

Sovereignty and Providence

From the first page to the last, the reader of Genesis sees God Almighty's sovereignty and providence in the lives of Adam, Noah, and the patriarchs, in the fulfillment of covenant promises, and in God's rule over the nations.

Sovereignty describes God's supreme power and authority over heaven and earth, including but not limited to the universe, all spiritual beings, mankind, all living creatures, and nature itself. The reader is introduced to God's supreme power in the first chapter when God speaks matter into existence out of nothing. This power to create establishes ownership. He is God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth (14:22). As the Creator, He is the absolute Sovereign.

In Genesis, the reader sees God's sovereignty in:

- The pronouncement of judgment upon the serpent, Adam and Eve, and the exile from the Garden of Eden (3).
- Statements like, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." (6:5).
- The changing of people's languages and Yahweh's scattering of humans throughout the earth (11).
- Covenant promises, like God is going to give one man land, make his name great, create from him a great nation, and bless or curse particular individuals as they bless or dishonor him – all manifestations of supreme power
- A declaration of 400 years of affliction for the sons of Abraham in a land that is not theirs and then in the judgment of that nation for their iniquity (15).
- The rescue of one family from a wicked and sinful city before the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19).
- Giving Sarah a son, at the age of 90, after being barren all her life (21).
- Fulfilling the promise God made to Abraham that he would die in a good old age (25:8).
- The message that He gave Rebekah concerning the two nations that were in her womb when in reality it was two sons, but God had determined that each would become a nation (Edomites and Israelites) (25).
- Declarative statements like, "A nation and company of nations shall come from you [Jacob], and kings shall come from your own body." (35) "But God will visit you and bring you up out of this land..." (50:24).

Providence describes God's sovereign involvement in the affairs of mankind such that human choice and responsibility are not compromised while what God has decreed comes to pass. Providence can be distinguished from pure sovereignty in the involvement of humans to accomplish what God has determined will come to pass. For example, it is Pharaoh's choice and decision in every way to elevate Joseph to the position of governor of the land; yet, in hindsight, it becomes evident to Joseph that this was all God's will. Sometimes it is quite difficult to be dogmatic about providence. In chapter 37, 'a man' finds Joseph looking for his brothers. If the man is a human, then this is God's providence guiding this man to find Joseph and give the information he needs to find his brothers. But if the 'man' is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ or an angel made to look like man, then this is supernatural and does not fit the definition of providence. In Genesis, providence is seen the most in the life of Joseph, but there are many other examples of divine providential involvement in the narrative. Finally, providence is another manifestation of God's sovereignty while maintaining the legitimacy of human choice, actions, and individual culpability when sin is involved (42:22).

In Genesis, the reader sees divine providence in:

- A ram caught in a thicket after the angel of Yahweh told Abraham not to end Isaac's life; instead, God provided the burnt offering just as Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering" (22:8).
- The servant of Abraham finding Rebekah in his search for a wife for Isaac (24).
- Esau's sale of the birthright he despised to Jacob such that Jacob would be the recipient of the Abrahamic covenant according to God's plan, yet Scripture is unambiguous: Esau sold the birthright and he did not see its value (25).
- Blessing Jacob's labor to grow his herds of livestock through breeding techniques that should have had no impact on the fertility and survivability of sheep and goats, yet Jacob's flock grew while Laban's did not (30).
- Judah's motivation to make money in the sale of Joseph to the Midianite traders was used by God to preposition Joseph in Egypt before the famine to ensure the sons of Jacob did not die from starvation (37 & 45).
- Selling Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, a captain of the guard, who would have had the power or connections to get Joseph confined in the prison where the king's prisoners were kept. Joseph would be there when the cupbearer and baker each had a dream that needed to be interpreted so that he could eventually interpret Pharaoh's dreams and be released from prison and be promoted to the governor (39, 40 & 41).