it is doubtful whether many would have taken ‘rock’ to be anything or anyone other than Peter,”²⁸ the traditional Protestant view of the confession being the rock seems to be the one with the most historical and scriptural support. Throughout the New Testament, various passages show that the foundation of the church is Jesus alone. First Corinthians 3:11 says, “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” The apostle John, who was undoubtedly present when Christ made his statement in Matthew 16 writes quoting Jesus, “I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev 1:18). Further, he writes quoting Christ again, “The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens” (Rev 3:7). Even Ephesians 2:20, the touchstone verse for those arguing that Jesus was making a Petrine reference makes clear that the “foundation of the apostles and prophets” is clearly subordinate to “Christ Jesus himself” who is the “cornerstone.”

The most compelling argument from later New Testament writings that it is Christ rather than Peter who is the rock upon which the church is built comes from Peter himself. How did Peter understand Christ’s rock? In 1 Peter 2:4-8, Peter makes clear that the foundation stone upon which the church is built is Jesus Christ. At no point does

²⁸Carson, *Matthew*, 368.

he even hint that he is the rock on which the church is built, which would seem quite odd if, in fact, Jesus had earlier implied that Peter was.

Even if one were to argue, like Clowney and others, that the rock is Peter as representative of the disciples' teaching and authority, it raises the question, "What was the disciples' teaching and authority upon which the church was built?" Their teaching and authority was comprised of and grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ—"that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God"—the confession of Peter in Caesarea Philippi. So, Clowney's view only takes a lengthier path to arrive, inevitably, at the same conclusion.

What Does Jesus Mean the Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail Against It?

The most popular interpretive view of Jesus' statement is that this is a promise the church will continue victoriously even against attacks by Satan and his demonic forces. Calvin says, "Against all the power of Satan the firmness of the Church will prove to be invincible, because the truth of God, on which the faith of the Church rests, will ever remain unshaken."²⁹ Calvin continues with a warning,

Yet this passage also instructs us, that so long as the Church shall continue to be a pilgrim on the earth, she will never enjoy rest, but will be exposed to many attacks; for, when it is declared that Satan will not conquer, this implies that he will be her constant enemy By the word *gates* is unquestionably meant every kind of power and weapons of war.³⁰

Some argue that "gates" are not offensive, but defensive, like a strong prison fortification.³¹ As Morris states, either way, offensively or defensively, the gates were

²⁹John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 291.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 292, emphasis original.

³¹Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 424.

“important . . . and lend themselves to the imagery of strength.”³² The “gates of Hell” evokes images of a city where evil reigns in direct opposition to the City of God.³³ Therefore, the meaning is that hell and all the forces of evil will not be able to restrain or resist the church when the church is assaulting it. However, as Boice mentions, “Although the Bible recognizes the reality of spiritual warfare, it does not speak of evangelism in those exact terms.”³⁴

Further differences arise between scholars over the best translation of *hadou*, arguing between “hell,” as the ESV and AV, or “Hades,” as translated by the NIV. Those arguing in favor of a “Hades” translation reason that since Hades is the abode of the dead, the Greek equivalent of *Sheol*, readers should interpret this phrase as promising the resurrection from the dead of the redeemed, thus death will not prevent Christ’s people from rising at the last day.³⁵ This interpretation influences the RSV translation, “The powers of death shall not prevail against it.”

Others argue that these words echo Isaiah 28:15-18.³⁶ In this text, the foundation stone in Zion is viewed as a refuge in the face of a flood of death from the gates of hell.

The most clear interpretation is understanding Hades as synonymous with hell.³⁷ Hendrickson writes,

³²Ibid.

³³Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, ed. Leslie F. Church (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1961), 1287.

³⁴James M. Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1:308.

³⁵John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993), 179.

³⁶Clowney, *The Church*, 42.

³⁷For further discussion of this argument, see Hendrickson’s argument that here, as well as the parallel in Luke 10:15, as “probably everywhere else in the Gospels, Hades means ‘hell.’” William Hendrickson, *Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1973), 496.

When Hades is interpreted as indicating hell the assurance given here by the Lord can be readily understood. ‘Gates of hell,’ by metonymy represents Satan and his legions as it were storming out of hell’s gates in order to attack and destroy the church. What we have here is an oft-repeated promise of the victory of Christ’s church over the forces of evil. See John 16:33; Romans 16:20; Ephesians 6:10-13; Revelation 12:13-16; 17:14; 20:7-10.³⁸

No matter which course of interpretation one may choose, the final outcome remains the same—the church of Jesus Christ will be invincible against every foe, including the most demonic and hellish it may encounter. Again, Morgan aptly says, “[Based upon this promise of Jesus] we are sure of the impregnability of the Church, that nothing can destroy it, that all the forces of darkness can never finally prevent the completion of His Church.”³⁹

Throughout history there have been many attacks on the church of God—heretical teachings, cultural hostilities, scholastic hypotheses, atheistic governmental regimes, and even Christian divisions and apostasies have all laid their best blows at the church of Jesus Christ. The late D. James Kennedy said in light of such attacks, “Sometimes it seems like all hell is breaking out against Christ and His Church.”⁴⁰ The antagonism of the world toward the Church of Christ was even prophesied by Christ. He said, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18-29). Since King Herod sent his soldiers to Bethlehem in an attempt to murder the infant king, the world—including and embodying the gates of hell, has desired to rid itself of Christ and his Church. However, over two thousand years later, the church still stands.

³⁸Ibid., 649.

³⁹Morgan, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 212.

⁴⁰D. James Kennedy, *The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 67.

John MacArthur sums up the hope of the believer based upon this promise of Jesus:

When Jesus said, “I will build My church,” He gave the strongest possible guarantee of the church’s ultimate success. If it were left only to the people of God, the building would have crumbled long ago. Church history is filled with proof of human failure, worldly corruption, unfaithfulness, doctrinal deviation, compromise, and weakness. Yet the Lord still builds the church. No matter what the church appears to be on the outside, there is at the core of it a body that Christ Himself is building—made of God’s elect—and it grows strong and faithful.⁴¹

There is no uncertainty pertaining to the promise of God. His promises are fulfilled and are being fulfilled. The church of God is eternally invincible. All of the animosity of unbelievers throughout the ages have been and will be incapable of bringing it down. The Church will go on until Christ comes back again to drop the curtain on the history of mankind. And because of the promise of Christ to sustain his church until the end of time, Christians can confidently and eagerly look for evidence of the fulfillment of that promise in their current situation as well as throughout history.

Biblical Theology and History

The Bible is God’s revelation to mankind. His revelation is given through “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16) writings of “men [who] spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). The majority of what these men wrote was in the form of narrative, a story recounting actual events of history. This history includes both the ancient tribal and national history of Israel as well as the life of Christ and the plight and progress of the church in its infancy. These narratives are part of a larger meta-narrative, the story of God’s redemptive plan for mankind throughout the ages. Christianity is a religion intertwined with, and taught through, historical events. Many of the key doctrines of the Christian faith are at the same time historical events (i.e., the Incarnation or the Resurrection) and the truthfulness of the doctrine lies in the actual

⁴¹MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 177.

occurrence of the event in history. The late Christian philosopher Ronald Nash says “Certain historical events are held to be part of the [Christian] religion itself—they are considered to have a spiritual content and to represent the divine breaking in upon history.”⁴²

Therefore, in order to understand the Bible most clearly, one must understand every part of the Bible in relation to the entire story of redemptive history. This “big picture” approach is known as biblical theology. Graeme Goldsworthy says, “Biblical theology is a verbal map of the overall message of the Bible.”⁴³ Goldsworthy continues, “Biblical theology is concerned with God’s saving acts and his word as these occur within the history of the people of God.”⁴⁴ Paul Jewett adds a word about the uniqueness of the biblical idea of revelation, stating, “History is the medium through which the eternal God has revealed himself once for all.”⁴⁵ Understanding the historical backdrop against and through which God’s revelatory acts occur is integral to every aspect of theology. One contemporary writer notes, “The study of doctrinal truth, apart from its historical background, leads to a truncated theology.”⁴⁶ This appears to be the understanding of both the Old and New Testament writers as they frequently utilize historical events to illustrate doctrinal truths.

Old Testament Testimony

The Old Testament shows the important link between seeing God’s work in history and holding to a biblical theology. It could be argued that the entire Old

⁴²Ronald H. Nash, *The Meaning of History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 8.

⁴³Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 23.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁵Paul K. Jewett “Revelation as Historical and Personal,” in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 46.

⁴⁶ Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 5.

Testament is God revealing his nature through historical events. We see Moses repeatedly reminding the people of historical occurrences that God has orchestrated. Joshua, Moses' successor, follows the same pattern in his ministry, calling for present and future obedience grounded in God's faithfulness in the past. The Psalmist in Psalm 78 lays out the details of national history to demonstrate the mercy of God. In the days of Nehemiah, the entire history was considered and rehearsed. While time and space limits discussion of each of these passages in detail, it will be helpful to examine two aspects of historical illustration in the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 6:20-25. In Deuteronomy 6:20-25, Moses instructs parents to teach their children (in response to the question of the meaning of the law) by recounting the historical events of the Exodus. Theology is intimately tied to history because God has revealed himself in his mighty acts. One commentator says,

It is crucial with the passing of time that descendants of people who have participated in or witnessed events that have been fundamental to their origin and that explain their unique destiny should be continually reminded of those events lest they lose their sense of history and meaning. This is all the more true of ancient Israel, for no other people had been called to such a significant mission, one that enveloped within it the very salvation of humankind. Israel must therefore recall its history and pass along its facts and value to generations yet to come. The way this was to be done was through the recitation of God's saving deeds in the past, a "sacred narrative" underlying the more formal and legal embodiment in the covenant texts.⁴⁷

The pattern of Scripture indicates that theology is well taught through viewing God's current covenant faithfulness as secure because of God's faithfulness in past events. At the same time, past events occurred, in part, as a testimony to future generations. This intergenerational emphasis is at the heart of Deuteronomy 6.

⁴⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, New American Commentary, vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 174.

The stones of remembrance. The stones of remembrance (Josh 4, 24; 1 Sam 4, 7) serve as memorials to history that are to be taught to subsequent generations. It should be noted that the first of these occurrences was by divine decree (Josh 4:1-3).

One of Israel's first worship expressions on entering the Promise Land was erecting the stones at Gilgal (Josh 4). The stones were a memorial to providential protection and provision of God that was to stand for generations to come. The general miracle of God bringing Israel across the Jordan became a personal testimony as the story was shared in subsequent generations. These stones served to remind the people of God to remember the miraculous work of God, thus revive the faith in God as each Israelite generation recounted what God had done. The experience of the crossing of the Jordan River was of such importance and impact to Israel that each successive generation was commanded to be reminded of the occurrence.⁴⁸

It is significant that these stones were erected in such a way that would draw attention to them. The text is clear in verse 20; Joshua "set up" the stones. These large stones were arranged so that God's purpose would be fulfilled providentially by inviting inquisitive children to ask questions about them.

It is further seen that these stones were not just a memorial to a historical event, but rather to the meaning of the historical event. The historical event was an illustration of a doctrinal reality. Joshua clearly instructed the people how to answer their children's question, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' And Joshua continued, "so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever" (Josh 4:21-22, 24). These stones were a "sermon in stone. . . . That cairn of stones was to signify

⁴⁸Timothy M. Pierce, *Enthroned in Our Praise: An Old Testament Theology of Worship*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008) 114.

that Israel had not crossed the Jordan by their own ability, but because of the miracle-working power of God . . . More especially, it was a pledge of what God would yet do for them.”⁴⁹

The two “Ebenezer stones” (literally “stone of remembrance”) in 1 Samuel are additional examples of monumental reminders of God’s activity. However, these two accounts offer differing perspectives on the reason for the importance of such monuments.

The first Ebenezer serves as a reminder of what happens when one forgets. Israel at this location forgot who it was and what it was that had brought them to this point in their history. The people’s rejection of God’s leadership and provision led to a great loss. But its counterpart in 1 Sam 7 was built to demonstrate how far God had brought Israel, both physically and spiritually. It stood as a positive reminder of what happens to people who submit themselves wholeheartedly to the direction of God.⁵⁰

Each of these monuments stood as an “object lesson,” a long-term reminder to a temporal generation of the works of an eternal God. And each of these monuments taught a present, ongoing truth from a past, completed event.

New Testament Testimony

Just as the Old Testament repeats key events in Israel’s history, so the New Testament builds upon these events in interpretation. Jesus used historical illustration in his teaching, referring to Jonah concerning his resurrection (Matt 12:40), Elijah as John the Baptist (Matt 11:14), Sodom in relation to Capernaum (Matt 11:23-24), David and his men in regard to the keeping of the Sabbath (Matt 12:3), and Solomon and the queen of the South (Matt 12:42) among others.

In Acts 7, Stephen, the first martyr in the church, takes the national story of Israel back to its foundational days in God’s covenant with Abraham to draw a

⁴⁹Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Joshua* (Chicago: Moody, 1964), 114.

⁵⁰Pierce, *Enthroned in Our Praise*, 114-15.

conclusion about rejection and crucifixion of Christ by the Jewish religious leaders in his day. However, there are two key New Testament texts which clearly show the importance of historical illustration in the teaching ministry of the local church:

Hebrews 11. The author of Hebrews devotes an entire chapter to remembering the “great cloud of witnesses” who lived in the past, but with whom the original recipients shared the same faith in the same Lord. The lives represented by the names listed in this chapter—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab—demonstrate that genuine, saving faith takes God at his word and risks all trusting that the promises for the future are already a present reality.⁵¹ This catalog of the faithful is included in this book to remind the Jewish Christian recipients of what godly living and faith looks like. In the same way, these lives are listed to encourage believers today toward perseverance in faith and obedience.

F. F. Bruce rightly calls Hebrews “a homily in written form, with some personal remarks added at the end.”⁵² Since Hebrews is a sermon, it is clear chapter 11 is the use of historical illustration to teach doctrine, namely the doctrines of faith and obedience, to the congregation. By implication, then, historical illustration to teach doctrinal truth has solid biblical precedent.

There are also some basic homiletical principles for using historical illustration in this recounting of the lives of Old Testament saints. The major details of their life of faith are included—Abel’s acceptable sacrifice, Noah’s construction of the ark, Abraham and Sarah’s miraculous conception, etc.—although meticulous detail of the events is not. The author of Hebrews assumes some prior knowledge about the events on the part of the hearers.

⁵¹F. F. Bruce *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 276.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 389.

Additionally, the author elaborates on the theological teaching of the examples. By drawing conclusions from details of these saints lives not included in the Old Testament text explicitly, the writer gives a theological commentary on the events. For example, verse 6 proclaims Enoch's faith as "pleasing God" (Heb 11:5) and states that "without faith it is impossible to please God." Though the Old Testament does not ever say that Enoch had faith, the author states his possession of it confidently. Why? Without faith it is impossible to please God, and Enoch pleased God. Thus it is clear that he had faith.⁵³ Abraham is another example, shown to be yearning for "the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God" and "considering that God was able even to raise [Isaac] from the dead" (Heb 11:10, 19). Throughout this sermon the historical illustrations are interpreted theologically.

One more homiletical principle is found in this section. The author of Hebrews not only succinctly retells the events and draws theological implications from them, he goes on to apply the truths to the people. Hebrews 12:1 begins with "Therefore," signaling applications to be embraced are forthcoming. Throughout chapter 12, he gives imperatives based in the historical illustrations. Preaching must contain a call to apply the truths of Scripture to the individual lives of each believer if it to be truly considered Christian preaching.

First Corinthians 10:1-11. Paul uses historical illustration from the Old Testament to teach life application to the congregation at Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-11, he references the children of Israel coming out of the Exodus, twice (6, 11) referring to them as "examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did."

Paul begins this section with the words the ESV translates, "I want you to know. . . ." However, the Greek literally reads with a double negative (*ou* + the *a* prefix

⁵³Leon Morris, *Hebrews*, in vol. 12 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 115.

attached before the word *gno* “to know”) “For I do not want you to not know. . . .” Paul is putting an emphasis and urgency on the importance of the knowledge he is giving. He is bringing new insights into old and familiar stories.

Part of the new insight is the highlighting of Christ in the exodus. Paul says in verse 4, “For [the Israelites in the wilderness] drank the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”⁵⁴ While Paul is writing anachronistically, is he attributing to Moses and the Israelites something that they would never have noticed? The writer of Hebrews would say no. In fact, in the Hebrews 11 passage earlier discussed, the writer says Moses “considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt” (11:26). So, Paul is teaching providence by showing Christ’s presence through a historical illustration to the Corinthian congregation.

Paul includes the rationale for including this historical illustration, saying, “Now these things . . . were written down for our instruction.” These things were an example not only for instruction for the first-century believers but by implication for all believers in every age. While believers today are living in a vastly different world than the Israelites of the Exodus or the first-century church at Corinth, valuable lessons can and should be learned from their experiences.

The main premise of Paul’s teaching in this section is that “we might not desire evil as they did” (v. 6). He goes on to give specific examples of the evil in which the Israelites engaged in, each time prefacing the example with the statement, “we must not.”

⁵⁴Interestingly, the word rock (*petra*) is the same word found in Matt 16:18. The fact that the same word is used here and it is plainly said that the rock is Christ lends more credence to the argument it is not Peter, but Christ, who is the foundation of the promise in Matt 16:18. While it is arguable that a different rock is in the mind of Matthew, it is much more likely that in both places Christ is the Rock.

While MacArthur argues elsewhere that the rock of Matt 16 is Peter, downplaying the significance in change of noun form of *petros* and *petra*, in reference to the 1 Cor 10 passage he says, “The term Paul uses here for rock is not *petros*, a large stone or boulder, but *petra*, a massive rock cliff. God used a boulder to provide water for Israel on one occasion. But the spiritual rock which followed them throughout their journeys was not the small boulder but the great rock of Christ.” John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 220.

The actions of God’s people hundreds of years prior were just as applicable for God’s people in Paul’s day, and for God’s people today. Paul concludes this section with the summation for his readers, ancient and present, “Therefore let anyone who things that he stands take heed lest he fall” (2 Cor 10:12)

The Providence of God

The biblical teaching on the providence of God demonstrates that every event is sovereignly governed by him and is planned and accomplished according to his glorious purpose.⁵⁵

Psalm 135:6

In Psalm 135:5-12, the anonymous Psalmist calls God’s people to praise him for what he has done on behalf of Israel. This song is intended to strengthen the faith and gratitude of those encountering these words. At the heart of this hymn, verse 6 says, “Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth.” In an ancient world where religious pluralism and mythology often divided powers between a multitude of deities—i.e. granting to Neptune dominion over seas, and Jupiter the heavens, and Pluto the underworld—the God who is “great . . . above all gods” (v. 5) rules over all things “in heaven and on earth.” The Psalmist is clear that God’s will is not frustrated; there is no power that can stop him.

Beginning in verse 8, the Psalmist recounts many of the acts of the Lord in Israel’s history. He speaks of the Passover and the plagues God sent upon Egypt. He mentions the victories God has won on behalf of his people overthrowing nations and kings, particularly Sihon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan (Num 21:21-35).

