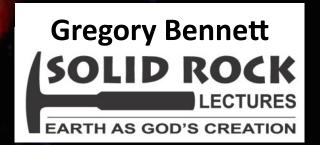
# God's Providence in Nature:

The Forgotten Doctrine in the Relationship between Science and Faith





## Outline

- ✓ Importance of God's providence
- Definitions: Creation compared to Providence
- **✓** Wrestling with God's activity in nature
- ✓ Modeling God's activity in nature
- Recommendations
- ✓ Summary

## Importance of God's Providence

- Providence = God's activity in the universe
- Providence = Without God's continued activity no created anything would exist, no mathematics, no gravity, no light, no life.
- Providence = This activity of God provides a basis for science
- Providence = This activity of God provides foundation for technology

#### **Providence: A Basis for Science**

God has made and has continued to sustain a universe that acts in predictable ways. If a scientific experiment gives a certain result today, then we can have confidence that (if all the factors are the same) it will give the same result tomorrow and a hundred years from tomorrow.

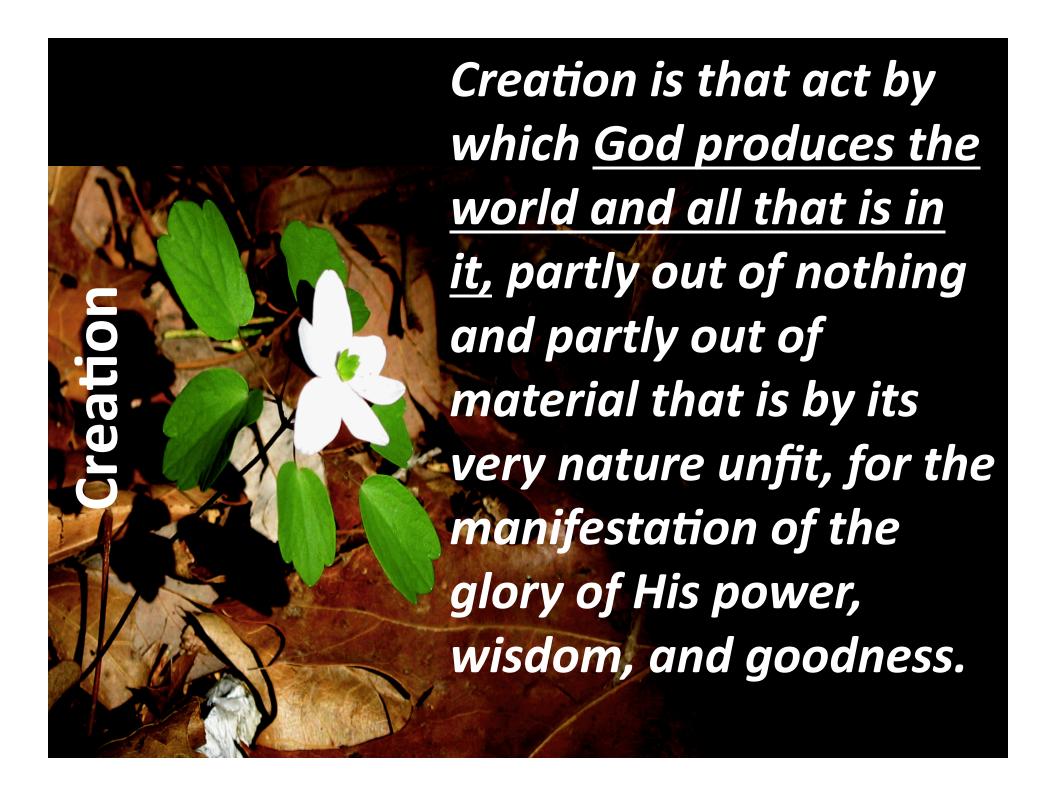
### **Foundation for Technology**

I can be confident that gasoline will make my car run today just as it did yesterday, not simply because "it has always worked that way," but because God's providence sustains a universe in which created things maintain the properties with which he created them.

