

for this special purpose. Others will hold it more worthy of God to communicate directly with man, from spirit to spirit, without the use of sensory means; these will therefore take the Biblical description as figurative or mythical. In fact, he who does not cling to the letter of the Scripture will probably regard all the miracles as poetical views of divine Providence, as child-like imagery expressing the ancient view of the eternal goodness and wisdom of God. To us also God is "a Doer of wonders," but we experience His wonder-working powers in ourselves. We see wonders in the acts of human freedom which rises superior to the blind forces of nature. The true miracle consists in the divine power within man which aids him to accomplish all that is great and good. Only a primitive age could think of God as altering the order of nature which He had fixed, so as to let iron float on water like wood to please one person here, or to stop sun, star, or sea in their courses in order to help or harm mankind there. It is more important for us to inquire into the law of the mind by which the fact itself may differ from the peculiar form given it by a narrator. With our historical methods unknown to former ages, we cannot accept any story of a miracle without seeking its intrinsic historical accuracy. After all, the miracle as narrated is but a human conception of what, under God's guidance, really happened.

Accordingly, we must leave the final interpretation of the Biblical narratives to the individual, to consider them as historical facts or as figurative presentations of religious ideas. Even now some people will prefer to believe that the Ten Commandments emanated from God Himself in audible tones, as medieval thinkers maintained. Some will adopt the old semi-rationalistic explanation that He created a voice

¹ II Kings VI, 2.
² I Kings I, 18.
³ Mendelssohn: G. Sch., III, 62, 120 f., 120 f.
⁴ Joshua X, 13.
⁵ Moses, II, 33.

Ruler of a moral government. Thus He directs all the acts of men toward the end which He has set. Judaism is most sharply contrasted with deism at this point. Deism is an either-
 either nature or merges the deity into nature. Thus there is no place for a God who knows all things and provides for all in nature.

CHAPTER XXVIII
 PROVIDENCE AND THE MORAL GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD

1. None of the precious truths of Judaism has become more indispensable than the belief in divine Providence, which we see about us in ever new and striking forms. Man would succumb from fear alone, beholding the dangers about him on every side, were he not sustained by a conviction that there is an all-wise Power who rules the world for a sublime purpose. We know that even in direst distress we are guided by a divine hand that directs everything finally toward the good. Wherever we are, we are protected by God, who watches over the destinies of man as does the eagle who hovers over her young and bears them aloft on her pinions. Each of us is assigned his place in the all-encompassing plan. Such knowledge and such faith as this comprise the greatest comfort and joy which the Jewish religion offers. Both the narratives and the doctrines of Scripture are filled with this idea of Providence working in the history of individuals and nations.

2. Providence implies first, *provision*, and second, *predestination* in accordance with the divine plan for the government of the world. As God's dominion over the visible world appears in the eternal order of the cosmos, so in the moral world, where action arises from freely chosen aims, God is

¹ The Hebrew term *Hashgaha* — Providence — is derived from Ps. XXXIII, 14, *hishgiah*, "He observes." See J. E., art. Providence; Davidson, l. c., 178-182; Hamburger, R. W. B., II, art. Bestimmung; Rauvenhoff, l. c., 538 f.; Ludwig Philippson: "Israel. Religionsl.," II, 98 f.; Formstecher: "Religion des Geistes," 114-119.

Ruler of a moral government. Thus He directs all the acts of men toward the end which He has set. Judaism is most sharply contrasted with heathenism at this point. Heathenism either deifies nature or merges the deity into nature. Thus there is no place for a God who knows all things and provides for all in advance. Blind fate rules all the forces of life, including the deities themselves. Therefore chance incidents in nature or the positions of the stars are taken as indications of destiny. Hence the belief in oracles and divination, in the observation of flying arrows and floating clouds, of the color and shape of the liver of sacrificial animals, and other signs of heaven and earth which were to hint at the future.¹

On the other hand, Judaism sees in all things, not the fortuitous dealings of a blind and relentless fate, but the dispensations of a wise and benign Providence. It knows of no event which is not foreordained by God. It sanctioned the decision by lot² and the appeal to the oracle (the Urim and Thummim)³ only temporarily, during the Biblical period. But soon it recognized entirely the will of God as the Ruler of destiny, and the people accepted the belief that "the days," "the destinies," and even "the tears" of man are all written in His "book."⁴ Thus they perceived God as "He who knows from the beginning what will be at the end."⁵ The prophets, His messengers, could thus foretell His will. They perceive Him as the One who "created the smith that brought forth the weapon for its work, and created the master who uses it for destruction."⁶ However the foe may rage, he is but

¹ Jer. X, 2. See art. Divination, in J. E.; Dict. Bible; Enc. R. and Eth.