⁵⁵This chapter’s discussion is limited to an exegetical overview of a few introductory passages. Chapter 3 will contain a more detailed discussion of the theology providence.

Thus, the writer uses illustrations from history to show the power, faithfulness, and protection by God in the lives of his people.

This idea that God is omnipotent, without peer or competition, carries over to the New Testament and to Peter's confession of Jesus' identity. As the Messiah, of equal essence with the living God, Jesus is all-powerful and his plans cannot be thwarted. Psalm 135 gives an Old Testament foundation for the New Testament fulfillment of the promise that since Jesus is God, if he builds his church, the "gates of hell will not prevail against it."

Ephesians 1:11

Ephesians 1:11 is deemed the clearest statement of God's absolute divine sovereignty.⁵⁶ In Ephesians 1:11b, Paul tells us all things work "according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will." The entirety of Ephesians 1:3-14 is one sentence. Due to its length and complexity, volumes could be (and have been) written on its meaning and interpretation. Therefore, this project was limited to a brief discussion on the phrase previously mentioned, which discusses the providence of God. This phrase is actually used twice in this sentence, being written previously in verse 5. However, verse 5 is dealing with the particular issue of election and salvation while verse 11 is speaking in a more general sense and is best understood in its most clear and straightforward sense, namely, that every single event that occurs is in some sense predestined by God.

A few things need to be highlighted from this verse in order to understand the sovereign providence of God, including what Paul means by the "purpose (*prothesin*) of [God] . . . according to the counsel of his will." This phraseology doubly emphasizes the fact that the original idea from its very inception was God's alone and was not suggested

⁵⁶Terrance Tiessen, *Providence & Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 234.

to him by anyone else.⁵⁷ Not only is this wording used in verses five and eleven, but also in verse nine. This repetition highlights the uniqueness and sole proprietorship of the thought to God.

Although the immediate context of Ephesians 1 is speaking of particular election of individuals, it must not be overlooked that this purpose unfolds into a larger plan and purpose of God. In the verse prior (Eph 1:10) Paul shows that the final phase of the plan God has purposed is to sum up everything in Christ.⁵⁸ His plan is to constitute for himself a people and divinely direct these people toward its appointed end—the “summing up of all things in Christ” (Eph 1:10). To say it another way, God through Christ is building His church. Matthew 16:18 can be set parallel to Ephesians 1:11 as an articulation by Jesus of what is truly the purpose of the will of God.

Another important aspect of this verse shows that God is not only the one who plans but the one who “works all things according to the counsel of his will.” In other words, God not only thought up his plan for the ages, not only does he divinely orchestrate all the events of life, he alone accomplishes it. Furthermore, because these events are planned by him, they do not fail. God’s accomplishment of his plan is just as certain as his planning.

Certainly, some in evangelical circles balk at any doctrinal statement or system which stresses the omnipotence and providence of God. Critics argue that such a doctrine automatically implies a hard determinism, a point which Scripture rejects. In response to such a criticism, Hendrickson offers a helpful analysis:

Although everything is included in God’s universe-embracing plan and in its effectuation in the course of history, there is nothing in this thought that should scare any of the children of God. Quite the contrary, for the words clearly imply that the only true God, who in Christ loves his own with a love that passes all

⁵⁷David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose*, vol. 1 of *An Exposition of Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 227.

⁵⁸Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 347.

understanding, acts with divine deliberation and wisdom. All his designs are holy, and he delights to reward those who trust in him. Human responsibility and the self-activity of faith are never violated in any way. There is plenty of room for them in the decree and in its effectuation. Scripture is very clear on this (Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; Phil 2:12; 2 Thess 2:13).⁵⁹

Lorraine Boettner adds,

Although the sovereignty of God is universal and absolute, it is not the sovereignty of a blind power. It is coupled with infinite wisdom, holiness and love. And this doctrine, when properly understood, is a most comforting and reassuring one. Who would not prefer to have his affairs in the hands of a God of infinite power, wisdom, holiness and love, rather than to have them left to fate, or chance, or irrevocable natural law, or to short-sighted and perverted self? Those who reject God's sovereignty should consider what alternatives they have left.⁶⁰

Those alternatives are offered and addressed in chapter 3.

Proverbs 21:1

In Proverbs 21:1, Solomon says, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” This verse uses synthetic parallelism to emphasize its point: the first line tells that the decisions (“heart”) of the king are under the control (“in the hand”) of the Lord, the second explains that he “directs” the king as he pleases.⁶¹ This verse shows that God is higher and more powerful than any human ruler or potentate. It further shows that God often fulfills his divine plans and purposes through the actions of people, both righteous and unrighteous. One commentator says, “God’s inscrutable mastery extends to kings, the most powerful of human beings, and to the heart, their most free member.”⁶²

⁵⁹William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* in New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 88-89.

⁶⁰Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932; reprint, 1972), 32.

⁶¹Allen P. Ross, *Proverbs*, in vol. 5 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 1049.

⁶²Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15-31*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 167.

It must not be overlooked that the one who penned these words was none other than Solomon, the king. Even as one who sat on the throne and seemingly did whatever he pleased in his kingdom, he recognized that there was one greater than he. God is shown in Scripture to be the one who grants earthly authority and establishes kings and rulers in their offices (Rom 13:1ff.). Calvin says Proverbs 21:1 shows “generally, that not only the wills of kings, but all their external actions are overruled by the will and disposal of God.”⁶³

The “stream of water” to which Solomon refers describes water flowing through a channel or an irrigation ditch, which a skillful farmer can turn to flow wherever he wishes. The metaphor of a channel of water emphasizes that God’s actions are for blessing and not for cursing of the people.⁶⁴ Waltke continues,

Water is especially precious in the parched Near East. Aside from Lam. 3:48 and Ps. 119:136, which use the phrase as a hyperbole for tears, it always connotes positively the channeling of abundant, gladdening, life-giving water in an otherwise dry place. Whereas a river might run wild and a wadi run dry, the artificial stream of water provides a steady, directed, full supply of refreshing, life-giving water. However, it takes great skill and power to direct water’s chaotic nature.⁶⁵

Just as a farmer channels the water where he wants and regulates its flow, so does the Lord with the intentions and declarations of the king, or by extension any human government.

The importance of this verse to historical illustration is that one must recognize that God’s purposes are accomplished through the actions and decisions of humans, often those in authority over governments and kingdoms. A favorable or unfavorable decision by a person or persons has shaped the proclamation of the gospel and the building of the

⁶³John Calvin, *A Defence of the Secret Providence of God, by which He Executes His Eternal Decrees: Being a Reply to the “Slandorous Reports” (Rom. iii. 8) of a Certain Worthless Calumniator Directed Against the Secret Providence of God [Calvin’s Calvinism II]*, trans. Henry Cole (Geneva: n.p., 1558; trans. London: Sovereign Grace Union, 1927), 224.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15-31*, 167.

church. However, each of these decisions was guided from and used by God to accomplish his glorious purpose. More will be said on this point in the next chapter.

Theology, History, and the Pastor's Task

The New Testament book of Titus is a letter of pastoral significance. This pastoral letter was written by the Apostle Paul to Titus, who was a trusted helper and was charged with oversight of a very young church.⁶⁶ Paul addresses his protégé with important instruction regarding his priorities and tasks.

Paul begins the letter by giving Titus the qualifications for elders. All of the qualifications Paul has mentioned in verses 6 through 8 are about character—what kind of person an elder is to be. In verse 9, the conversation shifts to task—what kind of things an elder must do. The first task of an elder is to “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.”

To “hold firm” (*antecho*) means “to strongly cling or adhere to something or someone.”⁶⁷ Jesus used this word in Luke 16:13 in a contrast when he said, “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted (*antecho*) to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

To hold firm is to be devoted to something. The opposite of holding firm is despising. To “hold firm,” then, is to have a strong affection for and devotion to the Word of God. The Word of God itself is “trustworthy,” that is, the “Christian gospel is perfectly reliable and completely worthy of [the pastor’s] confidence.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 383.

⁶⁷John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Titus*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 45.

⁶⁸D. Edmond Heibert, *Titus*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 431.

Holding firm to the Word certainly means a commitment to inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, but it goes well beyond that. A pastor who holds firm to the Scripture must be submitted to the absolute authority and total sufficiency of the Word. “The foundation for effective teaching of the Word is the pastor’s own understanding of and obedience to that revelation. He must be unwaveringly loyal to Scripture.”⁶⁹ To hold firm to the Word means the pastor loves it, believes it, obeys it, and proclaims it.

The purpose or result for which doctrinal fidelity in the life of a pastor exists is given to Titus in this passage. Paul writes the purpose clause “so that he may be able to . . .” and two components of the task are given. The faithful pastor must undertake the task of including both of these components in his ministry. These purposes are presented as parallel thoughts; however, one is stated positively, the other negatively.

The Positive Component

First, the godly pastor is to “give instruction in sound doctrine.” This instruction is more than a passing of information. It involves “persuasion with authority.”⁷⁰ Thus, faithful models of doctrine and conduct must be elevated as examples to emulate. The pastor is to strengthen God’s people in their knowledge of and obedience to the Word. “Scripture is unambiguous that every true elder is divinely equipped to preach and teach God’s Word.”⁷¹

“Sound” translates *hugiaino*, from which we derive the English word *hygienic*. It has the basic meaning of being healthy and wholesome, referring to that which protects and preserves life. The task of a preacher is to instruct the believers in a way that spiritual vitality is protected and preserved.

⁶⁹ MacArthur, *Titus*, 45.

⁷⁰ Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1&2 Timothy & Titus* (Waco: Word, 1974), 242.

⁷¹ MacArthur, *Titus*, 44.

Spurgeon advised his students:

Sound information upon scriptural subjects your hearers crave for, and must have. Accurate explanations of Holy Scripture they are entitled to, and if you are “an interpreter, one of a thousand,” a real messenger of heaven, you will yield them plenteously. Whatever else may be present, the absence of edifying, instructive truth, like the absence of flour from bread, will be fatal.⁷²

The Negative Component

Secondly, the godly pastor is “also to rebuke those who contradict [the word of sound doctrine].” A refutation includes not only an exposing of error, but a clear contrast with truth. Incidents in history where false teaching or practice was normative or secretively insidious must be shown as examples to avoid. A call to elders to rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine implies that those who contradict are found even within the church.

A rebuke means “to speak against.” John MacArthur comments on this phrase, “To exhort only and not to refute amounts to spiritual insubordination, even gross disobedience.”⁷³ John Stott confronts pastors who fail to confront doctrinal error:

This emphasis is unpopular today. It is frequently said that pastors must always be positive in their teaching, never negative. But those who say this have either not read the New Testament or, having read it, they disagree with it. For the Lord Jesus and His apostles gave the example and even set forth the obligation to be negative in refuting error. Is it possible that the neglect of this ministry is one of the major causes of theological confusion in the church today? To be sure, theological controversy is distasteful to sensitive spirits and has its spiritual dangers. Woe to those who enjoy it! But it cannot conscientiously be avoided. If, when false teaching arises, Christian leaders sit idly by and do nothing or turn tail and flee, they will earn the terrible epithet “hirelings” who care nothing for Christ’s flock. Is it right to abandon His sheep and leave them defenseless against the wolves to be like “sheep without a shepherd”? Is it right to be content to see the flock scattered and individual sheep torn to pieces? Is it to be said of believers today, as it was of Israel, that “they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field” (Ezek 34:5)? Today even some of the fundamental doctrines of historic Christianity are being denied by some church leaders . . .

⁷²C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (1875; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 73-74.

⁷³John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry* (Dallas: Word, 1995), 345.

Pastors are to protect God's flock from error and seek to establish them in the truth.⁷⁴

The clear calling of the man of God is to teach those entrusted to his care both what the Scripture says and to caution them and prepare for any false teaching they may encounter. One of the key ways to warn against false teaching is to show what heresies have arisen in church history and to show God's faithfulness in raising up men and women of faith to refute them.

Conclusion

Since Christ is still building his church by calling people into a covenant community on the rock of his identity, and since the gates of hell still are powerless to stop or derail it, and since that promise of Jesus has been in effect for now over 2,000 years, believers can look back throughout history and see God's providential protection, plan, and purposes at work. The task of the pastor, upon clear precedent from both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, is to show forth the providence of God through historical illustrations in order to instruct in sound doctrine and correct error.

May many pastors and teachers be found faithful to do just that until Christ comes. May the faithfulness of those pastors and teachers be illustrative to future generations of evidence of God's covenant faithfulness to build, protect, and sustain his church.

⁷⁴John Stott, "Ideals of Pastoral Ministry," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146, no. 581 (January-March 1989): 8.

CHAPTER 3
A THEOLOGY OF PROVIDENCE

Introduction

A chapter on providence, in the midst of a project on providence is, to some, like a dentist adding Novocain to the mouth of a patient he has already put to sleep. To people with this mindset, reading or hearing the phrase “providence of God” immediately moves the discussion out of the realm of practical relevancy, and into the realm of “ivory tower” academia. Admittedly, a discussion on providence takes place in the realm of systematic theology because the term *providence* does not appear in the Bible.

However, many who reject providence as worthy of discussion because it is dry, dusty theology are the same people who argue that the average person is only concerned with relevant life application teaching that answers questions people are asking. These questions include: If God loves me, why do bad things happen? If God is all-powerful, why doesn't he change my circumstances? If God already knows everything that will happen and everything happens exactly as he intends, what use is it to pray? Does God want me to pray over the “little things” in life or just the big things? Does life have a meaning or is it just a series of random events?

These *are* the questions people are asking, and all these are questions of providence. When one remembers that *providence* is a formal way of saying “God provides,” the issue of relevance pertaining to the doctrine of providence is highlighted. After all, what could be more practical than God providing today?¹

¹Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 18.

One writer shows the benefits of a discussion on providence:

The extent to which God controls the world is of vital importance both to our personal lives and to numerous related Christian doctrines. For example, one's doctrine of providence directly affects one's view of human freedom. This, in turn, influences the way one conceives of human responsibility. One's views on these issues also shape one's approach to God's relationship to human sin and suffering. And the doctrine of providence affects one's take on various moral attributes of God, including his wisdom, kindness, justice, mercy, and love. These are not trivial theological matters but momentous issues that affect believers at a basic level.

One's take on this issue deeply influences one's worldview and personal life, coloring the way one sees current events, church history, and cultural trends, as well as one's personal relationships, career choices, and moral decision-making. In short, the doctrine of providence is fundamental to one's way of living.²

Unfortunately, the concept of providence, and the word itself, has been all but lost from contemporary society. Where providence is not dismissed entirely, it is redefined, renamed, or restricted to such an extent what remains is far removed from the biblical doctrine. Pastor and author R. C. Sproul writes about the importance of preserving not just the concept, but the verbiage as well:

The word *providence* has all but disappeared from the vocabulary of the contemporary Christian. . . . The culture in which we presently live has little room for thoughts of God's providence. . . . But the word providence is too rich and too heavily loaded with crucial theological nuance to allow it to pass from our language without a fight. It is not a slang term fit for a specific generation but a term with centuries, indeed millennia, of historic significance. It is a theological term of the highest import, a term rooted in the ageless content of Scripture itself.³

Even those without an overtly Christian perspective have noticed this trend of the diminution of providence. A review of works of history took note of this fact ten years ago, saying: "Once the word *providence* efficiently communicated the idea that God loved us, ruled time to its minute details, and was himself a historical agent. That time is gone, however, and the word has rusted up through misuse beyond utility."⁴

²James S. Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence: A New Look at Divine Sovereignty* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 13-14, 19.

³R.C. Sproul, *The Invisible Hand* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996), 13-15, emphasis original.

⁴Jonathan Tucker Boyd, "If We Ever Needed the Lord Before," *Books and Culture* (May-June 1999): 41, emphasis original.

Providence Defined

As stated in chapter 1, in this project, providence is defined as

God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy. (Hebrews 1:3; Job 38:11; Isaiah 46:10, 11; Psalms 135:6; Matthew 10:29-31; Ephesians 1:11)⁵

Generally speaking, providence is God’s activity of preserving and governing the whole of creation. Jerry Bridges offers a helpful popular definition, “[God’s providence is] his constant care for and his absolute rule over all his creation for his own glory and the good of his people.”⁶

Certainly any elementary definition of providence is inadequate for much serious discussion since the debates regarding providence deal with the details. These details lead to many questions that divide theologians: How does God preserve his creation? Does God actively or passively act in governing the world? How does God’s providence correspond with human freedom? If God is in control of everything, why does evil exist? These questions are important and any coherent discussion of providence must be able to provide an answer.

Most classic definitions of providence address three aspects of God’s work in creation: (1) preservation; (2) concurrence; and (3) governance.⁷ Many scholars amplify

⁵"Divine Providence," Second London Confession of Faith (1677), ch. 5, para. 1, cited in William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*. rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1969), 256.

⁶Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God Even When Life Hurts* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 25.

⁷David Nelson “The Word of God: Creation and Providence,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 280. The Second London Confession lists the aspects of God’s work as four actions (uphold, direct, dispose, and govern). However, the aspects of concurrence and governance would include directing, disposing, and governing, so the working definition is congruent with classic definitions.

or simplify the number of terms they use for clarity.⁸ Others use different nomenclature in order to be more precise or to avoid confusion.⁹ However the aspects of providence are grouped or labeled, one must account for the sustaining, controlling, and interaction between God and his creatures. Whether this accounting is done through condensing or elaborating terms, giving the aspects various names, or by mere description of the aspects is simply aesthetics—a new way of rearranging and presenting an old thought.

Preservation is the idea that God “continues to see that the creation is maintained, that order prevails, and that life is sustained through, over, and above the species’ divinely given power to propagate themselves.”¹⁰ The ultimate goal of preservation is the uniting of all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.¹¹ In the Bible, God is shown to preserve the physical universe, humanity in general, and his covenant people in particular.¹²

Concurrence means that “both God and his creatures work together to accomplish God’s sovereign purposes in the world.”¹³ Berkhof defines concurrence as “the co-operation of the divine power with all subordinate powers, according to the pre-

⁸Bruce Ware, in his work, *God’s Greater Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 17-18n.2, includes only two aspects (preservation and governance) in his definition, arguing “many Reformed and Lutheran theologians have seen concurrence as part of the mechanism of providence as governance.” However, he does include a chapter in his book entitled “Ruling Through Creation: Divine-Human Concurrence,” in which he defines concurrence as “the exercise of [God’s] rule through secondary agency within the created order” (99).

⁹Helm offers a three-aspect definition, highlighting *preserving*, *sustaining*, and *directing* as the actions, 23. Donald A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 210, prefers the term *ultimacy* to *concurrence* in order to avoid “synergistic overtones” or give man too much power in the cooperation.