# Definitions: Creation compared to Providence

Creation

Creation in the strict sense of the word may be defined as that free act of God whereby He, according to His sovereign will and for His own glory, in the beginning brought forth the whole visible and invisible universe, without the use of preexistent material, and thus gave it an existence, distinct from His own and yet always dependent on Him.



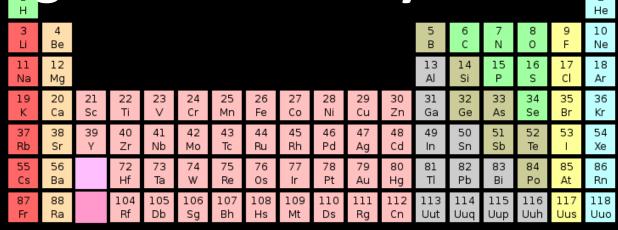
God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he:

Preserves:
God keeps all created

God keeps all created things existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them.

# God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he:

Providence



Tm

**Preserves:** 

God keeps all created things existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them.

Double Cooperates:

God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do. (aka Concurrence)



God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do. (aka Concurrence)

Providence

**Governs:** 

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. Providence a

God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he: Governs:

Danielle

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.

Earl



# God's Activity: Ordinary Providence

God works through second causes in strict accordance with the laws of nature, though He may vary the results by different combinations.



## God's Activity: Extraordinary Providence

God works immediately or without the mediation of secondary causes in their ordinary operation. These "miracles" of God occur without recourse to the ordinary means of production.



## **Examples of Secondary Causes**

- ✓ Plate tectonics
- ✓ Wind and waves
- Climate change
- Competition
- Change in predation
- Genetic changes
- ✓ Basically, anything in nature

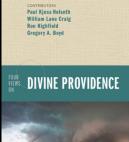
# Wrestling with God's Activity in Nature

#### **#1: Challenges with Providence**

- 1. Human freedom (Nature of free will agents and agency including causation).
- 2. Determinism makes God the author of sin and nullifying human agency
- 3. The problem of evil
- God's use of power (control or love) (open model criticism)
- 5. What is meant by a secondary cause (open model criticism)

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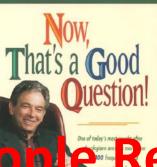
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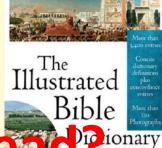
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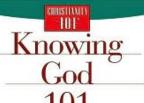
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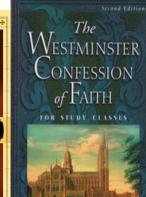


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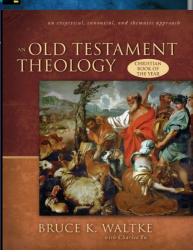


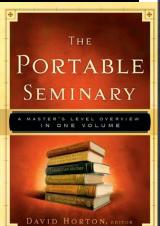
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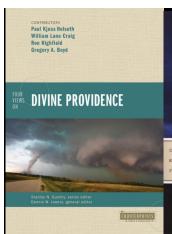
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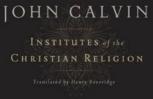






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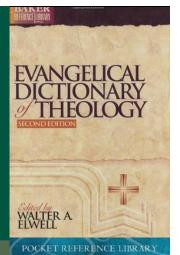




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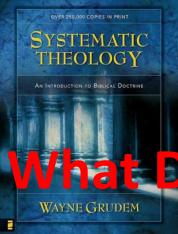
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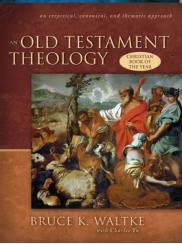
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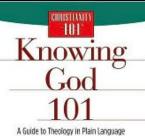
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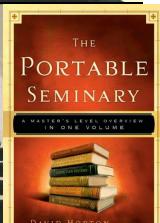


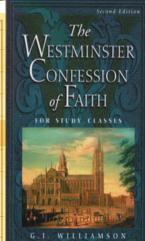
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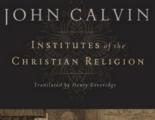




