

Distinctions in God's Will

Sovereign Will and Revealed Will

Is everything that happens God's will?

As we have seen, God's will is seen as the final authority and the ultimate reason for everything that happens. God's "*permitting*" or "*preventing*" in Providence is the determining factor. But is everything that happens God's will? This can be a very puzzling question unless you make a distinction which is clearly seen in Scripture. The distinction is between God's Sovereign will and God's Moral will. Many times in Scripture we see that God's desire for our moral conduct is violated by the free choices of mankind, yet God does not prevent but rather permits this to occur. So then it is not His "*moral will*" that evil should take place, but in His "*Sovereign will*" He has permitted it to happen. We find out God's "*moral will*" by simply reading His "*precepts*" and "*commanded will*" about what we should do or how we should behave. We find out God's "*Sovereign will*" when events actually happen and the "*secret*" counsel of God is "*revealed*", the things He has planned and "*decreed*" from all eternity. So when we ask questions like, "Is it God's will for me to do this or that," we simply look to God's revelation in Scripture about what He desires for us to do. But when events actually occur, we see what the secret counsel of God's Sovereign will, what he has ordained and approved (what He has permitted or prevented to occur) as it is revealed in time and space. Therefore it is important when discussing these matters to make a clear distinction in the "*will of God*" for the sake of properly understanding one another when we make statements about God's will. See the table below on the "*Two Wills of God.*"

The Two Wills of God

Deuteronomy 29:29 - "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. NASB

SOVEREIGN WILL	MORAL WILL
Also called..... SECRET WILL WILL OF DECREE	Also called..... REVEALED WILL COMMANDED WILL WILL OF PRECEPT
<i>God's Sovereign will includes God's hidden decrees by which He governs everything that happens. We find out God's Sovereign will when events actually happen.</i>	<i>God's moral will expresses God's general desire concerning things and usually contains God's commands about our moral conduct.</i>
Ephesians 1:11 James 4:15 Genesis 50:20 Matthew 11:25-26 1 Corinthians 4:19 Acts 2:23, 4:28,21:14 Romans 1:10, 9:18, 15:32 1 Peter 3:17, 4:19	Exodus 20:1-17 Ephesians 5:17 Romans 2:18 1 John 5:14 Matthew 6:10, 7:21, 12:50, 18:14 1 Timothy 2:4 2 Peter 3:9 Ezekiel 33:11

Examples of distinctions in God's will are clearly seen in Scripture or in the world around us. Many times it is NOT God's will(His moral will, His general desire) for evil to take place, but his **permitting and NOT preventing** obviously makes it His Sovereign will(His will of Decree or Secret will), that which He determined should happen from all Eternity. Consider the following.....

- **Genesis 50:20 – Joseph and his brothers**
 Genesis 50:20 - 20 "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but **God meant it for good in order** to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. NASB
- **Acts 2:23 – The murder of Jesus**
 Acts 2:23 - 23 this Man, delivered up **by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. NASB
- **Genocide in War**
- **911- The Twin Towers**

In light of this knowledge, consider afresh the statement we looked at by Jonathan Edwards...
"God decreed from all eternity all the evil that He ever does permit, because God's permitting is God's forbearing to act or to prevent. It can be made evident by reason that nothing can come to pass but what is the will and pleasure of God should come to pass."

Know then that the **Scripture plainly declares** a distinction in the will of God between His Sovereign(Secret or Decreed) and Moral(Commanded or Revealed) will.
 Finally, we have come to the third part of our definition of Providence which is referred to as **"Government"** - (3) *directs them to fulfill his purposes.*" Grudem further defines this third aspect in the following way....

“God has a purpose in all that he does in the world and he providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish his purposes.”

The **Scripture plainly declares** that everything that happens is happening ultimately under the Sovereign Authority of God as He **directs them** so that **in the end His purposes are fulfilled**.

Psalms 103:19 - 19 The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; And **His sovereignty rules over all**. NASB

Paul affirms that God works *“all things after the counsel of His will”* and to His *“ends.”*

Ephesians 1:11-12 - 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to **His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end** that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. NASB

Romans 8:28 - 28 And we know **that God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. NASB

Romans 11:36 - 36 For **from Him and through Him and to Him are all things**. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. NASB

The **Scripture plainly declares** this same truth in the Old Testament.