¹⁰Benjamin Wirt Farley, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 32.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Nelson, “The Word of God: Creation and Providence,” 280.

established laws of their operation, causing them to act and to act precisely as they do.”¹⁴ The idea of concurrence speaks in terms of primary and secondary causes. God is viewed as the primary cause and ultimately governs all that occurs.¹⁵ At the same time, he works through secondary causes, which may be considered as fully responsible for what happens. Again, Berkhof’s articulation is helpful: “each deed is in its entirety both a deed of God and a deed of the creature.”¹⁶

Governance may be defined as the “direction, purpose, and goal that God assigns to each component of creation and to the whole of history.”¹⁷ Berkhof writes “Government is that continued activity of God whereby He rules all things teleologically so as to secure the accomplishment of the divine purpose,” namely, “the glory of His name.”¹⁸ The idea of governance is usually described as the sovereignty of God, or, as often the case, providence is used as shorthand for the aspect of governance.¹⁹

As mentioned previously, the word *providence* does not occur in the Bible. However, as noted in chapter 2, the Bible shows in both the Old and New Testaments God exerting control over and having responsibility for his creation. The truth that God is in command of every atom in the universe is a central motif of the Bible.²⁰ This means

¹⁴Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1939), 171.

¹⁵This idea of concurrence is rejected by some Arminians because it views as incompatible with human freedom. Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says About God the Ruler* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1984), 191, says concurrence is “an unsatisfactory concept because it is too monergistic.”

¹⁶Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 171.

¹⁷Farley, *The Providence of God*, 42.

¹⁸Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 175.

¹⁹Ware speaks of using “providence” and “divine providence” to describe governance, “The reason for this is simple: most of the enduring questions and deepest concerns that relate to God’s relationship with humanity have to do, in particular, with his governance of human beings and their affairs from his position as Creator and Sovereign Ruler of the universe. Our concern with providence, then, is largely focused on his providence as governance, and how we, his human creatures, live out our lives in the light of this divine governance” (Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 18-19).

²⁰Farley, *The Providence of God*, 17.

that the term providence is attached to a biblical doctrine, rather than a doctrine being formulated to define a biblical term. The advantage of this is our understanding of providence is determined by the entire testimony of Scripture, not merely the usage of a few words.²¹

The doctrine of providence is central to biblical Christianity. It is not a theological doctrine that is peripheral to the church's message, it is part of the core teaching of the Bible.²² Baptist theologian James Pendleton writes, "Should we take from the Bible all that it says of providence, the volume would be greatly lessened and would, in truth, become another book."²³ Because providence is biblical and essential, the word and the concept must be taught and preserved to each successive generation of believers.

Various Views of Providence

Generally speaking, Christian views of providence can be divided into two²⁴ camps: *determinist* and *self-determinist*.²⁵ The best known of the determinist views of

²¹Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says About God the Ruler* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1984), 10.

²²Farley, *The Providence of God*, 15.

²³James Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines: A Compendium of Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2000), 128.

²⁴It is true views of providence can be divided along several lines in addition to determinist and self-determinist. Most prominent among divisions is a grouping into *risk* and *no-risk* views of providence (see Helm, 39ff) or a grouping into *high* and *low* views of providence (see Spiegel, 19-46). These views are grouped according to whether or not God knows exhaustively and infallibly how the future will unfold. Views that affirm divine *omniprescience*, that is that God knows the future completely are labeled *no-risk* or *high* views of providence. Generally, these views are viable options within historic orthodoxy. Views that deny divine *omniprescience* are labeled *risky* or *low* views of providence. Generally, these are considered unorthodox views of biblical providence.

While the terms *determinist* and *self-determinist* overlap with *risk (low providence)* and *no-risk (high providence)*, the terms are not synonymous. It is possible to have a no-risk view of providence and hold to self-determinism, as is evidenced by classic Arminian theology (see Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006], 121).

²⁵Some in the determinist camp (for example, Helm, *Providence of God*, 67) label the self-determinist view as indeterminist, however, indeterminism sees there are no causes for man's actions,

providence is Calvinism.²⁶ The best known form of a self-determinist view is Arminianism.²⁷ Process theology and Open Theism are both no-risk, self-determinist views.

Determinism is the “belief that all of man’s actions are the result of antecedent factors or causes.”²⁸ Determinism has been promoted from both naturalistic and theistic worldviews.²⁹ Theistic determinism argues that the antecedent cause for all events is God. Theistic determinism is seen in the theology of Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and John Piper.

The opposing thought to determinism is self-determinism. Self-determinism is “the belief that man determines his own behavior freely, and that no causal antecedents can sufficiently account for his actions.”³⁰ Prominent advocates of this view include Pelagius, Jacob Arminius, John Wesley, and C. S. Lewis.

Bruce Ware rightly points out that the “fork in the road” leading to different views of providence lies at the very beginning.³¹ Depending on whether one views

antecedent or otherwise. Therefore, indeterminism denies any causal connection between God and the universe. This leads self-determinists such as Norman L. Geisler, to reject the indeterminist label, stating “a Christian could not hold [to indeterminism], for the Christian position is that God created the world and he providentially sustains it and intervenes in its affairs.” Norman L. Geisler, “Freedom, Free Will, and Determinism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 428. Therefore, those views holding to libertarian freedom will be labeled as “self-determinists” in this project. For more extensive study, see Cottrell, *What the Bible Says About God the Ruler*, 31-40.

²⁶The determinist view is clearly held at least as early as Augustine several centuries before Calvin.

²⁷The self-determinist view predates Arminius by at least a century as well, as seen in many of the works of the Anabaptists. See Roger E. Olson, “Classical Free Will Theist Model of God,” in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, ed. Bruce A. Ware (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 152.

²⁸Geisler, “Freedom, Free Will, and Determinism,” 428.

²⁹Naturalist determinism, as popularly seen in the work of B.F. Skinner and others, is not a biblical option for believers. In the same manner as indeterminism, naturalistic determinism removes the work of God from the equation. Therefore, in this project, the term *determinism* will be limited to referring to theistic determinism.

³⁰Geisler, “Freedom, Free Will, and Determinism,” 428.

³¹Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 63. This divergence is seen even in the definition of terms. While Calvinists are prone to accuse Arminians of denying or redefining God’s sovereignty (see Ware,

knowledge of God or man as preeminent in large measure determines where one will arrive in regard to providence.

In this chapter, five views of providence are examined. Due to the massive amount of literature on the subject, historical and contemporary, as well as individual variances between authors holding essentially the same view, one or two prominent authors will be set forth as representative of the entire tribe. The views of providence examined are: (1) Classic Determinist or Calvinist view as given by Paul Helm; (2) Compatibilist Middle Knowledge or “Modified Calvinist” view as represented by Bruce Ware; (3) Classic Free Will or Arminian view as articulated by Jack Cottrell and Roger E. Olson; (4) Open Theist view as represented by John Sanders and Greg Boyd; and (5) a neo-orthodox or Process theology view as seen in the writings of Harold Kushner and Frank Tupper.

Each of these views will be briefly examined in relation to four key areas³²: (1) human freedom and responsibility—Is human freedom libertarian or compatibilist?; (2) foreknowledge—Is God’s knowledge of future events exhaustive including future free choices of creatures? Is this foreknowledge effectual or simple?; (3) the problem of evil—If God exercises meticulous providence, how does this not make him morally responsible for evil?; and (4) the purpose of prayer—What role does prayer play in God’s working in the world? A final section encompassing all the views, looks at a fifth element, namely, the role of God and history.

To help one understand these views, they are grouped under the headings of orthodox, which are views which articulate truth generally agreed to be within the

God’s Greater Glory, 65), Arminians are prone to accuse Calvinists of denying or redefining man’s free will (see Cottrell, *What the Bible Says About God the Ruler*, 169).

³²Augustine defined providence as being concerned with four major and interrelated themes: (1) the freedom of the will; (2) the problem of evil; (3) foreknowledge; and (4) the meaning of creation and history. See Farley, *The Providence of God*, 101. Since this project deals specifically with providence and history, that issue is separated for focus and this issue of prayer is examined under each individual view.

doctrine and tradition of biblical Christianity, and unorthodox, those views which are generally agreed to be outside the bounds of biblical Christianity.³³

Orthodox Views of Providence

Orthodox views of providence are those views which espouse an understanding of God that fits within the broad scope of historical Christian belief. While these views differ widely on the issue of providence, they agree on far more than they disagree concerning biblical theology in general.

Classic Determinist or Calvinist View

Both of the first two models mentioned in this project (Classic Determinist and Modified Calvinist) share most of their understanding of God and providence, since both flow from a common theological heritage, namely Augustinianism. Both views see God's working as meticulous, that is, he knows, orchestrates, and brings to pass all events. Both views are a "no-risk" view of providence, meaning God's will is never thwarted. Both views uphold true human freedom and ultimate human responsibility. Both views suffer from the same critiques and criticisms (which will be examined shortly).

An Augustinian view of providence begins by saying that one must begin with a correct view of God and then move to an understanding of mankind. Augustinian models are deterministic, believing that "no finite events can happen purely by chance, but that all events are causally determined in their nature by previous states of affairs."³⁴

³³It should be noted that many Open Theists insist that their view is within evangelical orthodoxy; however recent debates among evangelicals have culminated in repeated rejections of this view as orthodox. For a fuller understanding, read John Piper, Justin Taylor, Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003) and Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000).

³⁴R. K. McGregor Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 44.

Augustinian models are identified by holding to both an exhaustive, effectual foreknowledge and meticulous providence.

Augustinian models of providence were debated, clarified, and built upon heavily during the Protestant Reformation era. Both Luther and Calvin saw a belief in exhaustive foreknowledge and meticulous providence as essential to true Christian faith.³⁵ However it would be wrong to ascribe the origins of the essential characteristics of this view to Calvin because they predate the Reformation by several centuries.³⁶

As mentioned, the classic determinist view and the modified Calvinist view share much more in common than they have in contrast. Among commonalities, are a perspective on human freedom and responsibility, God's foreknowledge, and providence and prayer. While there is some divergence in the understanding of providence and the problem of evil, much of this understanding is similar as well.

What God knows about the future. Christian orthodoxy, including both Calvinists and Arminians in agreement, has always understood God as omniscient.³⁷ Omniscience means that "God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act."³⁸ This definition effectively makes God's knowledge limitless in all respects. It never changes or grows, he never learns something new, and

³⁵Regarding this issue, Luther wrote, "If you hesitate to believe, or are too proud to acknowledge, that God foreknows and wills all things, not contingently but necessarily and immutably, how can you believe, trust and rely on his promises? . . . If, then, we are taught and believe that we ought to be ignorant of the necessary foreknowledge of God . . . Christian faith is utterly destroyed, and the promises of God and the whole gospel fall to the ground completely." Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will: A new translation of De servo arbitrio* (1525), by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1957), 83-84.

³⁶See Paul Helm, "Classic Calvinist Doctrine of God," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, 5.

³⁷See S. M. Baugh, "The Meaning of Foreknowledge," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995, 2000), 183ff.

³⁸Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 190.

he has detailed knowledge of what every other possible situation that could exist would be like.

However, determinists have pointed out this type of knowledge is an “Achilles’ heel” of free will theology.³⁹ If God foreknows all things, then all things that he knows will happen is certain to happen because God’s infallible foreknowledge, by definition, cannot be wrong.⁴⁰

For determinists, God foreknowledge of certain (or all) events, including future decisions of free humans, means that these events will occur “precisely because God willed, planned, and predestined them.”⁴¹ Thus, many of the promises of God, which are undeniably certain to come to pass, are based in God’s foreknowledge which ensures the possibility to become an actuality. So, Augustinians argue that from Scripture, God’s foreknowledge is effectually causal.

Human freedom and responsibility. “Two things are beyond dispute: God is sovereign, man is responsible.”⁴² Both classic determinists and modified Calvinists would agree with Pink’s statement. Both views share a common understanding of human freedom and responsibility; a view given the label *compatibilism*.⁴³ Compatibilist views of freedom believe meticulous providence and human freedom are biblically compatible. Ware defines the compatibilist view saying,

³⁹Baugh, “The Meaning of Foreknowledge,” 183.

⁴⁰In a very real sense exhaustive foreknowledge has been the single-issue that has led to many Arminians embracing Open Theism.

⁴¹Baugh, “The Meaning of Foreknowledge,” 196.

⁴²Arthur W. Pink *The Sovereignty of God* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 9.

⁴³See Helm, *The Providence of God*, 161, 174ff. While some determinist models are not compatibilist, instead arguing that determinism is logically incompatible with human freedom and responsibility, Helm disagrees.

[E]xhaustive and meticulous divine sovereignty must be compatible with the actual and real manner by which human freedom operates. God's control of all that occurs, including his control of human choice and action, must be compatible with the nature of human freedom, rightly understood.⁴⁴

One's understanding of freedom must begin with how the free choices individuals make are made. One of the biggest arguments against an Augustinian model of providence is that meticulous providence, and to some extent exhaustive foreknowledge, precludes human freedom. Augustine, however, addresses this issue pre-emptively, stating, "[W]e assert both that God knows all things before they come to pass, and that we do by our free will whatsoever we know and feel to be done by us only because we will it."⁴⁵

Both Reformed views define true human freedom as *freedom of inclination*, rather than *libertarian freedom* espoused by free will theists, open theists, and process theologians. Freedom of inclination states that individual choices are made because of what the nature and will of the individual most desires at any given time. Ware describes this process of free decision making:

This means that the circumstances and factors that influence our decisions result eventually in our having, at the moment of choice, *one* desire or inclination that stands above all others. The fact that we have *one* desire that is our *highest desire* explains why we make the *one choice* that we do, in that particular setting. Put differently, the set of factors in which the agent makes a choice constitutes a set of individually necessary and *jointly sufficient* conditions for forming within the agent a strongest inclination or highest desire by which to make the one choice that is in accordance with that highest desire. And, the agent's freedom is then expressed when he chooses according to that highest desire.⁴⁶

This "freedom of inclination" is true freedom provided that none of the desires are coercive in and of themselves.⁴⁷ Absent of any coercive force, one's choice flows

⁴⁴Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 78.

⁴⁵Augustine, *The City of God*, 5.9.

⁴⁶Bruce A. Ware, "A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, ed. Bruce A. Ware (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 112.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 100.

freely from a synthesis of all the circumstances at play and furthermore, display one's own moral character and nature of his/her heart and mind.

True freedom is the ability to decide, think, and act in accordance with our strongest desires, which flow from our nature.⁴⁸ And to act according to one's nature at any given moment eliminates the option of choosing any other option because it would not be what we most desire.⁴⁹ "In a word, we are free when we choose to do what we want."⁵⁰

God uses his sovereignty in governing the influences that affect our lives so that ultimately he is in control of the free choices that we make, and those choices are always part of his eternal plan. On the other hand, humans are fully accountable for the free will decisions they make. Therefore, human freedom and responsibility are fully compatible with divine sovereignty.

Providence and evil. Meticulous providence recognizes that God is ultimately sovereign over all the affairs of life and creation, including both natural and moral evil.⁵¹ That is, he allows or permits evil and uses it for his own purposes. At the same time, determinists are clear that God is *not* the author of that evil, nor is he tainted by it.⁵² God

⁴⁸Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 79, makes a strong exegetical case for this understanding from Luke 6:43-45 giving the illustration of a tree only bearing fruit in accordance to its nature. The problem with libertarian freedom is that it contradicts what Jesus taught in this passage, namely a good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. If freedom is defined by the option of contrary choice then individuals are always able to pick equally between good and bad, good and evil, obedience and disobedience.

⁴⁹For further discussion see Jonathan Edwards, "A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of the Freedom of the Will," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 1:5, 30.

⁵⁰Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 80.

⁵¹While most discussions of evil rightly separate natural and moral evil in the discussions, since natural evil is a result of moral evil (Gen 3; Rom 8:19-25), they are considered together under the broad topic of evil in this project.

⁵²Helm, *The Providence of God*, 196.

is good and not evil. God must judge evil and cast it out of his presence, thus the necessity of the existence of hell. However, God is in complete control over every instance of evil that occurs.

It follows, then, one of the key criticisms of an Augustinian view of providence centers on this issue. “If God determines and governs all that occurs, is God not the author of evil?”

Many approaches to providence and sovereignty attempt to get God “off-the-hook” by removing him from painful or unpleasant events in life. This is one reason why many people look to low views of providence like openness theology or process theology because they explain the evil in the world in a way that God is completely one-sided, always and only shielding people from pain. However, Augustinians argue that the best hope in dealing with evil comes from an understanding and submission to a completely sovereign God.⁵³

This ordination of evil is purposeful, that is, “out of evil a greater good would come, a good that could not have come, or could not have been as great, if there had not been that evil.”⁵⁴ While the details of this greater good view are numerous and elucidated over thousands of pages in church history and theology text, the bottom line is “without the permission of moral evil, and the atonement of Christ, God’s own character would not be fully manifest.”⁵⁵

Determinists, as represented by Paul Helm, hold that moral evil is personal, it begins in the human will, and is primarily, if not entirely, rebellion against God.⁵⁶

⁵³Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence: A New Look at Divine Sovereignty*, 183.

⁵⁴Helm, *The Providence of God*, 197.

⁵⁵Ibid., 215. For more detail concerning the “greater good defense,” see Helm, *The Providence of God*, 203-216.

⁵⁶Ibid., 194.

Because evil is personal rebellion, it should not be thought of as necessarily the painful suffering we endure, rather the painful suffering is an “evil result of evil.”⁵⁷

“Christianity is not a religion of dualism by which God and Satan are equal and opposite opposing forces destined to fight an eternal struggle that must result in a tie. God is sovereign over His entire creation, including the subordinate domain of Satan. God is Lord of death as well as life. He rules over pain and disease as sovereignly as He rules over prosperity.”⁵⁸ How this ruling is accomplished is one of the key matters of difference between compatibilist and classic Reformed views of providence.

In the Augustinian view of evil, as opposed to the free will view, there is no such thing as gratuitous or pointless evil. As Ware points out:

Because God has determined to exercise meticulous sovereign rulership over the world, when it comes to regulating evil, God specifically permits only those instances of evil to occur that by his infinite wisdom and in light of his ultimate purposes he judges will advance and not hinder his designed ends for the world. . . . [I]n the Reformed conception there is never, at any time or in any circumstance, such pointless evil. Rather, God regulates exactly the evil that occurs, since for any and every instance of evil, he specifically permits according to his wisdom and ultimate purposes what he could otherwise have prevented.⁵⁹

Providence and prayer. Classic determinists assert the efficacy of prayer in God’s sovereign action.⁶⁰ God has commanded his people to pray and he promises to answer these prayers according to his will. Scripture even includes examples of times where providence was “changed” in response to prayer.

Classic determinism says that God not only has determined all the events that will occur in human history, he has also determined the means by which these events will

⁵⁷Ibid., 194.

⁵⁸R.C. Sproul, *The Invisible Hand: Do All Things Really Work for Good?* (Dallas: Word, 1996), 8.

⁵⁹Ware, “A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God,” 108.