² See Lev. XVI, 8 f.; Num. XXVI, 56; Josh. XVIII-XIX; Prov. XVIII, 18.

³ Ex. XVIII, 30; I Sam. see LXX; XIV, 41.

⁴ Ex. XXXIII, 32; Ps. LVI, 9; CXXXIX, 16; comp., however, the Babylonian "tables of destinies."

⁵ Isa. XL, 21; XLI, 4, 22 f.; Amos III, 7.

⁶ Isa. LIV, 16.

"the scourge in the hand of God," like "the axe in the hand of him who fells the tree."¹ No device of men or nations can withstand His will, for He turns all their doings to some good purpose and transforms every curse into a blessing.²

3. Naturally this truth was first accepted in limited form, in the life of certain individuals. The history of Joseph and of King David were used as illustrations to show how God protects His own. The experiences of the people confirmed this belief and expanded it to apply to the nation. The wanderings of Israel through the wilderness and its entrance to the promised land were regarded as God's work for His chosen people. The prophets looked still further and saw the destinies of all nations, entering the foreground of history one by one, as the sign of divine Providence, so that finally the entire history of mankind became a great plan of divine salvation, centered upon the truth intrusted to Israel.

Beside this conception of *general* Providence ruling in history, the idea of *special* Providence arose in response to human longing. The belief in Providence developed to a full conception of care for the world at large and for each individual in his peculiar destiny, a conviction that divine Providence is concerned with the welfare of each individual, and that the joyous or bitter lot of each man forms a link in the moral government of the world. The first clear statement of this comes from the prophet Jeremiah in his wrestling and sighing: "I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."³ Special Providence is discussed still more vividly and definitely in the book of Job. Later on it becomes a specific Pharisaic doctrine, "Everything is foreseen."⁴ "No man suffers so much as the injury of a finger unless it has been decreed in heaven."⁵ A

¹ Isa. X, 5, 15.

² Isa. VIII, 11; Ps. II, 2 f.; Deut. XXIII, 6.

³ Jer. X, 33.

⁴ Aboth III, 15.

⁵ Hul. 7 a.

divine preordination decides a man's choice of his wife and every other important step of his life.

4. This theory of predestination, however, presents a grave difficulty when we consider it in relation to man's morality with its implication of self-determination. While this question of free will is treated fully in another connection,² we may anticipate the thought at this point. The Jewish conception of divine predestination makes, as much allowance as possible for the moral freedom of man. This is shown in Talmudic sayings, such as "Everything is within the power of God except the fear of God,"³ or "Repentance, prayer, and charity avert the evil decree."⁴ Thus Maimonides expressly states in his Code that the belief in predestination cannot be allowed to influence one's moral or religious character. A man can decide by his own volition whether he shall become as just as Moses or as wicked as Jeroboam.⁵

5. The service of the New Year brings out significantly the Jewish harmonization between the ideas of God's foreknowledge and man's moral freedom. This festival, in the Bible, called the Festival of the Blowing of the Shofar, was transformed under Babylonian influence into the Day of Divine Judgment. But it is still in marked contrast to the Babylonian New Year's Day, when the gods were supposed to go to the House of the Tablets of Destiny in the deep to hear the decisions of fate.⁶ The Jewish sages taught that on this day God, the Judge of the world, pronounces the destinies of men and nations according to their deserts. They thus replaced the heathen idea of blind fate by that of eternal justice, as the formative power of life. Then moved by a desire to mitigate the rigor of stern justice for the frail and failing mortal, they included also God's long-suffering and

A ¹ Gen. XXIV, 50; M. K. 18 b. ² Ch. XXXIV. Ber. 33 b.

³ R. h. Sh. 17 b; New Year's liturgy. ⁴ H. Teshubah, V, 12.