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 - 3 Consider the work of God, For **who is able to straighten what He has bent?** 14 In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider- **God has made the one as well as the other** So that man may not discover anything that will be after him. NASB

Daniel 4:34-35 - For **His dominion is an everlasting dominion**, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 "And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But **He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth;** And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?' NASB

Psalms 135:5-6 - 5 For I know that **the LORD is great, And that our Lord is above all gods. 6 Whatever the LORD pleases, He does**. In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. NASB

And lastly, that *“all things”* have been placed by God the Father *“in subjection”* the Sovereign Authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son. The **Scripture plainly declares** that everything in the universe, seen and unseen, is under Christ’s personal dominion.

1 Corinthians 15:27 - 27 For **He has put all things in subjection under His feet**. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. NASB

Ephesians 1:20-22 - 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far **above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named**, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. 22 And **He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things** to the church, NASB

Philippians 2:9-11 - 9 Therefore also **God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name**, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, 11 and that **every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father. NASB

Scriptures for Distinctions in God’s Will

Sovereign Will

God’s Sovereign will requested

James 4:15 - 15 Instead, you ought to say, **"If the Lord wills**, we shall live and also do this or that." NASB

1 Corinthians 4:18-20 - 19 But I will **come to you soon, if the Lord wills**, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power. 20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power. NASB

Acts 21:13 - 14 And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, **"The will of the Lord be done!"** NASB

Romans 1:10 - 10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last **by the will of God I may succeed in coming** to you. NASB

Romans 15:32-33 - 32 so that I may **come to you in joy by the will of God** and find refreshing rest in your company. 33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen. NASB

God's Sovereign will in permitting Evil

Ephesians 1:11-12 - 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to **His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, 12 to the end** that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. NASB

Genesis 50:20 - 20 "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but **God meant it for good in order** to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. NASB

Acts 2:23 - 23 this Man, delivered up **by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. NASB

Acts 4:27-28 - 27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **28 to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur**. NASB

God's Sovereign will in revealing the Gospel to some and not others

Matthew 11:25-26 - 25 At that time Jesus answered and said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. 26 "Yes, Father, **for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight**. NASB

Romans 9:18 - 18 So then He has mercy **on whom He desires**, and He hardens whom He desires. NASB

God's Sovereign will in Christian Suffering

1 Peter 3:17 - 17 For it is better, **if God should will it so, that you suffer** for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. NASB

1 Peter 4:19 - 19 Therefore, let those also **who suffer according to the will of God** entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. NASB

Moral Will

God's general desire expressed in His Moral Will

Ephesians 5:17 - 17 So then do not be foolish, but **understand what the will of the Lord is**. NASB

Romans 2:18 - 18 and **know His will**, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, NASB

1 John 5:14 - 14 And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything **according to His will**, He hears us. NASB

Matthew 6:10 - 10 "Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done**, On earth as it is in heaven. NASB

Matthew 7:21 - 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but **he who does the will of My Father** who is in heaven. NASB

Matthew 12:50 - 50 "For whoever **does the will of My Father** who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother." NASB

Exodus 20:1-17 - 20:1 Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 "**You shall** have no other gods before Me. 4 "**You shall not** make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 **You shall not** worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth

generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. 7 "**You shall not** take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. 8 "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days **you shall** labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it **you shall not** do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. 12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. 13 "**You shall not** murder. 14 "**You shall not** commit adultery. 15 "**You shall not** steal. 16 "**You shall not** bear false witness against your neighbor. 17 "**You shall not** covet your neighbor's house; **you shall not** covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." NASB

God's Moral will in people being saved or not

Matthew 18:14 - 14 "Thus **it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.** NASB

1 Timothy 2:4 - 4 **who desires all men to be saved** and to come to the knowledge of the truth. NASB

2 Peter 3:9 - 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.** NASB

Ezekiel 33:11 - 11 "Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, '**I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.** Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'" NASB

Deuteronomy 28:63 - 63 And it shall come about that as the LORD delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so **the LORD will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you;** and you shall be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it. NASB

For further understanding read below.....