⁶⁰For a more thorough expansion of these ideas, see Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 258-66.

occur. Prayer is one of those means by which God has ordained to accomplish his unfailing purposes. There are some things God has purposed to do in direct response to prayer. Calvin lists six reasons for prayer: (1) to have a passion to seek, love, and serve God; (2) to protect ourselves from things we would be ashamed of before God; (3) to prepare ourselves to receive his gifts thankfully; (4) to understand his kindness better by meditating on it; (5) to enjoy and appreciate more thoroughly what we receive in answer to prayer; and (6) to confirm God's providence.⁶¹

Compatibilist Middle Knowledge⁶² or "Modified Calvinist" View

What distinguishes the "Modified Calvinist" view Ware espouses from the classic determinist view relates to a rethinking of some of the divine attributes,⁶³ and specific to providence, how God is related to good and evil.⁶⁴ Since the overwhelming majority of content of this view overlaps with the previous view, only the significant differences will be examined.⁶⁵

⁶¹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1989), III.20.2

⁶²Terrance Tiessen also calls his view a "Middle Knowledge Calvinist Model of Providence," 290. However, Tiessen's view and Ware's view differ more drastically than Ware's and Helm's. Therefore, this project focuses on Ware's articulation of this view.

⁶³Much of the distinction Ware makes from the classical determinist understanding of God has to do with issues of God's spatial and temporal nature as well as God's mutability/immortality. (See Ware "A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God," 77.) Since these issues are beyond the scope of this project, yet essential to understanding the distinctions between the compatibilist and classic determinist view, one should read Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 132-55.

⁶⁴For more information, see Ware, "A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God" as well as *God's Greater Glory*.

⁶⁵Ware states he "gladly affirm[s] the broad strokes and most of the finer details" of the classic determinist view. "Response to Paul Helm by Bruce A. Ware," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, 70.

What God knows about the future. Concerning foreknowledge, modified Calvinists believe God's omniscience or his *preomniscience* is both exhaustive and effectual. Like classic determinists, modified Calvinists believe God knows not only what could be and will be, but that God also has knowledge of what would be if the circumstances were in any way different from how they are. But, what God does with this knowledge of counterfactuals is a point of divergence between these positions.

Bruce Ware attempts to answer the critique of free will theologians against providence in the Reformed tradition. That is, free will theists see only semantic variance between the direct-causative and indirect-permissive agency of God. In response to that, Ware advocates a new mediating position, using the term *compatibilist middle knowledge*.⁶⁶

Middle knowledge was proposed by Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina, and is usually associated with his theological system called *Molinism*.⁶⁷ Molinism holds that God knows not only what is, but every possible scenario of what could be. By use of this knowledge, God controls circumstances, thus controlling what he knows man will actually choose. By this means of sovereignty, man freely chooses what he desires, and yet God meticulously knows and guides every free decision of man. The shortcoming of Molinism, however, is that it retains libertarian freedom.

Ware offers an alternative using freedom of inclination and middle knowledge. He explains,

What is different about this understanding of middle knowledge is that since freedom means that we always do what we most want, and since what we "most want" is shaped by the set of factors and circumstances that eventually give rise to one desire that stands above all others, therefore God can know the

⁶⁶Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 110.

⁶⁷For a contemporary examination of Molinism, see Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010).

circumstances giving rise to our highest desires, and by knowing these, he can know the choice that we would make, given those particular circumstances.⁶⁸

Human freedom and responsibility. The modified Calvinist position, like the classic determinist, sees human freedom as a freedom of inclination. Both positions also argue that a determinist model of providence is *not* fatalistic, nor does it in any way impinge on human culpability for choices made. However, the details of exactly how this works is a point of divergence of this model from the one discussed previously.

Ware argues that God's use of middle knowledge works in human responsibility in the following way:

God [by middle knowledge] would be able to know whether in certain situations he would passively permit an agent to carry out what he has most inclined to do, or whether he would alter the factors of that situation sufficiently to alter the agent's strongest inclination, thus altering the choice he would make. But, in either case, the agent would respond to those factors according to his own nature and hence do what he most wanted to do. As such, he would be free and morally responsible in the choices he makes.⁶⁹

Providence and evil. For Ware and others, the understanding of God's sovereignty and the problem of evil overlaps with the classic determinist view articulated by Helm. The reason that determinists can hold that God is sovereign over evil and yet that he is not the author of evil is because of an "asymmetrical control of good and evil."⁷⁰ This means that "when God controls good, he is controlling what extends from his own nature; yet when he controls evil, he controls what is antithetical to his own nature."⁷¹ Since all good is brought into the world directly from God, it is possible to speak of God's working in good as "direct-causative."⁷² Conversely, since evil never

⁶⁸Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 114-15.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 121-22.

⁷⁰Ware, "A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God," 102.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 103.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 103.

flows from God, yet God controls these evil things in a sense of permitting or denying their influence in our lives, one could speak of God's "indirect-permissive" agency.⁷³

Again, where Ware's modified view diverges from the classical view relates to Ware's jumping to middle knowledge. He says,

By controlling human sinful choices [by middle knowledge] it never is the case that God does evil directly (as he does good directly), nor is it the case that he causes a person to do evil. . . . When God envisions various sets of factors within which an agent will develop a strongest inclination to do one thing or another, the strongest inclination that emerges from these factors is not caused by the factors, nor is it caused by God. . . . Perhaps we should think of God's regulating the factors of a situation, then as "occasioning a particular choice to be made, rather than "causing" a particular choice to be made. . . . Thus, without causing a person to do evil, he nonetheless controls the evil they do. He controls whether evil is done, what evil is done, and in any and every case he could prevent the evil from being done. In this way, God maintains meticulous control over evil while his moral creatures alone are the agents who do evil, and they alone bear moral responsibility for the evil they freely do.⁷⁴

Providence and prayer. The disposition of the modified Calvinist view toward providence and prayer is in no way modified from the classic theist position. Ware writes,

Even though prayer is not necessary to God, and even though his work could fully have been accomplished without the use of prayer, yet God has chosen the instrument of prayer to be a great and gracious gift to his children. By prayer, we are drawn into relationship . . . we are called into participation in the work . . . and because God is sovereign, we come in prayer believing that God has ordained this instrument as a gracious tool by which he enlists us into participation in his glorious work. We are not mere bystanders. . . . we are involved participants through prayer in the very work of God himself, as prayer is made a necessary means for accomplishing much of God's ordained work.⁷⁵

⁷³Ibid., 106.

⁷⁴Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 122.

⁷⁵Ibid., 194.

Classic Free Will or Arminian View

Free will theism sets itself in contra-distinction from Augustinianism at the very beginning. “Free will theism, is, at the very least, a denial that God is the all-determining reality.”⁷⁶ Generally speaking, the classic free will view of providence begins with an understanding of human freedom; from that understanding of human freedom flows an understanding about God’s nature and character.⁷⁷ The human freedom that Arminianism espouses is “libertarian” freedom, that is, the freedom to, at the moment of choice, choose otherwise with equal ease. More will be said about this view of freedom of the will in a moment.

Although free will is at the heart of an Arminian theology of providence, adherents argue there is something more important—the nature of God. Olson elaborates:

Christian free will theism arises not so much from a desire to elevate free will as from a desire to do justice to God’s character as loving-kindness—not only toward a portion of humanity but toward all. Libertarian free will is not an idol erected to exalt humanity; it is rather a necessary protection of God’s goodness. Without it God would be virtually indistinguishable from the devil. . . . Apart from libertarian free will, persons’ destinies would be determined entirely and solely by God. Insofar as one believes in hell as eternal damnation one would then have to attribute the reality of eternal suffering persons to God’s sovereign and seemingly arbitrary decision—arbitrary because it cannot have anything to do with freely chosen character.⁷⁸

A key to understanding providence in the orthodox free will sense is to understand the concept of divine self-limitation. “When God decided to create anything, his sovereign choice to create was a choice to limit himself.”⁷⁹ “God has freely chosen to

⁷⁶Olson, “The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God,” 148.

⁷⁷For further discussion, see Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 63-67. This foundational philosophical presupposition concerning libertarian freedom must shape one’s understanding of God because if a view of God conflicts with a previous commitment to libertarian freedom, then the view of God is what must change. The ramifications of this presupposition shape an entire hermeneutic.

⁷⁸Olson, “The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God,” 154.

⁷⁹Cottrell, *What the Bible Says About God the Ruler*, 188.

allow people to influence him so that he does not do all of the deciding and acting.”⁸⁰

This self-limiting of God applies particularly to providence. E. Y. Mullins said, “God has limited himself in his methods with free beings . . . his control is through means which have respect for their freedom.”⁸¹ As Cottrell says,

God could have chosen some other method of ruling the world. He could have chosen the determinist model if he had so willed. But he did not. Instead he chose a self-limiting form of government in which his creatures have been endowed with a measure of self-determination. He has elected not to be the direct cause or determiner of everything that comes to pass.⁸²

Although often accused by determinists as denying God’s sovereignty, classic Arminian theology upholds God’s absolute sovereignty over all things. However, the term is defined differently than when determinist use it. In free will theism, God is in charge, but not fully in control. Free will theist Jack Cottrell says, “I do not believe that the Bible teaches that the causation or determination or foreordination of all things is the *sine qua non* of divine sovereignty.”⁸³ Olson states, “Free will theism affirms God’s sovereignty. Is sovereignty the same as control? Not in human affairs. No human sovereign controls every turn and twist or thought of his or her subjects. Rather a sovereign is in charge of a territory. So God is in charge of the world including free creatures who sometimes thwart his perfect will.”⁸⁴ Randall Basinger says, “what

⁸⁰Olson, “The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God,” 170.

⁸¹Edgar Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression*, (Philadelphia: Roger Williams, 1917), 268.

⁸²Cottrell, *What the Bible Says About God the Ruler*, 188. The difficulty with this statement is that is no *locus classicus* in Scripture advocating libertarian free will nor this self-limiting form of providence, while there are numerous Scriptures which seem to affirm God as determiner of all things. See chapter 2.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁸⁴Olson, “The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God,” 155.

actually occurs in the world is, to an extent, consequent on the human will . . . things can occur that God does not will or want.”⁸⁵

Arminian theology, as opposed to deism, does allow for the action of God in the affairs of men. This action is often called “special providence”⁸⁶ as opposed to the normal action of “general providence.” Cottrell explains special providence: “When his special purposes require it, God does intervene in order to influence and direct and govern human decisions. And he is able to do this in such a way that his purposes are accomplished.”⁸⁷

Cottrell goes on to attempt to clarify his position that the key word regarding special providence is *control*, and “control should not be equated with causation or determination.”⁸⁸ This indirect control is primarily through outward circumstances and mental states.⁸⁹

Olson offers the following illustration to summarize a free will theist view of general providence:

⁸⁵Randall G. Basinger, “Exhaustive Divine Sovereignty: A Practical Critique,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 196.

⁸⁶Although Cottrell argues against compatibilism, this concept of special providence differs only from meticulous providence in degree and duration. One wonders why, if God can have meticulous providence at times and not violate human free will, why cannot the entire scope of history be viewed as one scene of continuous special providence?

Cottrell closes his discussion saying it is “necessary to insist on two important qualifications.” The first of these is the danger of doing what has just been argued for in the previous paragraph—namely, generalizing that this meticulous providence is what God is doing all the time. He states “My main quarrel with this idea is the determinists’ assumption that God determines every act of every man in this way. Such generalization is unwarranted,” Cottrell, *What the Bible Says About God the Ruler*, 207. If there is clear Scriptural evidence that God does rule in this way at points, would not a generalization that he did not usually work in this way be unwarranted?

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 195.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 199.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 202.

God governs without control just like a parent of a late adolescent governs the maturing child without controlling him or her. There are consequences and the household will survive the adolescent's acts of rebellion because of who is in charge. But the adolescent may resist and do terrible things that bring grief and sometimes chaos for a time. But like a good parent, and to an even greater extent because of his omnipotence, God will keep faith with his creation and use his power in all its forms to hold onto it and bring it to his predetermined outcome. Human resistance is real but not determinative.⁹⁰

The major problem with Olson's summary (and free will theology in general) is the final sentence. If human resistance is not determinative, then ultimately someone or something else is determinative. What? He tells us in the preceding sentence, God brings creation to his predetermined outcome. Coupled with the previous section on special providence, one wonders how this differs from a determinist view?

What God knows about the future. Most Arminian theologians, including John Wesley and James Arminius, argue that God has perfect foreknowledge regarding the future. This foreknowledge means that God is "omniscient in the biblical and traditional sense. Every true proposition is known exhaustively and infallibly by God."⁹¹

While determinists argue that God's foreknowledge ensures future events occurring, free will theists believe that God's knowing future free decisions does not determine them. In fact, self-determinists argue because free decisions will happen, this determines God's knowing them. So, while the choice determines the knowing, the knowing precedes the choice, although it does not determine the choice. God simply foreknows the future because it will happen. This belief is called "simple foreknowledge."

Arminius, while altering Calvin's basis for foreknowledge by rejecting the idea that God foreknows because he has predetermined, did not waver in his belief that divine foreknowledge was exhaustive and certain.⁹² Arminius said, "[U]ncertainty cannot be

⁹⁰Olson, "The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God," 171.

⁹¹Ibid., 156.

attributed to the will of Him who, in His infinite wisdom, has all things present to himself, and certainly foreknows all future events, even those most contingent.”⁹³

One contemporary free will writer defines foreknowledge,

“God has comprehensive insight into all past, present, and future reality. To God, the past is as real as though it was happening in the present. The future is as certain as though it was the past. . . . God brings to pass all things that He has planned in eternity, even as each of his creatures acts freely, doing as he or she wills.”⁹⁴

Human freedom and responsibility. As it relates to God and providence, a Classic Arminian position must align with an *a priori* commitment to this libertarian freedom. Free will, in this system, is defined as being incompatible with determinism and is to be defined as “noncompatibilist free will.”⁹⁵ Libertarian freedom holds that no factors can fully explain or determine one choice being made over another. “Free will is the ability to choose between opposites without that choice’s being fixed or determined by some power outside the person’s own will.”⁹⁶ Therefore, human choosing is, ultimately, always arbitrary.

Arminian theologians believe human responsibility and accountability are only viable if human beings have libertarian freedom. They argue if human beings are not free to choose other than what they actually choose, they cannot be held accountable for what choice they make. That is, if there is not the ability to choose freely any option, there is not real freedom, nor is there any true moral responsibility for that choice. Any view of

⁹²Millard J. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 104.

⁹³James Arminius, *An Examination of the Treatise of William Perkins*, 1.4

⁹⁴Norman Geisler and H. Wayne House, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 22.

⁹⁵Olson, “The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God,” 149.

⁹⁶Cottrell, *What the Bible Says About God the Ruler*, 194.

God's nature, knowledge, work, or decree that violates libertarian freedom is rejected out-of-hand as a tenable theological position.

In response many Reformed theologians who question how sinful man can freely choose between good and evil, Arminians argue, "because man is created in the image of God, he retains the image of God even after the fall. This image includes the ability to make choices and act upon them."⁹⁷

Many in the Arminian camp see their view as the historically held view. One writer says, "With the exception of the later Augustine, most orthodox theologians through the Reformation held a libertarian view of free will."⁹⁸

Providence and evil. A traditional statement from outside of free will theology concerning the problem of evil, or viewing the sovereignty of God alongside the existence of evil, is given by philosopher David Hume. Hume says, "Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent? Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent? Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?"⁹⁹

This type of philosophical argument is part of what makes the idea of libertarian freedom and free will theism so popular. Free will theism's unwavering conviction toward libertarian freedom is perhaps most clearly seen when it comes to suffering and the problem of evil. It effectively gets God "off-the-hook" while clearly showing human responsibility for moral decisions. Any perceived intervention (or especially lack thereof) can be dismissed as the loving self-limitation of God. "One

⁹⁷Geisler, "Freedom, Free Will, and Determinism," 429.

⁹⁸Ibid., 229.

⁹⁹David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, part X in *Writings on Religion*, ed. Antony Flew (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 261.

reason for God's not intervening in a particular situation is his unwillingness to interfere with the libertarian freedom of the people involved."¹⁰⁰

Free will theism affirms that "God created the world with neither moral evil nor natural evil existing in it. But he did create free-will beings for whom moral evil was a possibility. In the exercise of their freedom these beings introduced moral evil into the world."¹⁰¹ Free will theism is divided over the question of whether evil was in any way a necessity for God in fulfilling his purposes for creation.¹⁰² However, whether or not it was a necessity, now that it is a reality, it must be dealt with.

Arminians would agree that the sovereignty of God over all things includes his control over evil.¹⁰³ In a way similar to Calvinists, Arminians see evil and the will of God as related in two ways: First, some evil is within the purposive will of God and is caused by him. This does not include moral evil (sin), only natural evil for the purpose of judgment or correction, and applies "only to a small percentage of these."¹⁰⁴ Second, most evil in the world is not caused by God, but is allowed to happen by his permissive will. In this case, the question, "Why is God doing this to me?" is moot because "in all likelihood, God is not doing it; it is probably the result of somebody's free will choice."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰John Sanders, "Divine Providence and the Openness of God," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, ed. Bruce A. Ware (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 212.

¹⁰¹Cottrell, *What the Bible Says About God the Ruler*, 398.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 399.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 405.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 407.

The summary of classic free will theism and the problem of suffering is well articulated in the following quote: “Here is the extent of God’s responsibility for evil: he is responsible for its possibility, but not its actuality.”¹⁰⁶

Providence and prayer. Classic free will theology would share much in common with the determinists when it comes to prayer. Although they may bicker on the details as they articulate the reasons to pray or how prayer affects God, they would joyously share in the command and the opportunity to pray.

Classic free will theism says that God “can and often does answer prayers by exercise of his special providence.”¹⁰⁷ As to how God can answer prayer while upholding the doctrine of eternal immutability, the answer lies in exhaustive foreknowledge. And because of foreknowledge, prayer can authentically influence God. Prayers can have a “real effect on the course and nature of history.”¹⁰⁸ God has known from eternity past what people would pray. And he was able to “decide which prayer he would answer and which he would not answer, from the very beginning.” Therefore, he did not have to “change his plans in response to our petitions.”¹⁰⁹

Classic free will theists believe in prayer because, “prayer intermeshes with providence, finding both its roots and its fulfillment there in the constant working of God in the world.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 398.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 149.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 369.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 367.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 378.

Unorthodox Views of Providence

The overwhelming majority of theologians, both determinist and indeterminist, throughout church history have agreed to a traditional view of foreknowledge, that is an exhaustive foreknowledge and a view of providence that has God actively involved in the world to a great extent.¹¹¹ However, in recent history, there have been some views which are clearly outside the camp of evangelical orthodoxy.

