

God's Providence Daniel 2:47

From John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, trans. Thomas Myers (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843), Vol. I, 195-199, emphasis added; English updated.

Daniel 2:47 “The king answered Daniel, and said, “Truly your God *is* the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret.”

. . . Whatever sense be adopted, God wished His glory to be proclaimed by the mouth of the profane king, and desired him to be the herald of His own power and influence. But this was peculiarly profitable to those Jews who still remained firm in their allegiance; for the greater part had revolted—notoriously enough, and had degenerated with great facility from the pure worship of God. When led into captivity, they became idolaters and apostates, and denied the living God; but a small number of the pious remained; God wished to promote their benefit, and to strengthen their minds when He drew this confession from the king of Babylon.

But another object was gained, since the king as well as all the Chaldeans and Assyrians were rendered more excuseless. For if the God of Israel was truly God, why did Bel in the meantime retain his rank? *He is the God of gods* — then it must be added at once, He is the enemy of false gods. We observe how Nebuchadnezzar here mingles light with darkness, and black with white, while he confesses the God of Israel to be supreme among gods, and yet continues to worship other deities. For if the God of Israel obtains His right, all idols vanish away. Hence, Nebuchadnezzar contends with himself in this language. But, as I have said, he is seized by a violent impulse, and is not quite in his senses when he so freely declares the power of the only God.

As far then as words go, he says, *truly your God is Himself a God of gods*. The particle *truly* is by no means superfluous here; it is strongly affirmative. For if any one had inquired of him whether Bel and other idols were to be worshipped as gods, he might answer, “yes;” but doubtfully, and according to pre-conceived opinion, since all superstitious worshippers are perplexed, and if ever they defend their superstitions, they do so with the rashness which the devil suggests, but not according to their judgment. In truth, their minds are not composed when they dare to assert their own superstitions to be pious and holy.

But Nebuchadnezzar seems here formally to renounce his own errors; as if he had said—Up until now I acknowledged other gods, but I now change my opinion; I have discovered your God to be the chief of all gods. And, truly, if he really spoke his own mind, he might *perceive* he was doing injustice to his own idols, if there was any divinity in them; Israel's God was confessedly held in utter hatred and abomination by the profane nations. By extolling Him above all gods, he degrades Bel and the whole crew of false gods which the Babylonians worshipped. But, as we have said, he was swayed by impulse and spoke without thinking. He was in a kind of enthusiasm, since God astonished him, and then drew him on to wonder at and to declare His own power.

God is the Lord of kings, sovereign over the world and all its rulers.

He calls him *Lord of kings*, by which eulogium he claims for Him the supreme dominion over the world; he means to assert that **Israel's God not only excels all others, but holds the reins of government over the world. For if He is the Lord of kings, all**

people are under His hand and dominion! and the multitude of mankind cannot be drawn away from His empire, if He rules their very monarchs.

We understand, therefore, the meaning of these words, namely, whatever deity is worshipped is inferior to the God of Israel, because He is high above all gods; then **His providence rules over the world, while He is Lord of all peoples and kings, and governs all things by His will.**

As God is sovereign, nothing happens without God's permission, and He foresees all things that come to pass because He ordained them.

He adds, *He is a revealer of secrets.* This is our proof of Divinity, as we have said elsewhere. For Isaiah, when wishing to prove the existence of only one God, takes these two principles, namely, **Nothing happens without His permission; and He foresees all things.** God declared, "I have declared the former things from the beginning; They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did *them*, and they came to pass. Because I knew that you *were* obstinate, And your neck *was* an iron sinew, And your brow bronze, Even from the beginning I have declared *it* to you; Before it came to pass I proclaimed *it* to you, Lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, And my carved image and my molded image Have commanded them'" (Isaiah 48:3-5).

These two principles have been inseparably unified. Although Nebuchadnezzar did not understand what was the true peculiarity of Divinity, yet he is here impelled by the secret instinct of God's Spirit clearly to set forth God's power and wisdom. Hence he confesses the God of Israel to excel all gods, since He obtains power in the whole world, and nothing whatever is concealed from Him.

Not only can God predict future events, but He also ordained them. Calvin contrasts God's foreknowledge with the false view of prescience.

He adds the reason — *Daniel could reveal that secret.* This reason does not seem a very good one; for he infers the world to be governed by one God, because Daniel made this secret known. But, then "this has no reference to His power." The answer to this remark is easy; we showed elsewhere how we ought not to imagine a god like Apollo who can only predict future events. And, **truly, it is far too insipid to attribute to God simple prescience, as if the events of the world had any other dependence than upon His power; for God is said to have a previous knowledge of future events, because He determined what He wished to have done.**

Nothing happens by chance! God's providence rules over all. Do things happen by accident or apart from God's sovereign will? Not a chance!

Hence Nebuchadnezzar concluded the dominion of the whole world to be in God's hands, because He could predict futurity; for unless He had the full power over the future, He could not predict anything with certainty. **As, therefore, He really predicts future events, this clearly determines all things to be ordained by Him, and disproves the existence of chance, while He fulfills whatever He has decreed.**

Flee from idolatry and false religion!

Let us learn from this passage, how insufficient it is to celebrate God's wisdom and power with noisy declamation, unless we at the same time reject all superstitions from our minds, and so cling to the only God as to bid all others heartily farewell. No fuller

verbal confession can be required than is here set before us; and yet we observe how Nebuchadnezzar was always involved in Satan's impostures, because he wished to retain his false gods, and thought it sufficient to yield the first place to the God of Israel.

Let us learn again, to do our best in purging the mind from all superstitions, that the only God may pervade all our senses. Meanwhile, we must observe how severe and dreadful a judgment awaits Papists, and all like them [e.g., Arminians], who at least ought to be imbued with the rudiments of piety, while they confess the existence of but one supreme God, and yet mingle together a great multitude of deities, and dishonor both His power and wisdom, and at the same time observe, what is here said by a profane king. For the Papists not only divide God's power, by distributing it in parts to each of their saints; but also when they speak of God Himself, they fancy Him as knowing all things beforehand, and yet **leaving all things contingent on man's free will; first creating all things, and then leaving every event in suspense.** Hence heaven and earth, as they bear either men's merits or crimes, at one time become useful, and at another adverse to mankind.

Thus, Arminians leave all things contingent (dependent) on man's free will, as though God created the world and then left every event in suspense not able or willing to rule and govern His Creation. This is idolatry, for the God of Holy Scripture leaves nothing to chance. He has foreordained whatever comes to pass.

Truly enough, neither rain, nor heat, nor cloudy nor serene weather, nor anything else happens without God's permission; and whatever is adverse is a sign of His curse; whatever is prosperous and desirable is the sign of His favor. This, indeed, is true, but when the Papists lay their foundation in the will of man, we see how they deprive God of His rights. **Let us learn, then, from this passage, not to attribute to God less than was conceded by this profane king.**