The Sovereignty of God God's Dominion - In Providence

The Providence Of God Defined

Indeed the doctrine of God's Providence is one of the great mysteries of the Bible. However, it is found on almost every page of Scripture. In fact, Providence is assumed and implied constantly by biblical writers, as we shall see. So what does Providence mean, and how is it described in the Bible? The best definition that I have seen of God's Providence comes from Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology, it reads.....

"God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them; (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes."

Now consider just how profound this statement really is....in so doing we will break it down and look at the biblical evidence of each of its parts. We will start with the first section, it is called **"Preservation"**

"God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them;

Here Providence is described as God's "continual involvement." God has not left the world to spin of its own power, but He is constantly maintaining its activity by His own hand...

Hebrews 1:2-3 - 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, **through whom also He made the world.** 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and **upholds all things by the word of His power.** NASB

Here the Scripture says of God that He "upholds all things." Could there be a more explicit statement of His "continual involvement?" Well, consider Colossians 1:17....

Colossians 1:16-17 - 16 For by Him all things were created, **both in the heavens and on earth,** visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- **all things have been created by Him and for Him.** 17 And He is before all things, and **in Him all things hold together.** NAS

Here the context of both the Hebrews and Colossians passages make it crystal clear that the scope of this **"Preservation"** is **"all of the created order of matter and beings."** It would be wrong to think that God is somehow merely holding the planet in orbit, but not men and angels. This is continually affirmed in Scripture.....

Acts 17:28 - 28 **for in Him we live and move and exist.** NASB

Job 34:14-15 - 14 "If He should determine to do so, **If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath,** 15 **All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust.** NASB

Therefore, when we think about God's activity of Providence in His world, we should think of it as **"continual involvement."** God is outside and separate and distinct from His creation, yet He is governing it by a mighty Providence. God is not somehow abstractly intervening in the events of History when He thinks its time to do something, but rather He is literally "the glue which holds it all together" and is constantly at work in the universe to hold everything together. God is not the creation(Pantheism), nor has God abandoned the creation to run by itself(Deism). Rather, God *"keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them."*

The second section the is what we call **"Concurrence."** It is stated as....

(2) *cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do;*

Here we are saying that God “*cooperates.*” God is not everything, but rather cooperates with everything. He is separate and distinct from everything and further is cooperating with the things He has made in such a way as to “*direct them.*” This is seen in so many places in the Bible that it can hardly be mistaken. God is literally in control of Nature and History in such a way that He is involved in “*every action, directing*” them. Let us look at the testimony of Scripture.

God's control of Nature

When we speak of God's control of nature we are saying that He is in control of planetary movements, weather patterns, animals and people, angels and demons, and every creature He has made. At the command of God burst forth the great springs of the deep in the days of Noah. With His voice opened He the heavens to pour down rain for 40 days and nights. Tornado and tempest, lightning and thunder, winds and waves- each one the servant of God sent to do His bidding and performing all His good pleasure. There is not a maverick storm in all the ages that He did not command its every whim!

Job 37:1-13 - "At this also my heart trembles, And leaps from its place. 2 "Listen closely to the thunder of His voice, And the rumbling that goes out from His mouth. 3 "Under the whole heaven **He lets it loose, And His lightning to the ends of the earth.** 4 "After it, a voice roars; He thunders with His majestic voice; And He does not restrain the lightnings when His voice is heard. 5 "God thunders with His voice wondrously, Doing great things which we cannot comprehend. 6 "**For to the snow He says, 'Fall on the earth,' And to the downpour and the rain, 'Be strong.'** 7 "**He seals the hand of every man, That all men may know His work.** 8 "Then the beast goes into its lair, And remains in its den. 9 "Out of the south comes the storm, And out of the north the cold. 10 "**From the breath of God ice is made,** And the expanse of the waters is frozen. 11 "Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning. 12 "And it changes direction, turning around by His guidance, That it may do whatever He commands it On the face of the inhabited earth. 13 "**Whether for correction, or for His world, Or for lovingkindness, He causes it to happen.** NASB