Open Theist View

The open theist view of God and providence is based on the idea that God decided in eternity past to make some of his decisions contingent on our actions.¹¹² Open Theism sees God exercising general rather than meticulous providence. That is, God has “flexible strategies.”¹¹³ These flexible strategies effectively mean that when God’s Plan A is thwarted, God, in his infinite wisdom and resourcefulness, resorts to Plan B, or Plan C, and so on.¹¹⁴ This view is called the “openness of God” because “God is *open* to what creatures decide to do and because God has left most of history open to multiple possible futures.”¹¹⁵

Although classic Arminians deny this, the open theist view of providence is essentially the Arminian path followed to its intellectual terminus. In fact, even Arminians who reject Open Theism admit most their view of free will is “similar to the view held by neotheists (aka Open Theist): Free choice involves non-coerced actions springing from a will that has the power of contrary choice.”¹¹⁶ Open theist John Sanders

¹¹¹Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 131.

¹¹²Sanders, “Divine Providence and the Openness of God,” 197.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 198.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 198-99.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 199.

¹¹⁶Geisler and House, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism*, 229.

says classic free will theism (Arminianism) and open theism “are members of the Hatfield free will family and differ sharply from the McCoy determinist family.”¹¹⁷

However, both Arminians and Calvinists join together in rejecting Open Theism as orthodox Christianity. From an examination of church history it is clear that the Open Theist view of foreknowledge is not the view held by, among others, Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, or Arminius.¹¹⁸

Open Theists branch off from Arminians in two crucial areas: (1) the temporality of God—how does God experience time (or does he experience time at all); and (2) the nature of God’s foreknowledge—does God have exhaustive definite foreknowledge of future contingent events. Open theists argue that if God knows unmistakably before the libertarian free choice is made what choice will be made, this violates human freedom because the choice is determined by God’s prior knowledge. Therefore, God *must* not know the future choices of free moral creatures or else libertarian freedom is violated.

Perhaps the most clear illustration of the openness view is given by Sanders when he says, “Because the future is not wholly fixed or determined, the story of God and humanity is more like a “create your own adventure book” than a completed novel.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷John Sanders, “Response by John Sanders to Roger E. Olson,” in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, ed. Bruce A. Ware (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 179.

¹¹⁸Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 131.

¹¹⁹ Sanders, “Divine Providence and the Openness of God,” 203.

Among the numerous problems with Open Theism is that it has to avoid some passages or at least adopt the more bizarre interpretations of those passages in order to keep coherence.¹²⁰

What God knows about the future. Open theism argues that God knows “all that is logically possible to know.”¹²¹ This means God knows perfectly, with exhaustive definite knowledge, all past and present events, but learns future, free events. In other words, God does not know exactly what will happen in the future. Sanders calls this type of knowledge “dynamic omniscience.”¹²² God’s knowledge of the future is comprised of unilateral decisions made by God, knowledge of possibilities, and “those events that are determined to occur (e. g., an asteroid hitting a planet). Hence, the future is partly open or indefinite and partly closed or definite.”¹²³

To help further describe or define this view, Sanders has coined a second term called “presentism.”¹²⁴ This view states that the only things that are real are the present moment and the past moments, which God knows perfectly, but the future does not yet exist, so God cannot know it. God’s only hope to “know the future” is by knowing the past and the present so well he can forecast the future based upon an informed hypothesis.¹²⁵

¹²⁰Chad O. Brand, “Orthodoxy and Open Theism and Their Connections to Western Philosophical Traditions,” in *Beyond the Bounds*, ed. John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 73.

¹²¹Sanders, “Divine Providence and the Openness of God,” 199.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 213.

¹²⁵Ibid., 73-75.

Human freedom and responsibility. As already stated, Open Theism is built around the idea of libertarian human freedom. Like other free will theologies, the idea of human responsibility is what necessitates libertarian freedom. Openness theology also says that because God has given humans a role in causing what transpires, humans bear “great responsibility to care for creation and for one another. . . . God will hold us accountable in our role as his appointed caretakers.”¹²⁶

Providence and evil. Open theists join with classic Arminians in advocating the “free will defense” to the problem of evil.¹²⁷ Since much of that discussion is included in the previous section, it need not be revisited fully here.

Where Open Theism deviates from a classic free will view of God and evil is that dynamic omniscience teaches that “God did not know prior to creation that an individual would become a child abuser or a CEO who rips off his company.”¹²⁸ In openness, theology, God is prone to make mistakes because he has no real idea what anyone will actually do.

Like other free will theists, advocates of this model of providence say that God’s overarching plan did and does not include evil. In fact, an openness view seemingly rejects or redefines Romans 8:28, calling evil

gratuitous or pointless, for [evil was] not intended with the purpose of attaining a greater good. . . . Though free will theists can certainly affirm that God works to bring good out of evil situations . . . it cannot be held that God always succeeds in such efforts. . . . Given our libertarian freedom, God cannot guarantee that a greater good will arise out of each and every occurrence of evil.¹²⁹

¹²⁶Sanders, “Divine Providence and the Openness of God,” 203.

¹²⁷Ibid., 210.

¹²⁸Ibid., 211.

¹²⁹Ibid., 213.

Providence and prayer. Proponents of openness theology see prayer as a means in determining the actual outcome of events. Gregory Boyd says, “The open view is able to declare, without qualification or inconsistency, that some of the future genuinely depends on prayer.”¹³⁰ This influence on God is viewed as “more active” or “more genuine than any view of meticulous providence could hold.”¹³¹ In this model, God does things precisely because he is asked or not asked to do so. In other words, “prayers have an effect on how things turn out in the world because they have an effect on God himself.”¹³²

The interdependence of the world leads to prayer that authentically works because the human and God can both change his mind. Sanders says:

Though we may prevail upon God, God can also prevail with us, getting us to change our minds. In this way prayer is a dialogue, opening windows of opportunity for the Spirit to work in our lives. Our failure to pray means that particular desires of God may not be realized because we fail to ask. If God’s bringing about a certain state of affairs is contingent upon our prayer and our prayer is a result of our free will, then God is taking a risk that some particular good may not come about.¹³³

Sanders continues:

If the future is open because some of God’s decisions are dependent upon our prayers and some of God’s plans can change, then the sort of prayer described here makes sense, and it lends urgency to our prayers for one another.¹³⁴

Process or Neo-Orthodox View

Process theology adamantly holds to a self-determinist (and at times an indeterminist) view. However, this view is not because of a conviction found in

¹³⁰Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 95.

¹³¹Thiessen, *Providence and Prayer*, 101.

¹³²Ibid., 110.

¹³³Sanders, “Divine Providence and the Openness of God,” 204.

¹³⁴Ibid., 205.

Scripture. In fact, in their introduction to process theology, John Cobb and David Griffin say the biblical record is “ambivalent on the question of whether God is in complete control of the world.”¹³⁵ In process theology, God is always at work in every situation, but often God is limited in his ability to accomplish his will because he is in a reciprocal relationship with influences outside himself and “vulnerable to the attitude and response of human agents.”¹³⁶

God is not the sole cause of all things nor is he even the primary cause. Whatever influence God does have over the world is persuasive and not coercive.¹³⁷ In fact, process theology argues that some things happen for no reason, they are a result of complete randomness in the universe.¹³⁸

The Process view understands God as completely outside and either uninterested or incapable of interfering in human affairs. God is viewed as genuinely free, but in deciding to create he has limited his freedom to act. Harold Kushner, a Jewish rabbi, makes this clear,

Insurance companies refer to earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters as “acts of God.” I consider that a case of using God’s name in vain. I don’t believe an earthquake that kills thousands of innocent victims without reason

¹³⁵John B. Cobb and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 52.

¹³⁶E. Frank Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 342. It should be noted that Tupper separates his view from a process or existential model, claiming that the process model “sacrifices the sovereignty of God to historical realism for the sake of the responsibility of humanity in the ambiguities of nature and history” (30). The alternative he offers is a “personal model with an accent on creative transformation through the power of the future” (30). How great a distinction this model offers from classic process theology is debatable, yet it is telling that his critique of the monarchical (Augustinian) model is included in every chapter while his critique of process theology is relegated to the Appendix. For the purposes of this project, Tupper’s model will remain categorized with process theology.

¹³⁷Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer*, 56.

¹³⁸Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Avon, 1981), 46-55.

is an act of God. It is an act of nature. Nature is morally blind, without values. It churns along, following its own laws, not caring who or what gets in the way.¹³⁹

Process theologians define providence very differently from classical orthodoxy. Providence is “God’s calling us to become a son of God ‘in Christ.’”¹⁴⁰ Providence is “a channeling of chance between banks less than infinitely close together.”¹⁴¹ Simply, process theology sees providence as God’s way of relating to us, nothing more, nothing less.¹⁴²

Some Process theologians recognize that the classic statement of the providence of God is Romans 8:28.¹⁴³ However, the traditional interpretation of this verse is quickly rejected. “Do ‘all things work together for good for those who love God’? *No.*”¹⁴⁴ In case this statement is not clear enough, the author continues, “At least we know what [Rom 8:28] does not mean: Paul does not mean that God predetermines everything that happens. Not everything that occurs is the design and intention of God.”¹⁴⁵

A fitting summation of most liberal views, including process, neo-orthodox, and existential views is seen in the quote, “In every critical situation with its multiple contextual variables God always does the most God can do.”¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹Ibid., 59.

¹⁴⁰Norman Pittenger, *God’s Way with Men: A Study of the Relationship Between God and Man in Providence, “Miracle,” and Prayer*, The Library of Practical Theology (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969), 23.

¹⁴¹Cited from *Reality as Social Process* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1953), 107 in Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer*, 63.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence*, 338.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 325.

What God knows about the future. Suffice it to say that for process theologians, God's foreknowledge is neither exhaustive nor effectual. Tupper explains:

God sees multiple options in the movement of history and the variables in the journey of each person's life. The envisioning of these multiple possibilities constitutes the opportunities for the actualization of God's purpose and the fulfillment of human life. Yet the alternatives with regard to specific historical progression decrease in number and scope as possibilities are actualized—even for God.¹⁴⁷

Although providence was a tightly held doctrine, even among liberal theologians in the late nineteenth century, the events of the early twentieth century gave rise to much skepticism that the world was moving toward any type of divine goal.¹⁴⁸ For some neo-orthodox theologians, discussions about foreknowledge and providence are apparently not even worth discussing.¹⁴⁹

Human freedom and responsibility. Process theology, in a similar vein to many Arminian theologies, teaches that to be human by definition mandates having libertarian freedom. Using Genesis 1:27 as their biblical basis, process theologians argue that the "image of God" means being free to make choices contrary to whatever our instincts, nature, or circumstances tell us to do. "If he were only free to do good, he would not really be choosing. If we are bound to do good, then we are not free to choose it. . . . [For man to be free] God has to leave us free to choose to do right or to do wrong."¹⁵⁰

The logic follows that if libertarian freedom is in any way compromised, human responsibility for actions and choices is eliminated. "If we are not free to choose

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 324.

¹⁴⁸Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 119.

¹⁴⁹For example, Frank Stagg's theology text, *New Testament Theology* (Nashville: Broadman, 1962), never mentions foreknowledge or providence.

¹⁵⁰Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 79.

evil, then we are not free to choose good either. . . . We can no longer be moral, which means we can no longer be human.”¹⁵¹

Process theology upholds that God has freely chosen to limit himself. “God has set Himself the limit that He will not intervene to take away our freedom . . . He has already let man evolve morally free, and there is no turning back the evolutionary clock.”¹⁵² Or, put another way, “Self-limitation characterizes the posture that God takes in the decision to create, and the limitations in the structures of creation with the dynamics of history concentrate on the world that God has already created and sustains.”¹⁵³

Providence and evil. Whatever one may disagree with Kushner about, he is correct in stating that any discussion of providence must deal with suffering, pain, and the problem of evil.

“There is only one question which really matters: why do bad things happen to good people. . . . Virtually every meaningful discussion I have ever had with people on the subject of God and religion has either started with this question, or gotten around to it before long. . . . [People] are all troubled by the unfair distribution of suffering in the world.”¹⁵⁴

In large measure, the question of God’s relationship to evil has already been addressed in process theology by God’s limiting himself in such a way to render him effectively impotent in stopping evil.

Whether this conclusion regarding God’s impotence is a cause or effect in holding process theology is debatable. Undoubtedly, many people have been driven to a process theology because of the existence of evil they found unexplainable. This

¹⁵¹Ibid., 80.

¹⁵²Ibid., 81.

¹⁵³Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence*, 329.

¹⁵⁴Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 6.

problem of evil leads many to cynicism. Kushner goes so far as to brand the author of Psalm 92, who speaks of the mysterious depths of the wisdom of God and the promise that the “righteous flourish like a palm tree” (Ps 92:13) as guilty of “wishful thinking.”¹⁵⁵

He continues, “[M]y religious commitment to the supreme value of an individual life makes it hard for me to accept an answer that is not scandalized by an innocent person’s pain Why then should we excuse God for causing such undeserved pain, no matter how wonderful the ultimate result may be?”¹⁵⁶

“I can worship a God who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die, for whatever exalted reason.”¹⁵⁷ Contrast that view with an Augustinian who says, “If we understand the providence of God and love the God of providence, we are able to worship Him with the sacrifice of praise He inherently deserves when things occur that bring pain, sorrow, and affliction into our lives.”¹⁵⁸

In explaining God’s role in evil, Kushner says,

Bad things do happen to good people in this world, but it is not God who wills it. God would like people to get what they deserve in life, but He cannot always arrange it. Forced to choose between a good God who is not totally powerful, or a powerful God who is not totally good, the author of the Book of Job chooses to believe in God’s goodness. . . . [I]f we can bring ourselves to acknowledge that there are some things God does not control, many good things become possible.¹⁵⁹

Events like the Holocaust, cancer, and natural disasters occur, simply, because “there was nothing God could do to prevent it.”¹⁶⁰ One author even points to the Garden

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 13.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 19.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 134.

¹⁵⁸Sproul, *The Invisible Hand*, 11.

¹⁵⁹Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 43, 45.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 85.

of Gethsemane as evidence of the limitation of God. “The eternal God could not—would not and could not—deliver Jesus from his cross.”¹⁶¹ The events were already set a certain way because of the free choices of people and God was unable to alter the natural consequence of the events.

Since God is powerless to stop or control evil, then events are thus rendered meaningless. “[T]he bad things that happen to us in our lives do not have a meaning when they happen to us. They do not happen for any good reason which would cause us to accept them willingly. But we can give them a meaning.”¹⁶²

Providence and prayer. Process theologians, while believing the importance and duty of prayer, reject the idea that God unilaterally acts to bring about anything that happens.¹⁶³ Prayer does not really affect God, just us. “When miracles occur, . . . we would be well advised to bow our heads in thanks, and not think that our prayers are what did it.”¹⁶⁴ So, according to process theology, why pray? The only reason possible is that prayer redeems people from isolation. It puts us in touch with other people who share the same experiences we do.¹⁶⁵ The problem here is this view seems to call into question Jesus’ pattern and teaching of praying in private, but that is an issue for another time.

¹⁶¹Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence*, 325.

¹⁶²Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 136.

¹⁶³Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer*, 64.

¹⁶⁴Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 117.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 121.

Providence and History

The Bible teaches that there is a transcendent plan to world history. History is linear, not cyclical.¹⁶⁶ It has a clear beginning and ending. Providence teaches that this moving of history from its beginning to ending is planned, governed, and carried out by God. C. S. Lewis said, “History is a story written by the finger of God.”¹⁶⁷

One of the great implications of the doctrine of providence is that history *has* meaning. Yet this meaning is not fully understood or seen until it is placed against the backdrop of the purposeful will of God.¹⁶⁸ Some consider this purposeful will for history to be concerned only with redemption, thus called redemptive history, however, redemptive history takes place within the context of ordinary history.¹⁶⁹

Christianity has always had a special interest in history, because it is uniquely and inextricably tied to history. “Not only does Christianity teach that God is Lord over history (in the sense that history began in his act of creation, is governed by his providence, and will end at his judgment), it also holds that through Christ, God actually entered into human history.”¹⁷⁰

Gordon H. Clark points out,

“If the Second Person of the Triune God actually became flesh and dwelt amongst us, and died on the cross for men, that event would naturally overshadow every other aspect of the world, scientific or historical. And such a descent of Deity into human affairs would not only involve a theory of history logically, but must psychologically

¹⁶⁶Ronald Nash, in *The Meaning of History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998) addresses whether it could be claimed that a cyclical view of history is presented in Eccl 1:2-4, 9. “There is a major problem with such a claim. Careful students of the book recognize that it is a divinely inspired account of what life would be like for humans without God. . . . What the book portrays is not a cyclical view of history but the utter hopelessness and despair of a life without God,” 35.

¹⁶⁷C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 105.

¹⁶⁸Farley, *The Providence of God*, 234.

¹⁶⁹Sproul, *The Invisible Hand*, 117.

¹⁷⁰Nash, *The Meaning of History*, 18.

provoke some general reflection on history. Both logically and actually therefore Christianity has a philosophy of history.”¹⁷¹

Ramifications of Views of Providence and History

Depending on one’s view of providence, his or her view of history is accordingly colored. If one holds to an Augustinian view, God’s work in history is not that God is merely interested in the “big picture.” His management of His creation is micromanagement, concerned with and involved with the smallest details. Thus, his will cannot in anyway be thwarted and every single atom, sparrow, lightning bolt, and decision is according to his perfect will.

What this means for history is that one can look back with an assumption that the final result was God’s will and examine the details and personalities to see how God providentially accomplished his will. One can also view the events that seem at first glance as contrary to his will in a larger context to see aspects of God’s working through those events.

Conversely, according to Arminian theology, “history is a mixture of God’s will and human resistance to and cooperation with it.”¹⁷² This means that while “sovereignty and providence are not in dispute”¹⁷³ God does not always and ultimately get his way in all things.

The challenge in viewing history in this manner is that one is never sure whether or not the final result was God’s will. And, even if the end was according to God’s providence, what about the means? Rather than the events themselves showing, in hindsight, God’s will for our edification, human examination of the events becomes the criterion for knowing the will of God.

¹⁷¹Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 1991), 80-81, cited in Nash, *The Meaning of History*, 10.

¹⁷²Olsen, “The Classic Free Will Theist Model of God,” 165.

¹⁷³Ibid.

Providence and Church History

As it relates to church history, one's view of providence is essential to making sense of not just the past but the present and future as well. "The church is not the only place where God's providence is at work, but it is the place where the means of grace are most clearly concentrated."¹⁷⁴ If one has a low view of providence, then church history becomes an eclectic set of trivial affairs of men. There is little need to study what God has done in and through his church in ages past or on other continents because one cannot be assured God has ordained or blessed that. Ancient doctrinal debates and refuted heresies are rendered obsolete because there is no appreciation of the fact that the Holy Spirit guided the Church in interpretation and development of the truth as it is revealed in the Word of God. The results of such a view is "The checks and roadsigns of the past are not taken into consideration, and ancient heresies, long since condemned by the Church, are constantly repeated and represented as new discoveries. The lessons of the past are greatly neglected, and many seem to feel that they should strike out entirely on their own, as if very little had been accomplished in the past."¹⁷⁵

On the other hand, if one has a high view of providence, then the persons and events of church history are significant because they teach us much about how God has built, protected, and grown his church for over two thousand years. The rebuttals to recurring heresies continue to be relevant. The perspective on the present is also changed as faithfulness and courage show themselves to be vital for God's providential work in this and to future generations. And the future is brightened because of Jesus' promise in Matthew 16:18 to build and sustain his church. Because of the providence of God, optimism must reign in regard to the future of the church.