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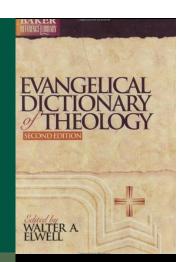
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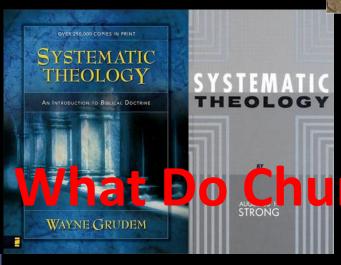
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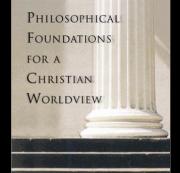
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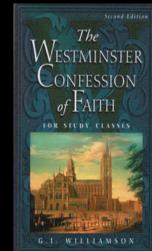


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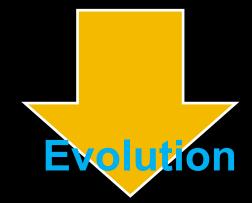
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Without God's providence, creationists have no ongoing mechanism to explain a tightly knit relationship between God and nature. They resort to explaining any change in nature to God's direct, creative handiwork and cannot model God's involvement otherwise.



#### #3: Creation vs. Evolution Debate



Without God's providence, evolutionists have no mechanism to tie what they observe in nature to the person of God. Thus, they run the risk of appearing to support worldviews that do not include a personal, active, involved God. Without God's providence, creationists have no ongoing mechanism to explain a tightly knit relationship between God and nature. They resort to explaining any change in nature to God's direct, creative handiwork and cannot model God's involvement otherwise.

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Without God's providence, evolutionists have no mechanism to tie what they observe in nature to the person of God. Thus, they run the risk of appearing to support worldviews that do not include a personal, active, involved God.

#4: Classical View of God's Providence stands midway between the extremes of pantheism and deism.

#### **Pantheism**

(e.g. Movie "Pandora")

#### **Theism**

(Judeo-Christianity)

#### Deism

(e.g. Thomas Jefferson)

#### **Materialism**

(e.g. Richard Dawkins)

Denial of the Secondary Cause in Nature (God not separate from nature) Denial of the Primary Cause in Nature (God)

# Theist Issue: Just how active is God in nature?

**Pantheism** 

**Theism** 

Deism

Denial of the Secondary Cause in Nature (God not separate from nature)

Denial of the Primary Cause in Nature (God)

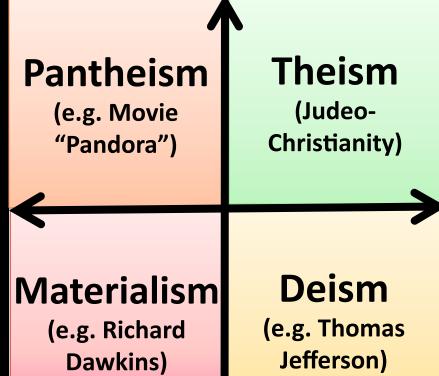
# Proposed "Active-Distinct" Model of God's Providence