Psalms 135:6-7 - Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. 7 **He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who makes lightnings for the rain; Who brings forth the wind from His treasures.** NASB

Mark 4:38-41 - 38 And He Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" 39 And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And **the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.** 40 And He said to them, "Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?" 41 And they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" NASB

Job 38:12-13 - 12 "Have you ever in your life **commanded the morning, And caused the dawn to know its place;** 13 That it might take hold of the ends of the earth, And the wicked be shaken out of it? NASB

Psalms 103:20 - 20 Bless the LORD, you His angels, Mighty in strength, **who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word!** NASB

God's control of events in History

Not only does God control Nature, but because of this is “*in every action directing*” the events of History. The **Scripture plainly declares** that God is the primary cause behind everything that happens.

Lamentations 3:37-38 - 37 Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, **Unless the Lord has commanded it?** 38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth? NASB

Isaiah 45:7 - 7 The One forming light and creating darkness, **Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.** NASB

Consider the words of Jonathan Edwards on this matter...

“God decreed from all eternity all the evil that He ever does permit, because God's permitting is God's forbearing to act or to prevent. It can be made evident by reason that nothing can come to pass but what is the will and pleasure of God should come to pass.”

Now the fact that events are seen to be under the control of God is plainly evident in Scripture. In fact **this is the main theme of the whole Bible!** God is Providentially working His will in all things to accomplish His own purposes for the display of His own Glory, Name and Power!

Ephesians 1:9-11 - 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a **view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.** In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.** NASB

Examples from the Old Testament

Many examples could be cited from the Old Testament, here are a few.....

- **The Creation Account** – Genesis chapters 1-2
- **The Flood** – Genesis chapters 6-8
- **The Confounding of the Languages** – Genesis chapter 11
- **The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah** – Genesis chapter 19
- **The Plagues of Egypt** – Exodus chapters 7-12
- **The Exodus, Red Sea, Manna, Water from the Rock** – Exodus chapters 14-17
- **Mt Sinai and the Giving of the Law** – Exodus chapters 19-20
- **Defeat of Sihon and Og** – Numbers chapter 21
- **Conquest of Canaan** – Joshua
- **Numerous interventions in Judges** – Judges
- **Defeat of Sennacherib and 185,000 Assyrians** – 2 Kings chapter 19

Now concerning the doctrine of “**Concurrence**”, remember that God....

(2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do;

See now from the above passages that the Old Testament is literally riddled with accounts of God’s constant “**directing of things to act as they do.**” The **Scripture plainly declares** that God controls the events of History to achieve His own purpose and will. Further, consider that....

God’s providence over the nations is explicitly taught in the Scripture.

Isaiah 40:22-25 - 22 It is He who sits above the vault of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. **23 He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless. 24 Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He merely blows on them, and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble.** 25 "To whom then will you liken Me That I should be his equal?" says the Holy One. NASB

Job 12:16-22 - 16 "With Him are strength and sound wisdom, The misled and the misleader belong to Him. 17 "He makes counselors walk barefoot, And makes fools of judges. **18 "He loosens the bond of kings, And binds their loins with a girdle. 19 "He makes priests walk barefoot, And overthrows the secure ones.** 20 "He deprives the trusted ones of speech, And takes away the discernment of the elders. 21 "He pours contempt on nobles, And loosens the belt of the strong. 22 "He reveals mysteries from the darkness, And brings the deep darkness into light. NASB

Here is seen **God’s Providence over the economic and religious systems of the world.....kings and priests....** God is seen to be Sovereign over the wise and the foolish, the strong and the weak....

Job 12:23-25 - 23 "**He makes the nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges the nations, then leads them away.** 24 "He deprives of intelligence the chiefs of the earth’s people, And makes them wander in a pathless waste. 25 "They grope in darkness with no light, And He makes them stagger like a drunken man. NASB

Even the very spiritual darkness of the nations is said here to be God’s doing, as is also the case in Romans 11:32. Here we see also that when a nation becomes great and powerful, it is God’s doing. And when a nation is destroyed, it is God’s doing. This is an irrefutable reality.... **God is Sovereign over the nations of the earth!** They belong to Him and exist for His purposes and for the good pleasure of His will. This fact is clear from man places in the bible like **Psalms 22:28, 82:8 or 47:78** which says....