¹⁷⁴Sproul, *The Invisible Hand*, 137.

¹⁷⁵Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1937), 5.

Conclusion

Taking into account the entirety of biblical revelation, it seems apparent that God's providence over life and history is an exhaustive, meticulous providence. This meticulous providence is fully compatible with authentic human freedom, which is a freedom of inclination. In that regard, the Augustinian understanding of determinism would be the best summary of biblical truth. Within that framework, a modified understanding, such as Ware offers, of God's relation to humanity, and especially his asymmetrical relationship with good and evil likewise seems to best match what the Bible teaches.

However, the fact remains that God is ineffable, even though he has chosen to reveal himself and his ways in many regards through his Word.¹⁷⁶ The fact that God's means of operation are a mystery to us is part of what makes man aware of his need for God's gracious providence. If man was to understand God's ways and means, he would be equal with God.¹⁷⁷ Even Ware himself seems to admit that the *how* question is not answered and cannot be answered entirely by his proposal saying, "even if we cannot answer satisfactorily just *how* God controls good and evil without being morally compromised by his relation to evil, these texts affirm unambiguously *that* God controls both."¹⁷⁸

Ware goes beyond clear biblical revelation and into philosophical systematizing when he attempts to tell "*just how*" God works in providence, specifically

¹⁷⁶Some theologians have sought to address the issues of providence as an *antinomy*—that is an *appearance* of incompatibility between two equally undeniable truths. See J. I. Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1961), 18ff.

¹⁷⁷See Farley, *The Providence of God*, 232-23.

¹⁷⁸Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 71. Emphasis his.

in his appeal to middle knowledge.¹⁷⁹ His appeal to middle knowledge is not necessary and, in short, not helpful.

While faithfulness to the Scriptures demands that theologians wrestle with all that is revealed in Scripture, at some point it must be admitted that the Bible does not explain exactly *how* these things work together, merely that they do. Therefore any attempt to explain the relationship goes beyond the realm of biblical revelation.

The fact that God's meticulous work of providence is particularly seen in the history of his redeemed people, means that history, particularly church history, has meaning. Since it has meaning, it should have significance for those in the redeemed community of faith. Therefore, a doctrine of providence should include a confidence in, and an appreciation of, God's work throughout the ages in church history.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., 110. Ware admits that this terminology is associated with Molinism, which he rejects because of its adherence to libertarian freedom. Instead of borrowing a term so closely identified with a perspective one is not holding, would it not be more prudent to coin a term or to borrow a term from a common perspective? Helm points out in his critique "Responses by Paul Helm to Bruce A. Ware" in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God* ed. by Bruce A. Ware (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 128, the use of "middle knowledge" is a misnomer for "natural knowledge." A point which Ware himself acknowledges in *God's Greater Glory*, 110.

CHAPTER 4
HISTORY IS HIS-STORY: GOD'S PROVIDENCE
THROUGH 2,000 YEARS OF CHURCH HISTORY

This Doctor of Ministry project focuses on using historical illustrations to teach the providence of God. This teaching, like all doctrinal teaching, best occurs in the context of a local church through expository preaching. To accomplish the end goal, an expository sermon series highlighting the providence of God throughout church history was developed, delivered and evaluated.

Scheduling of Elements

The project began the week of January 3, 2010. This allowed for two weeks of preparation and an eleven-week sermon series to be preached prior to Resurrection Sunday, April 4, 2010. Due to calendaring issues, the best time to preach an eleven-week sermon series to a consistent audience is either in the winter and early spring, completing the series before the school year ends or beginning in the fall and completing it prior to the Thanksgiving holiday. For the purposes of this study, and my academic goals, the winter into spring time fit better.

Weeks 1 and 2 of the project involved completing on a macro level, the sermons to be preached. While prior work had been done selecting the events, texts, and writing the key proposition of each sermon, the task of crafting the sermons and building illustrations that were varied in approach and delivery was still a work in progress.

Weeks 1 and 2 were also set aside to recruit as many church attenders as possible to complete the pre-series questionnaire and anticipate the upcoming sermon series. Three weeks prior to the beginning of the series, a personal note was included as a

bulletin insert informing the people of my progress in the Doctor of Ministry program, advising them of the upcoming surveys, and requesting prayer support and participation. Two weeks prior to the series launch, the pre-series questionnaires were distributed.

Weeks 3-13 were the sermon series proper. Each week, sermon notes were included in the worship bulletin. The notes usually contained a picture of an individual, a brief introduction or synopsis of his/her life, quotes attributed to said person or about him or her, major points from the sermon, and a “So What?” section highlighting application. The notes incorporated as much blank space as possible to allow the congregation to record what the Spirit said to them personally.

The sermon series concluded on March 28, 2010. The following weeks were spent trying to get post-series questionnaires completed and returned.

Study on Use of Historical Illustrations

In addition to work on my sermon series, Weeks 1 and 2 contained an element of evaluating sermon illustrations from other pastors who are gifted in using historical illustrations. Since delivery and content were both vital, three contemporary preachers known for passionate evangelism, engaging delivery, and expository style were examined: John Piper, Mac Brunson, and Chuck Swindoll. Each of these men regularly utilize historical illustration, however, they primarily use them for different purposes.

John Piper has preached biographical messages each year since 1988. For the past several years, these messages have been his address at the conference hosted at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where Piper pastors. Piper’s messages on these matters are not intended to be expositional sermons. In fact, he calls them biographical sermons. He begins with a person from history, studies their life, and draws theological lessons from their life, buttressed by biblical revelation. This style is not Piper’s normal pattern of preaching, but it is his pattern of preaching using historical illustrations.

Piper is a deep thinker and his use of historical illustrations demonstrates that depth of insight. He focuses on the full scope of a life, even those times when there is little in the way of memoirs or writings. Piper is gifted to learn lessons and turn up jewels of truth buried deep within one's life. Listening to Piper, one gets the sense that he is not telling the story to illustrate another point, he is telling the story because he wants you to know the person.

However, Piper's diligence can detach him from the average hearer when it comes to historical illustration. It is not practical for a pastor to spend over an hour giving the details of the life of Augustine, Luther, Bunyan, or others. Therefore, a preacher must be very selective in what he includes and omits in an historical illustration. Another observation from listening to Piper's biographical sermons is that the balance of the content is heavily weighted toward the person rather than the biblical content. Piper does well in drawing attention to these saints of old, and offers a wealth of insight from their lives, but not in a way that is easily transferable to the local pulpit each week.

Donald "Mac" Brunson currently serves as the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Florida. Brunson has a self-identified reputation as a "history buff" and that taste is often evident in his sermons. Unlike Piper, Brunson's historical illustrations are more often from "secular" history (military battles, political reigns, innovations, etc.) than from church history. Brunson does a masterful job making history understandable for the masses. His descriptions and colorful language make things like the British royal family or Balkan blowups interesting. Often, Brunson uses the historical illustration as an introduction or to serve as a bridge to the proposition of the sermon. His sermons are routinely biblical expositions, launched by effective historical illustration. However, at times these illustrative bridges seem a little disconnected or forced, as if he had a good story and he'd been waiting on a good time to use it.

Charles Swindoll currently serves as the Senior Pastor of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas. Due primarily to his daily radio broadcast, *Insight*

for Living, Swindoll has been one of the most widely heard pastors in America for many years. Swindoll uses a variety of illustrations in his preaching, including historical illustration. Following a traditional state your point, illustrate it, apply it approach, many of Swindoll's historical illustrations are short and vivid. The greatest strength of Swindoll's illustrations was his delivery—varied vocal range, pace, and inflexion. Like Brunson, the details, while engaging, were often superfluous. The names, dates, and places only served as a backdrop for the point being illustrated.

Focus Group

A focus group was formed at Pioneer Baptist Church for specific feedback and evaluation of the upcoming project series. The focus group consisted of 8 individuals ranging in age from 20 years old to the mid-50s and spanning those who had been members at Pioneer Baptist Church for over 40 years to one person who has joined within the past year. The focus group consisted of 4 males and 4 females.

Each member of the focus group was approached individually before the study and asked to participate in the focus group portion. Expectations were discussed, questions asked and answered and a plea for honest critique and faithful participation given.

Each week, focus group members were given a sermon evaluation form which evaluated specific aspects of sermon content and delivery. The number of evaluations completed for each sermon varied as members' attendance varied. The number of responses received for each sermon is listed with the sermon for the corresponding week.

Initially, three feedback sessions were planned following the third, seventh, and eleventh sermon, respectively. Due to snow, ice, and flooding affecting church activities during five of the eleven weeks, the focus group was only able to meet corporately following the sixth sermon. Feedback was pursued individually from the focus group members following the conclusion of the series.

In addition to the weekly evaluations, focus group members completed a “Final Series Evaluation Form” evaluating the effectiveness of the sermon series as a whole. The results of that survey indicated the sermon series was well-received and profitable in illustrating God’s providence.

Pre-Series Questionnaire Administration

The pre-series questionnaires were distributed to all youth and adult Sunday School classes, instructions given on where to return the surveys, and opportunity to ask any questions anyone might have. Questionnaires were also made available at multiple locations around the worship center and a verbal announcement was made requesting participation during the announcement time at the conclusion of the morning worship service.

Synopsis of Sermon Series

The sermon series covered eleven weeks and included the following

Week 3-Sermon No. 1

The first sermon in the series was an exposition of Matthew 16:18. The series focus was seeing how God has used his Word and his people to accomplish his purposes throughout 2,000 years of the church. The proposition of the sermon, and the entire series was: “Because the promises of Jesus are true and sure, including his promise to build, protect, and sustain his church, one should be able to see clearly evidence of the fulfillment of that promise looking back throughout history.” The application of the message was, “The promise of Jesus is either true, or it isn’t. If it is true, then you must believe both the promise and the rock upon which the promise is built.”

Week 4-Sermon No. 2

The second sermon in the series was an exposition of Acts 2:1-11, focusing on Pentecost and God’s empowering of the church through the Holy Spirit. The proposition

of the sermon was Jesus' promise to build his church is assured of being fulfilled because the church has the power of the Holy Spirit at work. The impossible mission of taking the gospel to the world is not just possible, it is unstoppable and certain. The application of the message was because the Holy Spirit's power is available to us, we should live transformed lives like those 120 on the Day of Pentecost. We need to experience the power of the Holy Spirit through conversion. We must walk in the power of the Holy Spirit each day. And we can share the good news of the gospel with confidence, knowing it goes forth with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Week 5—Sermon No. 3

The third sermon in the series was an exposition of Matthew 24:1-2. In these verses, Jesus prophesied the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. This prophecy was fulfilled in 70 A.D. This sermon was the first in the series with a clear historical illustration and context not found in the Scriptures.

The historical illustration served as the introduction to the message and focused on Roman general Titus Flavius Vespasian. Vespasian's expressed desire in destroying the Jewish temple was to abolish the Jewish and Christian religions. However, that abolition was impossible, because of Jesus' promise in Matthew 16:18. To the contrary, the destruction of the Jewish temple and persecution of Christians actually strengthened the church by forcing the church to go out from Jerusalem into the world and to prove Jesus' prophetic word true concerning the destruction of the temple.

The proposition of the sermon was that God is never caught off-guard nor are his plans frustrated or his promises fail. The application was that circumstances that may seem terribly difficult or tragic at the time are used by God to complete his holy will. The most painful experiences in our life are the things that grow us most as believers. So, we can trust him.

Week 6—Sermon No. 4

The first Sunday in February brought the fourth sermon in the series. This sermon focused on the Council of Nicea, Arius, and Athanasius. The text for exposition was a pivotal text from the Council's discussion, John 1.

The main idea of the sermon was that God providentially uses his Word to build, protect, and sustain his church by protecting right doctrine and rejecting false teaching. The applications centered around knowing, loving and defending biblical truth no matter what the cost.

Week 7—Sermon No. 5

Romans 5:12-21 was the focal text for the fifth sermon. The historical illustration was the life of Augustine of Hippo, particularly his views on sin, depravity, grace, and conversion. These views of Augustine are most clearly seen in his own description of his life and conversion and serve as a beautiful picture of the truth of the Romans 5 passage.

The proposition of the sermon was that God providentially uses his word to convert sinners and mature believers, thus fulfilling Jesus' promise to build and sustain his church. The application of the passage was to experience new life that is found only in Jesus Christ and to understand how why this new life is necessary and how it is attained.

Week 8—Sermon No. 6

The illustrations in the series moved forward to the Protestant Reformation and the life of Martin Luther at the midway point. The text was Romans 1:16-17, justification by faith. Rather than use an historical illustration as merely an introduction, a conclusion, or to illustrate one point in the sermon, the biographical illustration wove throughout the exposition of the text.

The proposition of the sermon was that God providentially uses His Word to raise up men and women of courage to call the church back to biblical fidelity. The

application of the text was since the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, we must never be confused about what we are to do and why we are to do it.

Week 9—Sermon No. 7

Sermon number 7 was an exposition of Hosea 12:10, the verse on the cover of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The first part of the sermon was an exposition of the Hosea passage, followed by application illustrated by Bunyan's life, specifically how Hosea 12:10 served as the inspiration for Bunyan's writing. The proposition of the sermon was that God uses his people, people changed by the gospel and uses them, their uniqueness, gifts, talents, abilities, desires that he has created them with to take the gospel to their people. The applications dealt with God's providential power to take even the most hardened sinner and transform him and use him for God's glory.

Week 10—Sermon No. 8

The eighth sermon in the series was an exposition of Deuteronomy 32:35, the text for Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. The sermon began with the historical illustration of Edwards and the First Great Awakening. The proposition of the sermon was that God providentially uses his Word, proclaimed through preachers, to bring awakening to his people. The applications, drawn from the text, dealt with God's just judgment on sin and his vindication for his people.

Week 11—Sermon No. 9

"Great Commission Resurgence" was the title of the ninth sermon in the series and was an exposition of Isaiah 54:2-3, the text that drove William Carey's heart to burn for the nations in a zeal for missions. After an exegesis and application of the text, details of Carey's life illustrated of how God providentially uses his Word to inflame a passion for missions.

Week 12—Sermon No. 10

The tenth sermon in the series began with an introduction from 1925 America and the Scopes Monkey Trial. Unlike many sermons on Genesis 1, the issue was not “believe in creation rather than evolution.” The proposition of the sermon was “In spite of the fact most people believe in creation rather than evolution, humans continue to reject God as creator and Lord. The reason is not intellectual; it’s moral.” The applications focused not on winning apologetic arguments, but on living consistently with the knowledge that God is our creator.

Week 13—Sermon No. 11

The final sermon in the series was an exposition of Luke 10:25-37, the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It was this text that was used in a sermon entitled, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.” It was the last sermon Martin Luther King Jr. preached, hours before he was assassinated. While King did not preach an expository message, his life can be used as an historical illustration of the fact God uses his word to build, sustain and correct his church. We each must ask “What kind of neighbor am I?”

Post Series Questionnaire Administration

In a similar manner to the pre-series questionnaires, the post-series questionnaires were distributed to all youth and adult Sunday School classes, instructions given on where to return the surveys, and opportunity to ask any questions anyone might have. Questionnaires were also made available at multiple locations around the worship center and a verbal announcement was made requesting participation during the announcement time at the conclusion of the morning worship service.

In an effort to receive as many completed questionnaires as possible, a personal plea was made in each service after the first week to remind and encourage people regarding the importance of the project.

Feedback from Focus Group

The corporate feedback session focused on the preaching under three major categories: content, delivery, and relevance. The content portion received unanimous positive feedback both in terms of the biblical exegesis and the historical illustrations. Focus group members consistently said they enjoyed the sermons contents and they were gaining a better grasp of the biblical truths. When pressed, a couple of items concerning content were offered as suggestions for improvement. The first was to continue to have variety in sermon structure and avoid falling into a trap of every sermon flowing the same. Another caution was to simplify my vocabulary and define any words which may not be commonly known by the congregation. The final critique for content was to maintain a healthy balance between the biblical and historical content.

Concerning delivery, the focus group offered several important observations. The majority of these insights referred to the pace of speech. Recommendations were given to slow down speech and utilize pauses when coming to applicational portions of the sermon. Also, observable signals in both speech and action indicated I felt rushed during delivery. One evaluator said, “Lose your watch; I’m tired of seeing you look at it. Just preach until you are done.” Evaluators felt my delivery was natural, was easy to listen to, and expressed energy and conviction.

The application and relevance of the message was another area in which helpful feedback was offered. After a couple of sermons with similar structures, involving explicit application being held until the end, evaluators suggested application be interspersed throughout the sermon. Another offered the suggestion that sermons contain personal application, and not just application to church or ministry. Overall, the consensus was that the messages were very relevant, even surprisingly more relevant than anticipated by several in the focus group.

As to various additional thoughts or insights into the series, the evaluators expressed great benefit received by the sermon notes in the bulletin insert from week to

week. They also enjoyed being introduced to new people or events and learning details of lives of those whom they had long heard, but about which they never knew much.

Week 3-Sermon No. 1

I received seven evaluations back from my focus group on this sermon. Critiques indicated content of passage was dealt with well, delivery was fine, but the stylistic elements and illustrations were scarce or could have been more vivid.

Week 4-Sermon No. 2

Five evaluations were received on this sermon. The exegesis received high marks and little comment. However, the evaluations indicated the rate of speech was too quick at times, especially when reading the text. On a positive note, the application, especially the emphasis on the connection between being filled with the Holy Spirit and evangelism received a couple positive comments.

Week 5—Sermon No. 3

This sermon was delivered on a day in which several inches of snow fell and attendance was very sparse. As a result, only four evaluations were completed. Powerpoint slides containing pictures of the temple mount and artists' renderings of Herod's Temple were planned, but failed due to technical difficulties. Surveys continue to show a weakness in summation and climactic appeal in conclusion and a strength in the content being closely tied to the text.

Week 6—Sermon No. 4

Seven sermon evaluations were completed this week. The evaluators seem to agree that this was the best sermon in the series. One commenter said, "Even though I don't like history I came away understanding why it is so important to know it in order to stand firm on what the Bible says." Another evaluator critiqued the sermon saying there seems to be too much content to get through in our time frame and the delivery seems rushed.

A final comment worthy of note, was from an evaluator who “would like to hear more personal/everyday application.”

Week 7—Sermon No. 5

Due to a snow storm, church attendance was very low on this week, and only five evaluations were completed. A pattern was seen in the evaluations that the structure and specific application was weak, while the general proposition was clear. The fact that the passage themes of depravity and redemption are so familiar probably helped this sermon be more clear in the minds of the focus than it really was to the general congregation.