Proposed
"Active-Distinct"
Model of God's

Model of God's Providence

Indistinct from Nature

**Personally Active** 



Distinct from Nature

**Inactive or Irrelevant** 

#### Advantages:

1. Creates debate from within a theistic worldview

2. Removes fear of too pantheistic a view of God's activity

Hands-On 10 —

8 —

6 —

4 —

2 —

**Hands-Off** 

**Theism** 

Models Emphasize God's Personal Activity in Nature

Models Emphasize God's Delegation in Nature

0 —

**Deism** 

Advantages:
3. Removes
fear of
materialism
from debate

4. Allows inclusion of evolution as secondary cause without fear of atheistic materialism.

Hands-On 10 —

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Hands-Off

**Theism** 

Models Emphasize God's Personal Activity in Nature

Models Emphasize God's Delegation in Nature

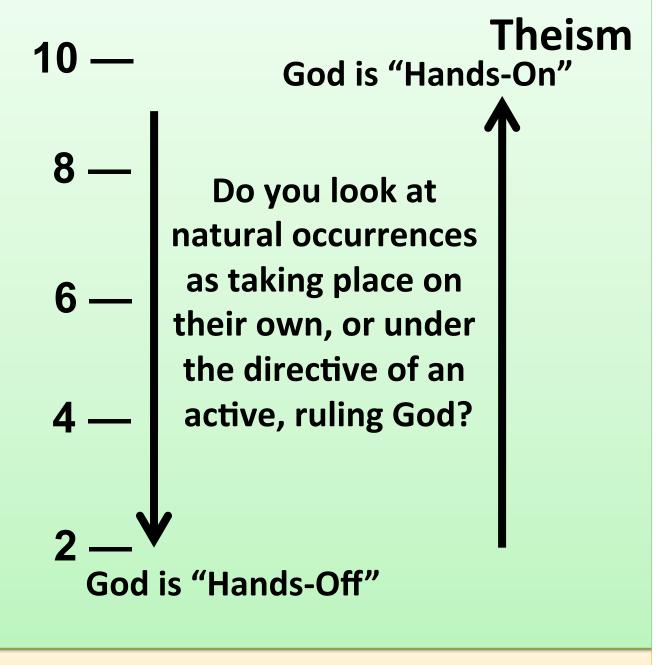
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**Deism** 

#### **Application:**

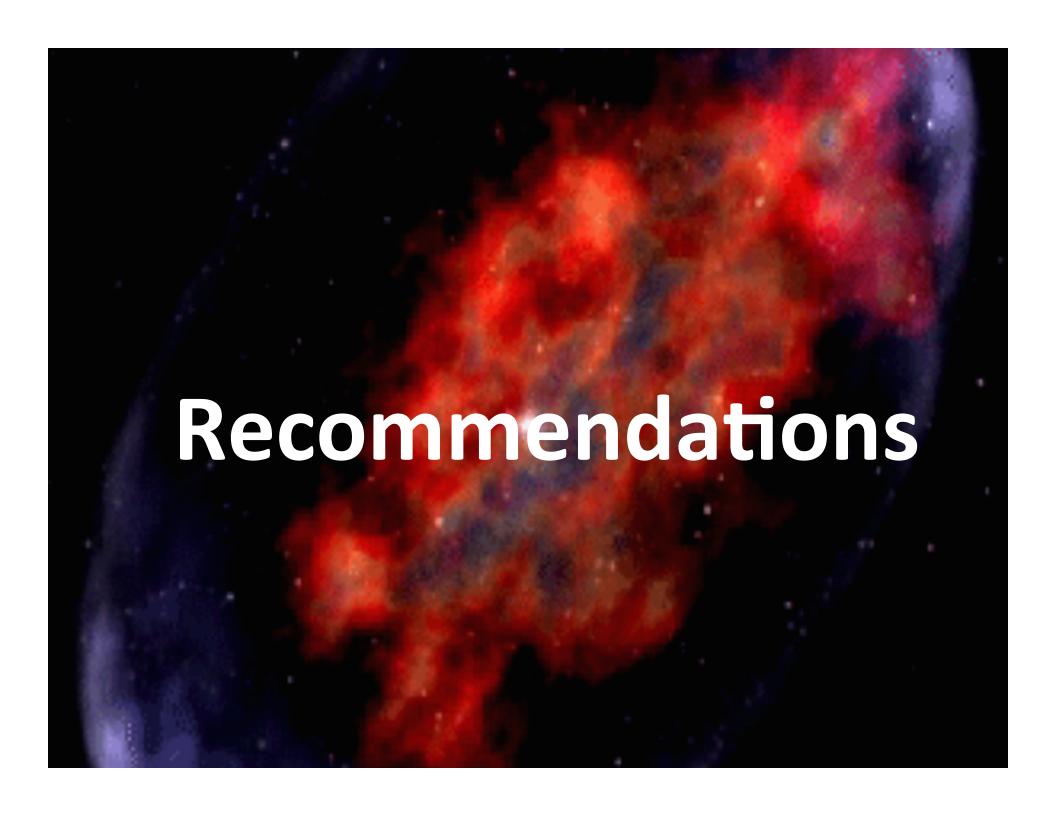
1. How can people train themselves to think at a higher number?