Psalms 47:7-8 - 7 For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm. 8 **God reigns over the nations**, God sits on His holy throne. NASB

Note then that the **Old Testament plainly declares** that God providentially directs the outcome of the rise and fall of nations and explicitly teaches that God is constantly directing the affairs of the History of mankind.

Examples from the New Testament

Consider that the entire life and ministry of Jesus the Christ is a manifestation of God's Providence in the affairs of History. Examine just a few of the accounts in the gospels....

- **The Virgin Birth of Jesus the Christ** – Luke chapters 1-3
- **The Calming of the Raging Sea** – Matthew 8:26
- **The Lame Walk** – John chapter 5
- **The Blind See** – John chapter 9
- **The Dead Live Again** – John chapter 11
- **The Resurrection** – Matthew chapter 28

Many other examples of “Concurrence” could be cited from the New Testament, here are a few.....

- **The Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost** – Acts chapter 2
- **Numerous Signs and Wonders done by the hand of the Apostles** – Acts
- **Peter's Deliverance from Prison** – Acts chapter 12
- **The Conversion and Calling of Saul of Tarsus** – Acts chapter 9
- **The Death of Herod** – Acts chapter 12
- **The Trumpet and Bowl Judgments** – Revelation chapters 7-11, 16
- **The Beast, False Prophet thrown into the Lake of Fire** – Revelation chapter 19

Further, think of how God mysteriously works in the free choices of men to accomplish His purposes. This “Concurrence” is most clearly seen in the passages in Acts.....

Acts 2:22-24 - 22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know — 23 **this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.** 24 "And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. NASB
Acts 4:27-28 - 27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 **to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.** NASB

Note then that the **New Testament plainly declares** and explicitly teaches that God is constantly directing the affairs of the History of mankind.

What about Evil? Does God cause Evil? Does God ordain evil?

Grudem wisely states..... *“If God does indeed cause, through his providential activity, everything that comes about in the world, then the question arises... “What is the relationship between God and evil in the world?” Does God actually cause the evil actions that people do? If he does, then is God not responsible for sin? We can begin by looking at several passages that affirm that God did, indeed, cause evil events to come about and evil deeds to be done. But we must remember that in all these passages it is very clear that”* ...and also the following.....

- Scripture *nowhere shows God as directly doing anything evil* but rather as bringing about evil deeds through the willing actions of moral creatures.
- Scripture *never blames God for evil* or shows God as taking pleasure in evil
- Scripture *never excuses human beings for the wrong they do.*

However we understand God's relationship to evil, we must **NEVER**.....

- come to the point where we *think that we are not responsible for the evil* that we do

- or that *God takes pleasure in evil* or is to be blamed for it.

“There are literally dozens of Scripture passages that say that God (indirectly) brought about some kind of evil. I have quoted such an extensive list (in the next few paragraphs) because Christians often are unaware of the extent of this forthright teaching in Scripture. Yet it must be remembered that in all of these examples, the evil is actually done not by God but by people or demons who choose to do it.”

- **Genesis ch 37-45** ... A very clear example is found in the story of Joseph. Scripture clearly says that Joseph’s brothers were wrongly jealous of him (Gen. 37:11), hated him (Gen. 37:4, 5, 8), wanted to kill him (Gen. 37:20), and did wrong when they cast him into a pit (Gen. 37:24) and then sold him into slavery in Egypt (Gen. 37:28). Yet later Joseph could say to his brothers, “*God sent me before you to preserve life*” (Gen. 45:5), and “*You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today*” (Gen. 50:20). Here we have a combination of evil deeds brought about by sinful men who are rightly held accountable for their sin and the overriding providential control of God whereby God’s own purposes were accomplished. Both are clearly affirmed.
- **Exodus ch 4-14**... The story of the exodus from Egypt repeatedly affirms that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh: God says, “I will harden his heart” (Ex. 4:21), “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 7:3), “the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh” (Ex. 9:12), “the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 10:20, repeated in 10:27 and again in 11:10), “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 14:4), and “the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Ex. 14:8).