⁵ See, on the Zagmuk festival, Zimmern, K. A. T., p. 514 f.

mercy. These attributes are thus supposed to intercede, so that the final decision is left in suspense until the Day of Atonement, the great day of pardon. Some Tannaitic teachers¹ find it more in accord with their view of God to say that He judges man every day, and even every hour.

Of course, the philosophic mind can take this whole viewpoint in a figurative sense alone. All the more must we recognize that this sublime religious thought of God liberates morality from the various limitations of the ancient pagan conception of Deity and the more recent metaphysical view. In place of these it asserts that there is a moral government of the world, which must be imitated in the moral and religious consciousness of the individual.

6. The belief in a moral government of the world answers another question which the medieval Jewish philosophers and their Mohammedan predecessors endeavored to solve, but without satisfying the religious sentiment, the chief concern of theology. Some of them maintain that God's foreknowledge does not determine human deeds.² Maimonides and his school, however, say that it is impossible for us to comprehend the knowledge and power of God, and that therefore such a question is outside the sphere of human knowledge. "Know that, just as God has made the elements of fire and air to rise upwards and water and earth to sink downward, so has He made man a free, self-determining being, who acts of his own volition."³ The Mohammedans would often give up human freedom rather than the omniscience and all-determining power of God, but the Jewish thinkers,

¹ Tos. R. h. Sh. T. 13; R. h. Sh. 16 a.

² Saadia: *Emunoth*, IV, 7; Bahya: *Hoboth ha Lebaboth*, III, 8; IV, 3.

³ H. Teshubah V; Moreh, I, 23; III, 16-19; comp. *Cuzari*, V, 20-21; Albo: *Ikkharim*, IV, 1-11; Gersonides: *Milhamoth*, III, 2; VI, 1-18; Isaac ben Shesheth: *Responsa*, 119; Lipman Heller to Aboth III, 15. See Joel: *Levi ben Gerson*, p. 56.

significantly, with only the possible exception of Crescas,¹ laid stress upon the divine nature which man attains through moral freedom, even at the risk of limiting the omniscience of God.

7. The philosophers failed, however, to emphasize sufficiently a point of highest importance for religion, God's paternal care for all His creatures. Indeed, God ceases to be God, if He has not included our every step in His plan of creation, thus surrounding us with paternal love and tender care. Instead of the three blind fates of heathendom who spin and cut the threads of destiny without even knowing why, the divine Father himself sits at the loom of time and apportioned the lot of men according to His own wisdom and goodness. Such a belief in divine Providence is ingrained in the soul, and reasoning alone will not suffice to attain it. Therefore even such great thinkers as Maimonides and Gersonides go astray as religious teachers when they follow Aristotelian principles in this very intimate matter. They assume a general Providence aiming for the preservation of the species, but include a special Providence only so far as the recipient of it is endowed with reason and has thus approached the divine Intellect. A Providence of this type, the result of human reasoning, is a mere illusion, as the pious thinker, Hasdai Crescas, clearly shows.² For the man who prays to God in anxiety or distress this bears nothing but disappointment.

The Aristotelian conception of the world has this great truth, that there is no such thing as chance, that everything is foreseen and provided by the divine wisdom. But religion must hold that the individual is an object of care by God, that "not a sparrow falls into the net without God's will,"³

¹ See *Or Adonai*, II, 3; comp. Joel: *Hasdai Crescas*, 41-49, 54-55; Neumark: "*Crescas and Spinoza*," in Y. B. C. C. A. R., 1908, vol. XVIII, p. 277-319.

² *Or Adonai*, III, 24.

³ Gen. R. LXXIX, 16; comp. Matt. X, 29.

that "every hair on the head of man is counted and cared for in the heavenly order,"¹ and that the most insignificant thing serves its purpose under the guidance of an all-wise God. We use figurative expressions for the divine care, because we cannot grasp it entirely or literally.