2. What number do you assume?



0 —

Deism



#### Recommendations

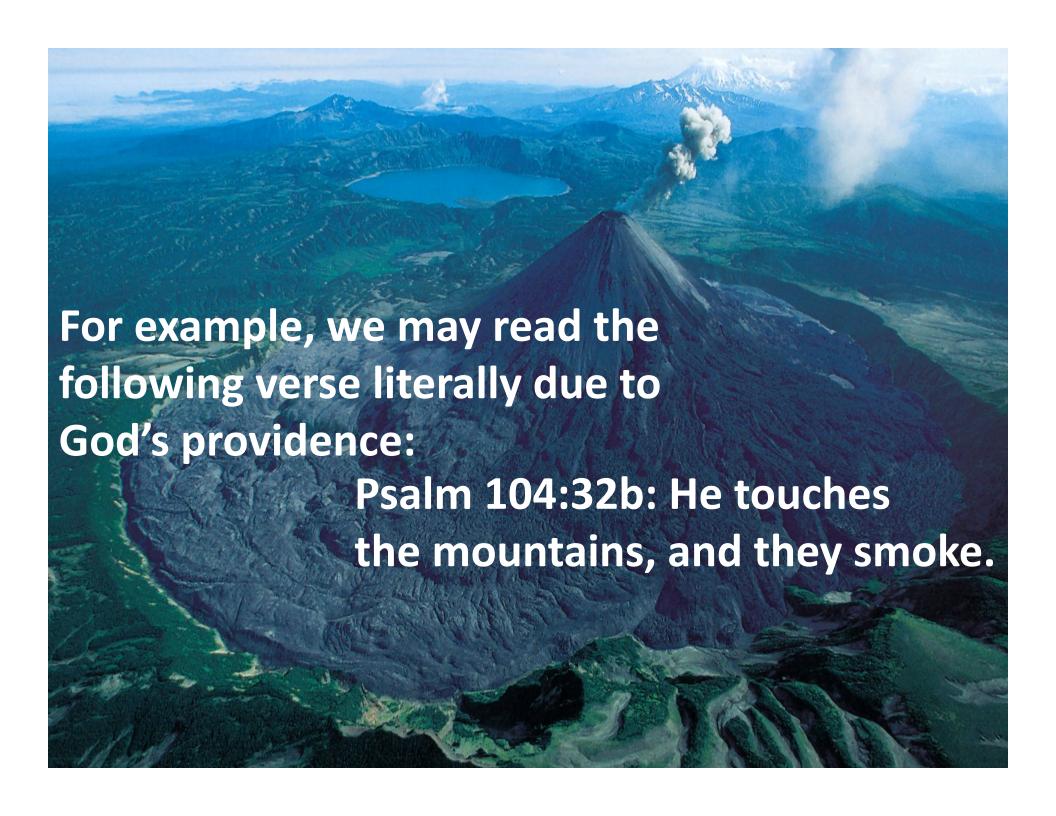
- Evaluate proposed model as alternative to classical, reformed approach to God's activity in nature.
  - Revise personal view and language of God's activity in nature.
- Every time you drop a pen, think of God causing that pen to be lowered due to his working through gravity to lower it to the floor.
  - Provide resources to the public that focus on changes in nature as tied to God's sovereign, personal, active relationship to that change.
  - Stop thinking in terms of Creation vs. Evolution and begin thinking about God's providence.

# **Suggested Changes to Wording**

God has made and has continued to sustain a universe that has acted in predictable ways from the beginning of time. If a scientific experiment gives a certain result today, then we can have confidence that (if all the factors are the same) it will give the same result from the beginning of the universe, in the distant past, today, tomorrow and a hundred years from tomorrow.