What was God’s purpose in this? Paul reflects on Exodus 9:16 and says, “For the scripture says to Pharaoh, “I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so **that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth”** (Rom. 9:17). Then Paul infers a general truth from this specific example: “So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills” (Rom. 9:18). In fact, God also hardened the hearts of the Egyptian people so that they pursued Israel into the Red Sea: “I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen” (Ex. 14:17). This theme is repeated in Psalm 105:25: “He turned their hearts to hate his people.”

- **Joshua 11:20**... “For it was the LORD’s doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed” (Josh. 11:20; see also Judg. 3:12; 9:23).
- **Judges 14:4**... And Samson’s demand to marry an unbelieving Philistine woman “was from the LORD; for he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel”
- **1 Samuel 2:25**... We also read that the sons of Eli, when rebuked for their evil deeds, “would not listen to the voice of their father; for it was the will of the LORD to slay them”
- **1 Samuel 16:14**... Later, “an evil spirit from the LORD” tormented King Saul
- **2 Samuel 24:1, 1 Chronicles 21:1**... Still later in David’s life, the Lord “incited” David to take a census of the people (2 Sam. 24:1), but afterward David recognized this as sin, saying, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done” (2 Sam. 24:10), and God sent punishment on the land because of this sin (2 Sam. 24:12–17). However, it is also clear that “the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel” (2 Sam. 24:1), so God’s inciting of David to sin was a means by which he brought about punishment on the people of Israel. Moreover, **the means by which God incited David is made clear in 1 Chronicles 21:1: “Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel.”** In this one incident

the Bible gives us a remarkable insight into the three influences that contributed in different ways to one action: God, in order to bring about his purposes, worked through Satan to incite David to sin, but Scripture regards David as being responsible for that sin.

In the story of **Job**, though **the LORD gave Satan permission** to bring harm to Job's possessions and children, and though this harm came through the evil actions of the Sabeans and the Chaldeans, as well as a windstorm (Job 1:12, 15, 17, 19), yet Job looks beyond those secondary causes and, with the eyes of faith, sees it all as from the hand of the Lord: "the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; *blessed be the name of the LORD*" (Job 1:21). The Old Testament author follows Job's statement immediately with the sentence, "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" (Job 1:22). Job has just been told that evil marauding bands had destroyed his flocks and herds, yet with great faith and patience in adversity, he says, "*The LORD has taken away.*" Though he says that the LORD had done this, yet he does not blame God for the evil or say that God had done wrong: he says, "Blessed be the name of the LORD." To *blame* God for evil that he had brought about through secondary agents would have been to sin. Job does not do this, Scripture never does this, and neither should we.

"Elsewhere in the Old Testament we read that **the Lord "put a lying spirit in the mouth" of Ahab's prophets** (1 Kings 22:23) and sent the wicked Assyrians as "the rod of my anger" to punish Israel (Isa. 10:5)."

"In many of the passages mentioned above, God brings evil and destruction on people in judgment upon their sins: They have been disobedient or have strayed into idolatry, and then the LORD uses the following to bring judgment on them..."

- **evil human beings**
- **demonic forces**
- **"natural" disasters**

"Therefore, when God brings evil on human beings, whether to discipline his children, or to lead unbelievers to repentance, or to bring a judgment of condemnation and destruction upon hardened sinners, none of us can charge God with doing wrong. Ultimately all will work in God's good purposes to bring glory to him and good to his people. Yet we must realize that in punishing evil in those who are not redeemed (such as Pharaoh, the Canaanites, and the Babylonians), God is also glorified through the demonstration of his justice, holiness, and power" (see Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:14–24). End Grudem's commentary here.....

One helpful thing to remember is the element of "**mystery**" in God's Providence. Grudem wisely states.. "**What If We Cannot Understand This Doctrine Fully?** Every believer who meditates on God's providence will sooner or later come to a point where he or she will have to say, "I cannot understand this doctrine fully." In some ways that must be said about every doctrine, since our understanding is finite, and God is infinite (see chapter 1, pp. 34–35; cf. p. 150). But particularly is this so with the doctrine of providence: we should believe it because Scripture teaches it even when we do not understand fully how it fits in with other teachings of Scripture."