Week 8—Sermon No. 6

Seven evaluations were completed from this sermon. The feedback from the evaluators matched my personal evaluation that this message became too biographical and not as exegetical as it should have been. One person commented my introduction was “a little too left-brained.” I think they were too kind, the entire message was a little too left-brained. Another comment stated the irony that this message tended to stray from the *sola Scriptura* theme for which Luther and the Reformers fought so hard. The punch of the applications for this message did seem to emerge in the minds of the hearers, however. Comments included words “powerful,” “much needed in today’s church,” and “encouraging.”

Week 9—Sermon No. 7

Five evaluators gave feedback on this sermon. The change of flow created by holding the historical illustration until the end as an illustration of the passage worked well and created a close link from the passage to the illustration. My favorite comments were the ones who wanted to study the entire book of Hosea because of the sermon. I think this sermon was one of my favorites in the entire series.

Week 10—Sermon No. 8

Six evaluations were returned for this message. This message was very heavy in content especially in the historical illustration used as introduction. This caused the entire sermon to feel “topheavy” and a little lethargic. However, this was probably the best sermon in terms of non-historical illustrations and applications, about which several evaluators commented.

Week 11—Sermon No. 9

The six evaluations returned for this sermon varied greatly in their responses. Consistently the biblical content and application portions received the most positive marks. One commenter said, “After reading the passage today before the service and trying to make sense of it, I truly enjoyed all you brought out. It was so plain to everyone that was listening.”

The conclusion got mixed reviews. I saved the historical illustration about William Carey until the end. One person commented, “Saving the historical illustration for the end made it feel a little rushed, and if we didn’t know the series it would have been fine, but it seemed in context of the series that it was almost added on.” However, another said, “I liked the text first and Carey as climax. Felt more text-centered.”

Week 10—Sermon No. 8

I only received four evaluations from this week, due to flooding which caused most of the churches in the area to be cancelled. This sermon received the highest marks, on average, of any sermon in the series. However, the written comments were the most sparse. Some pertinent encouragement was given by one evaluator, who wrote, “Good job bringing out implications of creation and getting to heart issues rather than intellectual smokescreens. Most present probably already believe creation, but many may not be living it. Good match to the audience.”

Week 13—Sermon No. 11

Each evaluator completed an evaluation of this message. This sermon utilized the historical illustration the least. Multiple evaluators noted the scarcity of the historical, however, they felt more of the historical aspect would have diminished the overall power of the message of the text, especially in light of the fact that the sermon was being followed by the Lord's Supper. The content and application of the message received high marks. A summation of the critiques could be summed up by one evaluator's comment: "worked wonderfully as an individual message, but relatively weak tie to series as a whole."

Post-Series Questionnaire Administration

Post-series questionnaire administration proved to be quite a challenge. Questionnaires were distributed again through the Sunday school classes as well as made available at multiple points in the church building. An announcement in writing was placed in the weekly bulletin as well as verbalized during the announcement time.

The importance of everyone who completed an initial survey to complete a concluding survey was stressed. Specific, convenient locations were pointed out where questionnaires could be returned. This process was repeated for two additional weeks following the study and surveys were accepted whenever they were presented up to several weeks after the series was completed.

Post Series Focus Group

Following the series, the focus group members were informally interviewed to get perspective on the project as a whole. Opportunity was given to reflect on the series in its entirety and reflect on any improvements, decline, or *status quo* on the issues discussed in our corporate meeting or on individual evaluation forms.

Each participant was then asked to complete a final sermon series evaluation form, which addressed nine points important to expository preaching. These evaluations

were completed on their own weeks after the series in order to see what lasting impact the series made on their view of the providence of God.

CHAPTER 5 ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF PROJECT AND GOALS

Analysis of Survey Responses

The congregational survey did not garner a high level of participation. At the time of this project Pioneer was averaging about fifty teenagers and adults in worship. I received 29 completed pre-series questionnaires and 13 post-series. I anticipated this problem beforehand knowing the cultural context. As indicated in chapter 4, I took several steps to attempt to alleviate this problem. However, the written survey format was not a good match for our church. The reasons for this are numerous. Some of these reasons and possible solutions are discussed in an analysis of the process later in this chapter.

Overall, the survey did not seem to indicate a significant move on the part of the congregation in regard to the elements of providence or expository preaching. An overwhelming majority of pre-series survey respondents indicated a “positive” answer on questions related to God’s work and faithfulness. This outlook continued into the post-series questionnaire. While incomplete data could be a result of those with a negative pre-disposition toward the study abstaining, my knowledge of the congregation leads me to think the surveys do accurately reflect orthodoxy in the area of a theology of providence.

On questions concerning effectiveness in preaching, the vast majority of respondents gave favorable answers even in the pre-series questionnaire. The variant in responses was minimal and does not seem to warrant any trends or shift in participants

thinking from beginning to end. Of far greater significance was the work of the Focus Group.

Analysis of Focus Group Feedback

Focus Group Meetings

The Focus Group assembled for this project was very edifying. They were chosen for their spiritual maturity as well as their honesty and objectivity. Each of the focus group members are faithful members of the congregation involved in multiple ministries. These qualities enabled them to provide exactly the type of reflection, encouragement, and guidance one desires in a project evaluation.

Two of the 8 participants are seminary graduates, and 7 of 8 are college graduates. The Focus Group included leaders in business and in the community. However, upon further reflection, the focus group was probably not the best cross-spectrum of the congregation at large.

Pioneer Baptist Church's congregation is overwhelmingly *not* college graduates. The church is comprised of blue-collar laborers, with limited leadership or administrative experience. While there was a broad age range on the focus group (ranging from 20-55 years), there was no one over 55, a demographic which comprises a significant portion of our congregation. These factors were acknowledged in forming the focus group, and potential alternative candidates considered, however no viable replacements emerged.

The result of the assembled focus group was some very honest, theologically sound, critiques of the messages' content and delivery. Yet, the individual perspectives, even shared corporately, undoubtedly differed from the average person in the pew. My messages were enhanced by the feedback offered and the critiques were far more mature than I would have imagined. For example, the focus group commented they did not feel the sermons were too long or deep. The depth was one of the greatest positive factors.

One of my failures in relating with the focus group was to articulate clearly what type of feedback was needed on the forms. This confusion became apparent at our mid-series meeting. Some of the focus group did an outstanding job of giving editorial comments about delivery, exegesis, application, etc. However, others tended to one of two extremes, either giving comments as if a professor were grading me on the sermon (i.e., “one of his best,” or “Andrew really inspired me today”) or simply listing notes taken from the content of the sermon (i.e., “we need to have more faith” or “a Levite served in the temple”).

The focus group meetings gave a freedom and confidence to the evaluators to offer negative feedback. They saw and heard my reaction to constructive criticism and heard me plea for complete honesty. From that point on, the feedback was exponentially more helpful.

Due to the lack of a corporate session at the conclusion of the series, I felt I got more explicit personal feedback from the focus group. Whereas in a corporate setting, one person may speak and the others nod (or not), it could be hard to deduce whether or not something was noticed by multiple people. However, when multiple people comment on similar issues, it is clear. The personal interviews also gave me a chance to ask specific questions that the group members may not bring up otherwise. For example, I asked, “If you were lost, would you have clearly heard in the messages the gospel and was I clear and urgent about what to do to respond?” That question wasn’t on evaluation form, but it is essential to expository preaching. And it provided another avenue for teaching the people what is important in biblical preaching.

Initially, I was nervous that our feedback sessions were not able to occur as I had planned in this project. However, upon further reflection, I see God’s providence in the individual meetings with much more openness, mutual encouragement, and personal engagement. I believe if I were planning this project again, I would intentionally plan for individual interviews.

Focus Group Sermon Series Evaluation Form

In addition to the week-to-week evaluation forms, each of the focus group members was asked to complete a final sermon series evaluation form (see Appendix). The purpose of this form was to gauge the overall effectiveness of the entire series and was completed. The questions addressed the listener's appreciation for the historical illustrations as a conduit for teaching the providence of God.

This overall evaluation was a key piece in the project. Few people will remember the details of the exegesis or the historical illustrations. Some may develop an awareness or recognition of a few events or people from church history. However, the main thing was to teach them to live lives confident in the meticulous and loving providence of God. The goal of the sermon series, and entire project, was to grow their faith by telling of God's faithfulness.

To that end, the answers to questions 9 and 10 were vital. Did this sermon series help the listener to be better equipped to serve the Lord and did it help him/her trust God's providence more fully in the details of life? I was pleased to see that these questions garnered the highest marks across the board.

It did become apparent through the week-to-week sermon evaluations that at least one individual was not connecting with the series, for a reason unknown to me. Her evaluations, including her final series evaluation form, are consistently 1-2 marks lower than any of the others. For several weeks the evaluations consisted of the exact same number down the page. She is also the only one throughout the series to give any mark below the "average." She offered no written comments for several consecutive weeks.

Evaluation of Goals

The goals of this project serve as the criteria for evaluating its effectiveness. These goals were laid out long prior to the implementation of the project.

Goal No. 1

The first goal is to review sermons of preachers who use historical illustrations effectively. This goal proved to be one of the most difficult. The first challenge was simply identifying which preachers to examine. The second challenge was finding sermons in which historical illustrations were used. The third challenge was developing a rubric by which to judge the “effectiveness” of the illustration. And the fourth challenge was adapting the common qualities to my individual preaching style and sermons. All of these things were by their nature very subjective.

My pool of preachers from which to draw was limited by exposure, either by myself or others. This limitation of preachers and sermons was heightened by time and accessibility. Thus, I had to rely on sermons by preachers which I knew or suspected contained historical illustrations.

As to effectiveness, I relied on the role for which the preacher seemed to use the historical illustration (introduction to pique interest, illustration to provide clarity, use of humor to drive home an application, etc.) and examined whether or not the purpose was accomplished in my own listening.

To my delightful surprise, the historical illustrations were easy to find and with little exception masterfully told by my three targets (Swindoll, Brunson, and Piper). I was able to hear a plurality of historical illustrations by in each and from that develop a list of key qualities.

Goal No. 2

The second goal was to improve my preaching by presenting historical events with relevance and freshness to a contemporary congregation. This goal would be the application of what I had learned from goal 1 into this project. From my study of effective use of historical illustration, I found these four qualities to be essential: intrigue—enough details or uniqueness to make immediately interesting; brevity—must

be short enough and simple enough that people can follow storyline involving unknown names and places and dates; impact—moral or application of the illustration must be immediately clear; and relevance—must faithfully tie into exposition of text.

I then took these four elements and crafted historical illustrations for my sermons. Regarding intrigue, questions such as the audience's prior knowledge of the individual, events, or places played a huge role. How much do they need to know to make it interesting balanced with what details are superfluous and distract from main point.

Brevity was a major factor. The main focus of the sermon had to be on the main point of the text. How can I tell this illustration as quickly as possible without sacrificing the illustration itself?

Like any good sermon illustration, the goal is impact. Whether it be surprise, conviction, inspiration, building consensus and commonality, every preacher wants each illustration to leave an impression on the hearer's mind and will. The same is true for historical illustrations. The goal is not to entertain or inform, but to impact.

Finally, relevance is crucial in using historical illustrations. Preachers are notoriously bad for utilizing illustrations for impact while being oblivious to the main them of the text. Good point, wrong text. In expository preaching, this is inexcusable. The historical illustration is a doorway into the text and it must connect naturally if it is to be a good illustration.

By intentionally focusing on these four aspects, I believe I was able to improve my preaching, especially my use of historical illustrations.

Goal No. 3

Goal 3 was to lead the congregation to identify and appreciate key persons and events in church history. Each week for the eleven sermons in the series a new individual or event was highlighted. While these may not have been the eleven most important

events in church history, they were eleven very relevant to our context as Western evangelicals.

I would say this project was successful in helping the congregation become introduced to key figures. A couple of the men from the congregation were standing in the hallway near the conclusion of the series and one commented, “Before this I had never heard of John Bunyan. I knew who Paul Bunyan was and his ox, Blue. I would have said John Bunyan must have been Paul’s brother.” Now, he knows the difference.

Goal No. 4

The fourth goal was to equip the congregation for ministry in our world through the use of historical illustrations. Of all the goals, this one may be the hardest to measure because it involves other’s heart and mind and those seeds take time to take root and grow. What I do know, albeit anecdotally, is that I hear church members make comments that indicate a dependence upon the faithful providence of God more often now than I did prior to this project.

How do believers respond when disappointment comes, when suffering is the portion for that day, when tragedy and crisis and death occur? Are the people prepared and equipped to make sense of life, live with unfailing joy, and trust God’s sovereignty? The lab for this goal of this project is not the church auditorium but the physician’s lab, the cemetery plot, the unreached villages of the world, and the courageous, confident rebuke of false teaching. Regarding these things I have some preliminary indications that this goal was at least somewhat achieved.

Goal No. 5

The final goal was to preach a series of expository sermons focusing on the providence of God. This goal was by far the simplest to evaluate because it was either “Yes, I did.” or “No, I did not.” I am glad to say I achieved this goal.

Evaluation of Process

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of evaluating the process of this project is that although the project is complete, the process is not. Faith and spiritual maturity are not quantifiable, especially in the short-term.

Analysis of Project Timing and General Church Demeanor

As I have evaluated the process, I realize that the timing of the project was a key factor. This project took place at a time when morale in our church was at the lowest point it has been in my tenure (now just over four years). While most of the reasons for this are beyond the scope of this paper, I will mention three that I believe are related to this project.

First, the scheduling of this project placed it at a difficult time. The project began in January, and the weather and sickness combined to make consistent attendance a major hurdle. Because attendance was low, the dynamics of the group made the service have low energy and this projected onto the sermon series. On the back end, the Sunday after the series was completed was Resurrection Sunday. Because of the high number of guests and unregenerate in our service, little was said in the service about the project surveys. In addition to this, many families had other activities that deserved their focus and time. This conflict undoubtedly affected the completion and return of post-series surveys.

The second factor project-related and the morale of our church has to do with expository preaching itself. It had been my philosophy, as well as pattern, to primarily preach verse-by-verse through large chunks of Scripture (either entire books or chapters). This style of preaching was very different for some who were used to revivalist-style topical sermons. I was criticized among them for being a “teacher, not a preacher.” While this view was not dominant in the church, a small, vocal minority was at the height

of fervor at the time of this series. The project series, heavy on theology and church history, compounded that negative perception and thus was not well received.

The third factor is linked closely with the second, but on the opposite pole. Due to my emphasis on systematically preaching through books, some in the church had developed a bias against thematic series. This sermon series, following on the heels of a thematic series to close out the previous year was a little exhausting for them. When this project series was completed and we began working our way through a book, I heard many comments of relief and thanksgiving that we were back to “expository preaching.”

I am glad to report that the morale of the church has improved and actually is at its highest point in my tenure. One of the things that this project did was allow for people to flow with the good and bad times trusting God through it all.

Written Survey Analysis

The written survey process was one of the weak spots in this project. I could have improved the response slightly if I had focused more on the surveys during our corporate worship time. However, I did not want the focus, even so briefly, to be on me or my degree pursuits, etc. I wanted the focus to be on Christ and the Word

As I have talked with other Doctor of Ministry candidates who have attempted projects in our area in recent years, this phenomenon is not unique to Pioneer. I believe the reason for this is cultural, yet the outworking is multifaceted.

For one thing, education generally, and advanced theological education especially, is looked on with some skepticism. Many of our people have little formal education and to hand them a packet of five or six pages of questions to read and answer was intimidating, even if the format was simple. Simply by asking for a written survey to

be completed, I estimate I was alienating between 5-10% of the congregation who would qualify as functionally illiterate.¹

Another issue affecting the completion of the survey I presented was a perception among community issue. In small towns, few things are truly anonymous. Some people feel embarrassed that they do not know something, or more commonly regarding evaluations, they believe that a critique or negative comment will be viewed as a personal attack. Therefore, in order to alleviate any awkwardness or embarrassment, people choose not to participate.

I was not at all surprised by the lack of participation. There were a couple of issues that I could have done better as were mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, the strength of this project is not based primarily in the survey data.

Sermon Series Process Analysis

The sermon series was arranged in chronological order according to historical illustration. This plan made the most sense with the thesis of the project being God's providence in two-thousand years of church history. I see no better way for the series to be arranged.

Theological Reflection

I know historical illustrations lead to an understanding of the providence of God. This project has been a blessing to me if for no other reason than allowing me to study the glory of God as he has demonstrated it throughout church history. My appreciation of the fact that it is God, who through Jesus Christ, builds, sustains, and protects his church has grown exponentially.

¹The survey data supports this argument. For example, the participation from those having master's degree or higher was 100 percent and over one-half of pre-series questionnaire participants have attended or graduated high school. This does not correspond accurately to the demographics of the church or community.

Researching and writing chapters 2 and 3 were the most fruitful aspect of this project in my own life and ministry. I see the benefit of immersing oneself in a particular aspect of theology for a season in order to understand that biblical doctrine and be able to articulate it well. Unfortunately, after seminary, few pastors ever take the time and energy to do serious doctrinal study.

With such an overarching doctrine as providence, my studies glean fruit in numerous texts as well as pastoral ministry. I am amazed at how often others have asked me to evaluate and recommend a book on providence either for academic or popular reading.

This project also stretched me theologically, causing me to interact critically with the views of providence of different theological persuasions (i.e. process theology and open theism) with whom I may not have taken the time to read the literature firsthand.

My reading, understanding, and appreciation of Scripture has also been enhanced. It is amazing how often the truths of God's sovereignty and providence appear on the pages of the Bible.

One of the aspects of ministry I would like to build over the course of my life is to teach church history to the church. While there is great teaching in seminaries, the vast majority of people have no idea of the workings of God on the linear plane of history. As a result of this neglect, our spiritual growth is stunted. I would like to find avenues to teach these truths on a popular level.

Personal Reflection

This project has been of great personal benefit to me as a pastor, as an expository preacher, and as leader. As a pastor, this project has shown the benefits of rich theological focus in my own life and the blessings of the discipline of teaching those theological concepts to the church. No matter what we may hope to believe, the reality is

the majority of people in our pews will never read a theological treatise or even Christian biography. Therefore, if systematic theology or historical theology are going to be used to make disciples, and my contention is that is the purpose they serve, it relies on shepherds of the church to provide it. One cannot feed others on that which they have not fed themselves. Therefore, as a pastor, I must be out in front in regards to theological thought and training.

This series really challenged me to grow as an expository preacher. Thematic series are much more difficult for me to preach than book series. The additional challenge in this project was the historical illustration which a fixed item in each one. The twin components of text and illustration became trusses upon which the sermon had to faithfully bridge. Application had to faithfully flow from both as well. It is much more difficult to say, “This is what the text says. This is what the text means. This is how the meaning of this text was used by God in the life of this person in the past. Now, since the meaning of the passage has not changed, this is the corresponding application of how God wants to use this text in your life.”

From a leadership perspective, this project taught me perseverance. This sermon series was not built on pizzazz. It did not correspond to people’s felt needs. Few people in Mercer County, Kentucky, wakes on a Sunday morning and thinks, “I wonder what theological implications the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 has on my life today.” Yet, I believe that a knowledge of a sovereign God, whose plans are not thwarted and whose promises are always fulfilled, plays a significant role in building our faith. And I believe that a biblical view of history gives us a perspective and purpose for our lives. And God has graced me with the privilege of beginning to see that hard work with the text sprout and grow in the soil of people’s lives.