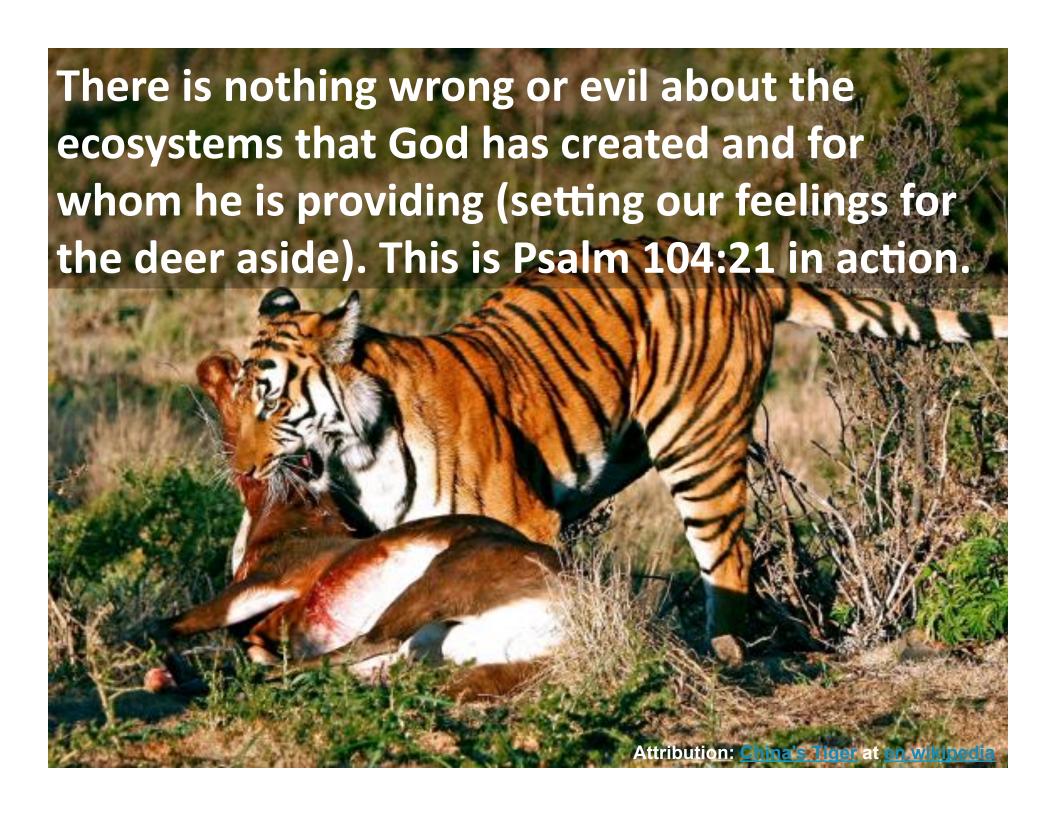
(Suggested edits to help geologists and other deep time scientists.)

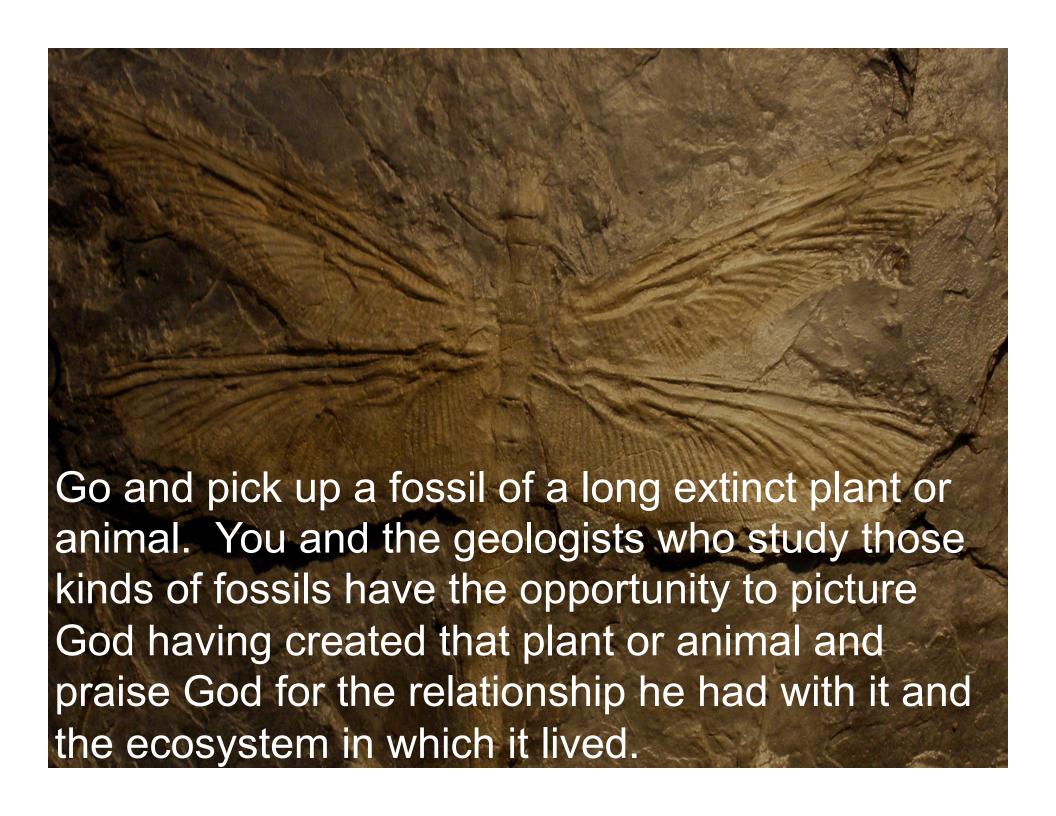
Scripture is full of language attributing directly to God's activity what happens in nature. Providence allows us to read these literally.