8. The Bible in the Song of Moses compares divine Providence to the eagle spreading her protecting wings over her young and bearing them aloft, or urging them to soar along.² The rabbis elaborate this by referring to the twofold care which the eagle thus bestows, as she watches over those who are still tender and helpless, shielding them from the arrows below by bearing them on her wings, but inspiring the maturer and stronger ones to fly by her side.³ In the same way Providence trains both individuals and generations for their allotted task. A little child requires incessant care on the part of its mother, until it has learned how to eat, walk, speak, and to decide for itself, but the wise parent gradually withdraws his guiding hand so that the growing child may learn self-reliance and self-respect. The divine Father trains man thus through the childhood of humanity. But no sooner does the divine spirit in man awaken to self-consciousness than he is thrown on his own resources to become the master of his own destiny. The divine power which, in the earlier stages, had worked *for* man, now works *with* him and *within* him. In the rabbinic phrase, he is now ready to be a "co-worker with God in the work of creation."⁴ Only at those grave moments when his own powers fail him, he still feels in the humility of faith that his ancient God is still near, "a very present help in trouble," and that "the Guardian of Israel neither slumbereth nor sleepeth."⁵

9. At this point philosophy and religion part company.

¹ B. B. 16 a; comp. Matt. X, 30; Luke XII, 7.

² Deut. XXXII, 11.

⁴ Shab. 119 b.

³ Mek. Yithro 2; Sifre ad loc.

⁵ Ps. XLVI, 2; CXXI, 4.

Philosophy cannot tolerate the removal of the dividing line between the transcendent God and finite man. Hence the relation of man's free will and divine foresight cannot be solved by any process of reasoning. But when religion proclaims a moral government of the world, then man, with his moral and spiritual aims, attains a place in Creation akin to the Creator. Of course, so long as he is mentally a child and has no clear purpose, Providence acts for him as it does for the animal with its marvelous instinct. Through His chosen messengers God gives the people bread and water, freedom and victory, instruction and laws. The wondrous tales describing the divine protection of Israel in its early life may strike us as out of harmony with the laws of nature, but they are true portrayals of the experience of the people. Whatever happened for their good in those days had to be the work of God; they had not yet awakened to the power hidden in their own souls. Their heroes felt themselves to be divine instruments, roused by His spirit to perform mighty deeds or to behold prophetic visions. It is God who battles through them. It is God who speaks through them. Both their moral and spiritual guidance works from without and above. At this stage of life autonomy is neither felt nor desired. When man awakens to moral self-consciousness and maturity, this inner change impresses him as an outer one; the change in him is interpreted as a change in God. He feels that God has withdrawn behind His eternal laws of nature and morality which work without direct interference, and in his new sense of independence he thinks that he can dispense with the divine protection and forethought. As if mortal man can ever dispense with that Power which has endowed him with his capacity for worthy accomplishment. Thus in times of danger and distress man turns to God for help; thus at every great turning point in the life of an individual or nation, the idea of an all-wise Providence imbues him with

new hope and new security. And in all these cases the great lesson of providential direction is typified in the history of Israel as related in the Bible.

10. The idea of Providence, indeed, belongs also to certain pagan philosophers, who observed the great purposes of nature which the single creature and the species are both to serve. The Stoics in particular made a study of teleology, the system of purposive ends in nature. Philo adopted much from them in his treatise on Providence. Later the popular philosophic group among the Mohammedans, the so-called "Brothers of Purity," based their doctrines of God and His relation to the world on a teleological view of nature. In fact, the Jewish philosopher and moralist Bahya ben Pakudah has embodied many of their ideas in his "Duties of the Heart." The Jewish folklore preserved in rabbinic literature has also attempted a popular explanation of the obscure ways of Providence, in strange events of nature as well as the great enigmas of human destiny. Thus the flight of David from Saul affords the lesson of the good purpose which may be served by so insignificant a thing as a spider, or by so dreadful a state as insanity. Vast numbers of the Jewish legends and fables deal with adversities which are turned into ultimate good by the working of an all-wise Providence.

¹ See David Kaufmann: "Theol. d. B. b. Pakudah," p. 240. Mid. Teh. to Ps. XXXIV; L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, IV, 89-90; *Alphabet of Ben Sirah*, which deals with the pleasure and pain of the human body and its restraint.

² Comp. *Maasehbuch*; Tendler: *Sagen d. jüd. Vorseh.* making for health; so, in the moral order of the universe, each being who battles with evil receives new strength for the unfolding of the good. The principle of holiness, which culminates in Israel's holy God, transforms and ennobles every evil. As the Midrash explains, referring to Deut. XI, 26: "If thou but seeest that both good and evil are placed in thy