I cannot be short-sighted as a leader. I must be concerned with long-term health than short-term fixes. These convictions were confirmed and strengthened through

this project. Dealing with the disappointment and even the depression that followed preaching the project was valuable learning experience.

Another area of personal growth through this project has been the joy of reading Christian biography as devotional literature. To see God's providence in the lives of men and women of faith throughout history makes my heart burn with a passion toward him. This discipline is one that I have learned and enjoyed because of this project.

Conclusion

Immediately upon the completion of the project, I would have commented that I did not feel this project was successful. However, now some months removed from it, I continually see evidences and hear testimonies of how the people of Pioneer Baptist Church, Harrodsburg, Kentucky, have learned about the providence of God by the use of historical illustrations in expository sermons. From my perspective, the journey has been full of surprises, disappointments, setbacks, and all the joys and pains of pastoral ministry. But through it all, God builds, protects, and sustains his church, with providential care. To God be the glory, great things he has done . . . and great things may he continue to do.

APPENDIX 1

HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATION FROM SERMON No. 4 LOVE THE TRUTH, LIVE THE TRUTH, DIE FOR TRUTH JOHN 1:1-5, 9-18

Imagine you are in a Mediterranean beach town. But you're not there to relax and sunbathe or even to sight-see, you are there for something far more significant than that. You are there to take part in a theological debate. (Doesn't that sound like a dream vacation!) And this debate wasn't just something that was a disagreement among friends over a cup of coffee. It did not result in a couple of books being written or a local church splitting. This debate led to Christians rioting in the streets. And you realize that this is not just a simple debate to win...it is a debate that will define biblical Christianity for centuries to come. For one to lose this debate would have you not only branded as a heretic and expelled from the church, but will probably mean the end of your life.

Now, that may seem far-fetched to you, very distant from where we live, but in the year is A.D. 325, that is exactly what happened. But even in the midst of such division, discord, and debate in the church, Jesus' promise to build, protect, and sustain his church was very much alive. God was at work through his people and through his Word raising up champions of truth—those that were willing to question and oppose the established tradition of the day because of what they saw as theological error. And God used the most unlikely of people in the most unlikely of places.

We saw last week that often the fiery schemes of the devil that are intended to destroy Christ's church come from opposition outside the church. But, what we see today is that Satan has his minions inside the church as well. There is opposition that comes from within. And that is what happened on this occasion.

The issue at the heart of the debate was the nature of Jesus Christ. Is Jesus Christ fully human and fully God? More specifically, is Jesus similar to God or is he the same in substance as God. You may think that is no reason to get very upset. It may seem like theological hair-splitting. But it is not. It is all-important. Salvation is at stake. If Jesus Christ was not fully God and fully man, we are all still lost in our sins. We are without hope of being saved. Only one who was fully human could represent man and pay the penalty for man's sin; only one who was fully God could represent God have the power to save us.

At the heart of this controversy was a man by the name of Arius. Arius claimed that Jesus was not eternal, therefore, he was not God. He was a created being. His teaching focused on the point that Jesus was "begotten," that is that he had a beginning, "there was a time when Christ was not" was a slogan. In Arius' mind there was no Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There was only 1 God—what we would call God the Father. Jesus was not seen as God and in no way equal to him. Arianism is still very much alive today in what is known as Jehovah's Witnesses.

To settle the dispute, a council of bishops was called. This was a meeting of the pastors and theologians throughout the land to come together, discuss the issue, debate it, pray, and examine the Scriptures and set the course for what faithfulness to the Bible was to be regarding this issue of Was Jesus really God. The basic question they sought to answer was what Christians must believe in order to be considered authentically Christian.

This meeting in the year 325 A.D. is still to this day considered one of the most important events in church history. The council lasted 2 months. 1,800 bishops were invited to Nicea, a city in Turkey, 318 came. Among them was a man you're probably familiar with, a bishop from Myra, a city in Turkey, named Nicholas. You know him as St. Nicholas...yes THAT ST. Nicholas jolly old St. Nicholas. Now, legend has it that Nicholas, who was very strongly against the heresy of Arianism (denying Jesus was

actually God), attacked the heresy of Arius in a very personal way— he slapped Arius in the face! In reality, there is no record of anything Ole St. Nick did at Nicea, but he was there.

The champion for the biblical view of Christ was a young man in his 20s named Athanasius. He was called by his critics the “Black Dwarf.” He was a short, dark-skinned Egyptian bishop with plenty of enemies. He actually came to Nicea as an assistant to the bishop of Alexandria, Egypt named Alexander. However, throughout the controversy, he challenged error and proclaimed truth. Much of what we take for granted as “well, all Christians believe that” today, we owe to Athanasius and men like him who heroically stood for truth. He came to be known as the “saint of stubbornness” because of his uncompromising opposition to false teaching.

Even though Athanasius is a hero to Christians, he wasn’t always well-liked by those in political power. Many of them had false ideas about God, and many were fond of Arianism. He was exiled 5 times by 4 different political leaders. He spent 17 of the 45 years he was a bishop living in exile. When you stand for truth and challenge the prevailing, traditional notions people have about religion, you’re not going to be popular.

Athanasius wrote a book that is still available today (some 1700 years later) called *On the Incarnation of the Word*. And much of what Athanasius does in that work is appeal to God’s Word to prove his point about who Jesus is. And much of his time is spent in the portion of God’s Word we want to look at today—John 1.

Proposition: God providentially uses His Word to build, protect, and sustain His church by formulating right doctrine and rejecting false teaching.

APPENDIX 2

HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATION FROM SERMON No. 9 A GREAT COMMISSION RESURGENCE ISAIAH 54:2-3

Proposition: God providentially uses His Word to drive his people to fulfill the Great Commission by taking the gospel to the world.

Throughout history, there have been times when God's people have had little real enthusiasm for accomplishing what is the very heart of God. But, we're good at disguising it. Many churches claim to be missions minded. What they mean is they take a missions offering, read about missionaries in a few of their monthly activities and occasionally have a missionary speaker in their service. Few churches are mission mobilized.

We are not alone in our apathy concerning evangelizing the nations of the world. There was a time in Baptist life formerly, in England in the late 1700s where they were in need of another Great Commission Resurgence. The people had grown cold, they had become passive and self-centered. As he always does, God raised up by his Word, a man with a passion for the heart of God. God took his word, particularly Isaiah 54:2-3, and he penetrated one man's heart with the truth of this text. The man was a shoemaker by the name of William Carey.

God used this text to burn in Carey's heart a passion for the nations. Carey saw the apathy in the churches in England. Carey wanted to see churches cooperating to send missionaries with the gospel to people who had never heard the message of Jesus Christ. The story is told of a young Carey going one night to a meeting of the local Baptist association in 1790. He stood at the meeting and gave an impassioned plea for the Baptist churches in that part of England to be involved in global missions. One of the

elder ministers in that meeting, a Dr. Ryland, stood in response to Carey's plea, pointed his finger and said, "Young man, sit down. If God sees fit to save the heathen, he'll do so without the help of you or me."

We're surprised and appalled by that story today. And I would say the reason we are appalled is in large part due to the work of God through William Carey. He changed the way Baptists think about missions. He saw the glory of God in the evangelization of the nations. He would not take no for an answer because he was convinced God would not take no for an answer.

William Carey began to preach in every church where he had an opportunity. May 31, 1792, Carey preached this text, Isaiah 54:2-3. His thesis was this: "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God." He expected the people to be greatly moved and obedient to the call. However, that was not the case. The people did not respond. They rose to leave as usual. When Carey, stepping down from the pulpit, saw the people quietly dispersing, he seized pastor Andrew Fuller and commanded 'Oh, Fuller, call them back, call them back! We dare not separate without doing anything!'

As a result of that meeting, a missionary society was formed, and William Carey offered himself as the Society's first missionary-the particular Baptist Missionary Society. Even then it was not easy. His wife was reluctant to go with him. Carey set off to go nevertheless, but after two returns from the docks to persuade her again, Dorothy and his children accompanied him. He served in India seven years without a single convert. He battled debt, disease, his wife's death, but by the grace and power of the Word, Carey saw what God could do.

When William Carey died at age seventy-three, he had seen the many converts, seen the Scriptures translated and printed into forty languages and he had founded a college to train ministers. Even the laws of the land were different as India opened its doors to missionaries and outlawed *sati*, the suicidal burning of widows at the funeral of their dead husbands.

Carey wanted Christ to be known. On his deathbed Carey commanded his missionary friend, "Dr. Duff! You have been speaking about Dr. Carey; when I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey — speak about Dr. Carey's God."

APPENDIX 3

SERMON EVALUTION FORM

Name _____ Text _____ Date _____

	POOR		AVG		WELL
Introduction					
Does it get your attention?	1	2	3	4	5
Did it set up the main subject?	1	2	3	4	5
Is the main idea stated clearly?	1	2	3	4	5
Structure					
Is the overall structure clear?	1	2	3	4	5
Do all points relate to the main idea?	1	2	3	4	5
Are the transitions clear and smooth?	1	2	3	4	5
Conclusion					
Does the sermon build to a climax?	1	2	3	4	5
Is there an adequate summary of ideas?	1	2	3	4	5
Does the audience know what to do as a result?	1	2	3	4	5
Content					
Is the sermon built on the text?	1	2	3	4	5
Is enough background info given?	1	2	3	4	5
Is appropriate application made clearly?	1	2	3	4	5
Is the subject significant?	1	2	3	4	5
Does the sermon teach the meaning of the passage?	1	2	3	4	5
Introductions and Illustrations					
Do the illustrations relate to the main idea?	1	2	3	4	5
Are the illustration interesting?	1	2	3	4	5
Are the illustrations relevant?	1	2	3	4	5
Style					
Does the preacher use words that are appropriate for the audience?	1	2	3	4	5
Does the preacher use words pictures that are colorful?	1	2	3	4	5

Does his style match the style of the audience?	1	2	3	4	5
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Delivery

Does the speaker relate well to the audience?	1	2	3	4	5
Are words pronounced correctly?	1	2	3	4	5
Is his rate of speech appropriate?	1	2	3	4	5
Is his voice easy to listen to?	1	2	3	4	5
Is there variety in volume?	1	2	3	4	5
Does the speaker avoid verbal bridges (uhmms, you knows, etc)?	1	2	3	4	5
Are gestures appropriate?	1	2	3	4	5
Are the facial expressions appropriate?	1	2	3	4	5
Are there any distracting mannerisms?	1	2	3	4	5
Is posture good (tall and relaxed)?	1	2	3	4	5
Is eye contact appropriate?	1	2	3	4	5

General Summary

Does the sermon meet needs?	1	2	3	4	5
Does the sermon go deep into the text?	1	2	3	4	5
Does the audience leave understanding the passage?	1	2	3	4	5
Was the sermon interesting?	1	2	3	4	5
What is your overall impression of the sermon?	1	2	3	4	5

GENERAL COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS:

APPENDIX 4

FINAL SERMON SERIES
EVALUATION FORM

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Uncertain		Agree		Strongly Agree	

1. _____ The sermon series focused on the biblical texts.
2. _____ The sermons' introductions were interesting, contemporary and was a "doorway" into the text.
3. _____ The sermon series was interesting.
4. _____ The sermon series was inspiring/encouraging and/or convicting.
5. _____ I believe I have a much better understanding of the passages hearing this sermon series.
6. _____ The pastor made *specific* application from the biblical text to the congregation.
7. _____ This sermon series speaks to Christ, and links to Christ in an appropriate way.
8. _____ I feel better equipped to serve the Lord because of what I have heard in this sermon series.
9. _____ This sermon series helps me to trust God's providence more fully in the details my life.

What advice, correction, and/or encouragement do you have for the preacher?

APPENDIX 5

CONGREGATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate the level of familiarity and understanding regarding this certain issue. This research is being conducted by Andrew M. Dyer for his Doctor of Ministry project “Using Historical Illustrations in Preaching About the Providence of God at Pioneer Baptist Church, Harrodsburg, Kentucky.” In this research, you will answer questions concerning your understanding of key persons, events, texts, and theological issues in church history, as well as the providence of God. You will also be asked questions to evaluate Andrew M. Dyer’s preaching. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Section 1—General Demographic Information:

1. Name (optional): _____

2. Circle the number of years since you became a Christian:

Not a Christian < 1 year 1-5 years

6-10 years 11-15 years 20 plus years

3. Circle the number of years you have been a member of Pioneer:

Not a Member < 1 year 1-5 years

6-10 years 11-15 years 20 plus years

4. Circle the highest level of education you completed:

Attended high school Graduated high school Attended college

Associate’s degree Bachelor’s degree Graduate/Master’s degree

Section 2—Opinions on Value and Importance of Topic

Please use the following scale to indicate your feelings, opinions, and thoughts regarding the following issues:

- 1—Strongly disagree
- 2—Disagree
- 3—Neutral/No opinion
- 4—Agree
- 5—Strongly Agree

- _____ 1. Learning new things is very important to me.
- _____ 2. I believe God is in control of every detail of life.
- _____ 3. I believe God is at work in my life, even when I can't see how or even when it is the midst of difficult circumstances.
- _____ 4. When I read a promise in the Bible, it excites me to think that God will keep that promise even today.
- _____ 5. It is hard for me to connect events from the past with modern life today.
- _____ 6. I believe that things happen randomly and without any greater purpose.
- _____ 7. I am naturally interested in history and people, places, and events of the past.
- _____ 8. I like to keep journals, mementoes, or other reminders of events that have happened in the past to help me to remember important things, people, and events.
- _____ 9. I am inspired by the stories of other people and find myself wishing I could be like them.
- _____ 10. I believe that God keeps all of His promises.

Section 3—Familiarity with names from church history:

Please use the following scale to indicate how familiar you are with the following names:

0-Never heard of him

1-Heard the name, but have no idea what he did

2-Heard the name and could identify from a list what he did, but couldn't tell you without help.

3-Could tell you some basic facts about name and what he did.

4-Very familiar with the name and his story. Could tell you in some detail about life or key events.

_____ 1. Simon Peter

_____ 2. Titus Flavius Vespasian

_____ 3. Arius

_____ 4. Athanasius

_____ 5. Augustine

_____ 6. Martin Luther

_____ 7. John Bunyan

_____ 8. Jonathan Edwards

_____ 9. William Carey

_____ 10. William Jennings Bryan

_____ 11. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Section 4—Please match the event in the right hand column with the name on the left hand column by placing the correct letter in the blank.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. Peter | a. Roman military commander who destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. |
| _____ 2. Titus Flavius Vespasian | b. Author of <i>Pilgrim's Progress</i> ; spent many years in jail for preaching the gospel |
| _____ 3. Arius | c. Baptist missionary to India; father of the modern Baptist missionary movement |
| _____ 4. Athanasius | d. Apostle; preached sermon on day of Pentecost |
| _____ 5. Augustine | e. pastor and leader in American civil rights movement; assassinated in 1968. |
| _____ 6. Martin Luther | f. prosecuting attorney in the infamous "Scopes Monkey Trial" |
| _____ 7. John Bunyan | g. preacher during the 1 st Great Awakening; served as president of Princeton University; famous for sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" |
| _____ 8. Jonathan Edwards | h. said that Jesus was not fully God; declared to be a heretic at the Council of Nicea |
| _____ 9. William Carey | i. early bishop of Hippo who said that man was "totally depraved" and could only be saved by a work of God's grace |
| _____ 10. William Jennings Bryan | j. German monk who believed in salvation by "faith alone"; nailed 95 Theses to the door of church, which led to the Protestant Reformation |
| _____ 11. Martin Luther King, Jr. | k. early church father and Bishop of Alexandria who argued at Council of Nicea that Jesus was fully God and fully man. |

Section 5—Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible in order to provide useable feedback for the researcher (Andrew M. Dyer) to evaluate the effectiveness of his preaching. Please use the following scale:

1—Strongly disagree; 2—Disagree; 3—Neutral/No opinion; 4—Agree;
5—Strongly Agree

_____ 1. I regularly expect to learn something that I did not know about the Bible through our pastor's preaching.

_____ 2. At times, I have trouble understanding how an event being discussed through illustration connects with the Bible passage being preached.

_____ 3. The preacher's sermons rarely help me to see that God is at work in all the circumstances of my life.

_____ 4. The lives or events talked about usually inspire me to want to live for Christ in such a way that I would make an eternal difference in the world.

_____ 5. My faith in God is usually strengthened because of something I learned during a sermon.

_____ 6. The world today is so different than the world back then, that it is not helpful to spend time learning about things that happened in the past.

_____ 7. The stories of the lives of Christians from the past were told in such a way that it made them "come alive" to me.

_____ 8. I rarely feel better equipped to share my faith with others as a result of something I learn in a sermon.

_____ 9. Usually, because of something I learn in the sermon, I have a better understanding of what I believe.

_____ 10. Generally speaking, an eleven week sermon series is too long.

_____ 11. God regularly uses my pastor's preaching to help me grow in my love and service to Him.

_____ 12. Our pastor's sermons teach me to understand the Bible clearly.

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ABSTRACT

USING HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS IN PREACHING ABOUT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD AT PIONEER BAPTIST CHURCH, HARRODSBURG, KENTUCKY

Andrew Michael Dyer, D.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011
Project Supervisor: Dr. Chad O. Brand

This project teaches the providence of God through the use of historical illustrations in expository sermons. Chapter 1 addresses the context of ministry at Pioneer Baptist Church, Harrodsburg, Kentucky. Also an introduction to the significance and scope of this project presented. In chapter 2, a defense of providence and historical illustration is given from Scripture. An exegesis of Matthew 16:18 forms the basis for the sermon series and project. Chapter 3 examines the biblical doctrine of providence as well as comparing and contrasting five common views. Chapter 4 details the process of the project step by step and gives the sermon texts, titles and historical illustrations. Chapter 5 serves as an analysis of the effectiveness of the project to meet the goals, reflecting on strengths and weaknesses of the project as it occurred as well as offering changes that should take place if a similar project were undertaken again.

VITA

Andrew Michael Dyer

PERSONAL

Born: April 22, 1978, Owensboro, Kentucky
Parents: Michael and Rhonda Dyer
Married: Corrie Renee Riner, January 15, 2000
Children: Hannah Grace, born March 8, 2004
Caleb Andrew, born November 24, 2005
Elizabeth Joy, born November 9, 2007
Lydia Faith, born September 29, 2009
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EDUCATIONAL

Commonwealth Diploma, South Laurel High School, London, Kentucky, 1996
B.A., Campbellsville University, 1999
M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003

MINISTERIAL

Minister of Youth/Young Adults, First Baptist Church, Taylorsville, Kentucky,
2000-2004
Church Planter/Strategy Coordinator, Poland, International Mission Board
2004-2006
Senior Pastor, Pioneer Baptist Church, Harrodsburg, Kentucky 2006-