We may accept natural disasters that happen as, yes, being governed by God, but knowing that human agency due to the Fall makes them disasters.



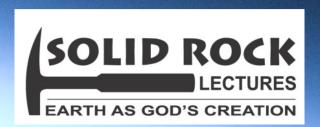




### Summary of Ideas

- 1. Doctrine of creation itself is inadequate for theological ties to scientific or technological work as it doesn't model God's activity in nature.
- 2. Doctrine of evolution itself is inadequate due to danger of ignoring God's activity.
- 3. Using an Active-Distinct model for God's providence is useful to help one see God as highly active, but not trend toward either pantheism or materialism.

For our part at Solid Rock Lectures, Ken Wolgemuth, Gregg Davidson and myself, we will work to provide Creation Workshops to Bible Schools, Seminaries, and churches. We include a discussion of God's providence in our presentation of old-earth geology.



I sing th'almighty power of God, that made the mountains rise,

That spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.

I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day;

The moon shines full at God's command, and all the stars obey.

I sing the goodness of the Lord, who filled the earth with food, Who formed the creatures through the Word, and then pronounced them good. Lord, how Thy wonders are

Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed, where'er I turn my eye,

If I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky.

There's not a plant or flower below, but makes Thy glories known, And clouds arise, and tempests blow, by order from Thy throne; While all that borrows life from Thee is ever in Thy care; And everywhere that we can be, Thou, God art present there. aise for Creation and Providence". Isaac Watts 1715

# Does Challenge #1 apply to nature?

- 1. Causation and human freedom (free will agents and agency)
  - A. <u>Does not apply to nature</u> unless people are involved. People were not around during geological periods, for example.
  - B. May apply to environmental studies due to human activity since Man was created.

### Does Challenge #2 apply to nature?

- 2. Determinism making God the author of sin and nullifying human agency
  - A. Humans have impacted nature negatively due to the Fall, however, in some fashion as stated in Romans 8:22.
  - B. <u>Does not apply to nature</u>, unless studying human agency.
  - C. Humans make moral choices, nature does not.

## Does Challenge #3 apply to nature?

- 3. The problem of evil
  - A. Any study of nature before the Fall would not study the effects of evil. This is exciting as a geologist as I can study the earth before it experienced the curse summarized in Romans 8:22.
  - B. Evil related to free agency (humans, angels, and demons) not to physics, chemistry, animals, plants, minerals.

### Does Challenge #4 apply to nature?

- 4. God's use of control or love (method of use of power) (Open model criticism)
  - A. Does apply to nature.
  - B. Scripture describes God in close, personal, loving relationship with his creation at every moment throughout time and in every possible location.
  - C. Apply Psalm 139 to every created thing in the universe from the beginning of time.

# Does Challenge #5 apply to nature?

- 5. How secondary causes work (Open model criticism)
  - A. Does apply to nature.
  - B. In nature we describe God's activity as "evolution".
  - C. "Theistic evolution" is not a strong enough term unless it partners with a strong view of God's providence.